

Southlands



WORLDBOOK

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Southlands



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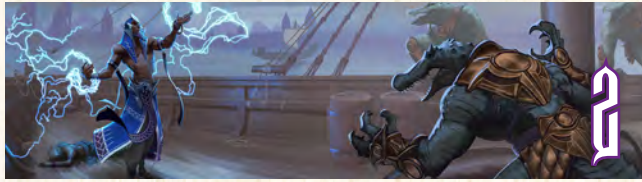
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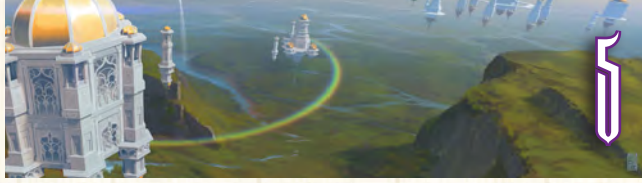
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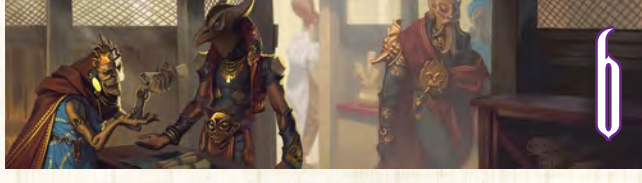
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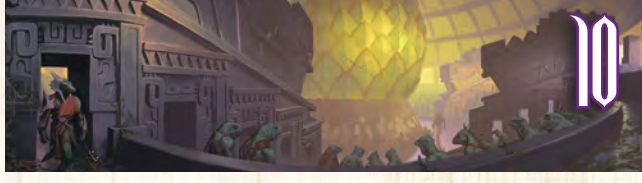
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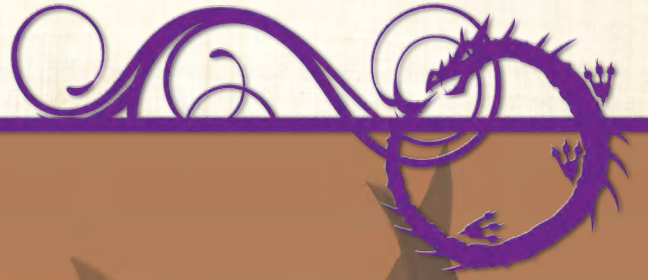
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welcome to the southlands



Welcome to a land of mystery and adventure, where riches and dangers await heroes who explore the vast expanse of the Southlands. Deserts abound with forgotten tombs, swift sandships, capricious genies, and wild nature spirits. The tall grasses of the savannah hide lost cities and valiant warriors, and the dense jungles swarm with living vines that choke the life from careless visitors.

Those who are brave enough to set forth into the Southlands' burning sands, fierce jungles, wild coasts, and ancient ruins can find riches beyond imagining, and perhaps even a spark of divinity itself. But beware—for the foolish and the unlucky, only death awaits.



seven secrets of the southlands

Adventures in the Southlands are full of high excitement and over-the-top action. Whether the characters want to blaze a trail through unexplored lands, uncover long-lost relics, or put a stop to evil conspiracies led by dastardly foes, the Southlands can be the backdrop for all those missions and many more.

Here are seven important points to bear in mind when planning a game set in the Southlands, whether it's a short arc lasting only a few sessions or a much longer campaign.

In the ruins of Kadralthu, treasure-laden heroes fleeing an undead minotaur run headlong into a hungry sandwurm.



A VAST CONTINENT

The Southlands are massive! From the ruins of Jelle-Anda on the northern coast to Susa in the far south is a distance of 5,700 miles. The continent's tremendous size enables the characters to experience a wide range of environments as they explore, from snowy mountain peaks to wind-scoured desert dunes, or from dense jungles to sprawling grasslands.

The size of the continent and its varied terrain can be a key part of the challenge the characters face as they travel. The journey itself can be as much of an adventure as the lost city or the fabled tomb that awaits at the end of the trip.

Fortunately for the characters, for those times when they are up against a ticking clock, there are faster ways to get around. Adventurers in the know can master the use of Red Portals, get aid from the magical monoliths of the Ramag, or travel the shadow roads.

LAND OF ENDLESS ACTION

The elements of pulp fantasy—mysterious lands, lost cities, and new wonders—abound in the Southlands. This is a place of forgotten desert ruins, unexplored jungles, ancient relics, and wicked foes. Adventures should be high-octane, fast-paced romps, full of twists and surprises. If things are slowing down to a contemplative crawl, maybe it's time for a genie to appear from a lamp and cause mischief, or for an ancient curse to be unleashed!

THREE ANCIENT POWERS

The Southlands have been shaped by many ancient powers, but three great ones stand out.

First, an empire of powerful, divine titans—Glorious Umbuso—once ruled most of the Southlands. The titans' rule has long since ended, leaving abandoned cities and secrets in their wake.

Second, a trio of mighty elementals known as the Wind Lords still hold dominion over the Stone Desert. The Wind Lords' influence has awakened the spirits of wind, stone, fire, and water within their domain.

Finally, the living gods of Nuria Natal control the desert lands along the magical River Nuria. These gods meddle in the affairs of their mortal subjects and even walk among them as their whims dictate—the goddess Bastet, for instance, is not an uncommon sight in the city that takes her name.

DIVINE SPARKS FOR THE TAKING

The history of the Southlands is marked with the rise and fall of the divine: gods die, titans tumble, powerful beings succumb to murdering blades—and new divine beings rise.

Usually when a god or titan falls, their spark—the source and core of their divinity—simply dissipates. Some sparks remain tethered to the Southlands, however. Several were absorbed by loyal vassals or other beings, to be passed down from one mortal host to another. Others are housed in a temple inside a magic vessel and protected by a holy guardian, and still more lie long forgotten in ancient tombs. For the ambitious and the brave, the chance to seize a divine spark, and through it wield mythic power, is worth risking one's life. See “Divine Sparks,” page 15, for more information.

new cultures and races

Player characters in the Southlands can be members of the known races of Midgard or one of several new options. Humans are certainly the most numerous, and hail from a wide variety of cultures, but the continent also has significant numbers of dwarves, aasimar, gearforged, heruti (ravenfolk), and tieflings.

Major new races of the Southlands are the two varieties of catfolk (basteti and nkosi), the desert-dwelling jinnborn, and the insectoid tosculi. Other options include lizardfolk, minotaurs, ramag, subek, and trollkin. See “People of the Southlands,” page 10, for more information.

HISTORY REBORN

As the kingdoms and empires of the Southlands have risen and fallen, many have left behind a legacy of magical treasures and forgotten secrets. Not everything lost to the ravages of the past stays in the past—the god-kings of Nuria Natal are notorious for not staying in their tombs, and powerful magic items have a habit of resurfacing, unearthed from ruins by adventurers or claimed by dangerous villains. The loot of the Southlands is more ancient, and often greater in power, than most plunder found elsewhere in Midgard, and its ancient origin means that much of the rediscovered magic is completely unfamiliar to living adventurers.



DOMINION OF THE WIND LORDS

KYPRION

RUBY SEA

KALPOSTAN

PARTHIA

BELDESTAN

HARIZ

MHAROTI EMPIRE

MEZAR

BETIK

RED WASTES

GIZMIRI

ISHADIA

TAITALA

NURIA NATAL

SARKLAN DESERT

WHITE SEA

CRESCENT DESERT

MHALMET

SHIBAI

DABU ZAVOA

AERDVALL

YAWCHTAKA JUNGLE

FALLEN KINGDOM OF AKSABA

BAHMA AZAR

KUSH

GREAT HIVE OF ARBEYACH

DJIBBAR PEAINS

YAVET

NARUMBEBI

TROLLKIN

KESARA

TROLLKIN

CORPSEHIVE

SEBBEK SOBOR

OMPHAYA

LIGNAS

TREEHOMES OF THE MAERI

AGGESAL PLAINS

MUNGU JUNGLE

THE SPICE COAST

HOOK ISLAND

FREE ISLANDS OF TETHYS

STRAITS OF ZAWRA

NMABI

MORREG

TITAN'S HIVE

FENDEEL JUNGLE

WEBWORKS OF THE SKITTERING ONES

BEHTU-NARI

TERROTU

SNOWCAP

VELES-SA

TROLLKIN

ZANSKAR

ZOBANU JUNGLE

SUDVALL



UNFOLDING PLOTS AND EXPANDING CONFLICTS

The cultures of the Southlands are living, breathing societies that grow, evolve, fight, and sometimes perish. Tensions between these groups rise and fall as each pursues its own agenda, while menaces like the Green Walker and the hives of the tosculi threaten all they come up against. Sinister cultists plot and scheme, raiding and piracy are rampant, and cattle rustling and wholesale thefts of entire caravans are common even in well-traveled areas.

Relations between nations in the Southlands rarely stand still for long, and the characters might find rising tensions in their homeland to be as much of a danger as any monster or ancient curse.

regional overview

The Southlands is an enormous continent with room enough for an incredible variety of civilizations to live within its bounds. The eight major regions of the Southlands are summarized below, with a brief look at what makes each of them distinctive and a reference to the chapter where that region is detailed.

Nuria Natal (chapter 2) is a desert kingdom of ancient magic, huge pyramids, and sprawling necropolises, where the gods walk the land, and the great River Nuria provides life and magical power to its people.

To the west lie the **Lands of Wind and Sand** (chapter 3), home to human and jinnborn nomads, temperamental nature spirits and Wind Lords, ruined minotaur cities, and the strongholds of fey and animal lords. South of these lands is **Dabu, Land of the Gnolls** (chapter 4), where rival clans vie for territory and the cult of Laughing Nkishi is on the rise.

Below the deserts are the **High Jungles** (chapter 5), where the River Nuria's source, the Celestial Waterfall, pours onto Black Lotus Mesa from the sky. The Living Jungle teems with plant life created by the alien monstrosity known as the Green Walker, and the people of Kush make pacts with fiends.

Down the western coast are the **Kingdoms of Salt and Steel** (chapter 6)—the grasslands of Narumbeki, home to mighty legions; tropical Lignas, Land of the Serpent Scholars; the dwarven kingdom of Sebbek Sobor; and Morreg, where even death does not end one's duty.

On the opposite side of the continent, the **Corsair Coast** (chapter 7) runs from once-great Ishadia in the north to the cattle lands of Terrotu thousands of miles to the south. In between lie Fallen Aksaba and the sealed city of Sar-Shaba; the Lion Kingdom of Omphaya; Kesara, the Land of the Saffron Rajah; and the plantations of the Spice Coast. In

the Tethys Ocean, the island of Shibai grows wealthy from the slave trade, while pirates prey on her ships.

The huge central expanse of the Southlands, once the heart of Glorious Umbuso, has become the **Abandoned Lands** (chapter 8), filled with ruins of the titans and plagued by unpredictable magic. Two major civilizations are found here: the Ramag, once-human servants of the titans, and the **Hives of the Tosculi** (chapter 9).

Finally, at the bottom of the continent lies the **Southern Fringe** (chapter 10), a large region featuring fierce trollkin, fanatical lizardfolk, arrogant xorn, and an unusual kingdom of chivalric knights.

people of the southlands

The Southlands are home to some of Midgard's oldest civilizations. More than a dozen different humanoid races live on the continent in significant numbers. For information on playing characters of these races, see *Southlands Player's Guide* or *Midgard Heroes Handbook*.

HUMANS

Whether they are descended from the titans' subjects, from the ancient Nurians, or from more recent arrivals from elsewhere in Midgard, humans of all types are the Southlands' most prevalent race, dominating much of the continent. The six largest ethnic groups are as follows:

Kushites

Smallest of the six major human ethnicities, the resilient, independent-minded Kushites dwell predominantly in the jungle kingdom of Kush, but they can also be found in the desert around Makuria and the plains to the south. Most have dark skin, but albinism is not infrequent. Kushites speak the Southern Trade Tongue; those who deal with demons or devils also speak Infernal.

Nurians

In addition to Nuria Natal itself, Nurians reside in the desert cities of Siwal, Makuria, and Saph-Saph, as well as in Kush and the Spice Coast. Nurians have mahogany-colored skin and straight, dark hair, although many choose to shave their heads and wear wigs. They exude an air of confidence that stems from their long magical tradition, their sense of history, and their closeness to their gods. They speak Nurian and the Southern Trade Tongue.

Morregi

The Morregi humans include the people of Lignas, the tree-dwelling Mafri in the Abandoned Lands, and the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Morreg. They are renowned for their love of learning, for their joyous festivals and

celebrations, and for their prophetic talents, but they also have a reputation for being sharp-tongued. Dark-skinned, the Morregi speak the Southern Trade Tongue; some also speak the argot of the Western Ocean islanders.

Tamasheq and Qamari

Widespread throughout the northern deserts, the nomadic Tamasheq have bloodlines that reach back to the sunken empire of Ankeshel and the ancient peoples of the Stone Desert. Their cousins, the more settled Qamari, share similar origins, but settled in the Moon Kingdom under minotaur rule. Some have since joined their brethren in the mountains, while others toil to rebuild Cindass. They are usually black-haired, and their skin ranges in color from light tan to deep brown. They speak Tamasheq, Minotaur, and the Southern Trade Tongue.

Tethyians

The people of the islands in the Tethys Ocean include a mix of arrivals from the mainland, and of the lineage of sailors who arrived from Ishadia, Khandiria, and Cathay; they display a variety of skin tones from deep brown to khaki-colored. Tethyians excel in battles of wit and are

highly competitive, often pursuing careers as traders or pirates. They speak the Southern Trade Tongue and are familiar with Cathayan and many other languages.

Zwana

Sharp-featured and tall, with tightly curled hair, typically worn short, the zwana live in Narumbeki, Omphaya, and Terrotu on the edges of the Abandoned Lands, and in the floating village of Munayo on Lake Debari. They have a variety of dark skin and hair colors, and their customs and culture vary by area. Zwana speak the Southern Trade Tongue and their own regional dialects.

AASIMAR

Concentrated in Ishadia and Aksaba, the angelic aasimar are a people whose glory days lie far behind them. No longer able to use the Portal of the Heavens in the holy city of Shuruppak to freely visit their celestial ancestors, the aasimar must be ready to face the dragons of the Mharoti Empire alone. Nevertheless, there are plenty of valiant paladins and devout clerics among their number who can put fear into evil hearts.





CATFOLK

The catfolk are feline humanoids of natural grace and insatiable curiosity, dwelling primarily in the blazing hot deserts and endless grasslands of the Southlands. Catfolk are divided into two main branches: the mischievous and irrepressible basteti, adored children of Bastet the cat goddess, and the dauntless and fierce nkosi, chosen people of Gamka Firemane, the Returned Titan of Omphaya.

Found in the cities of Nuria and the northern deserts, basteti are curious to the point of obsession, constantly seeking out new experiences and getting mixed up in wild escapades. The more warlike, driven nkosi value honor and heroism highly, and are always striving to accomplish glorious deeds to prove their worth. Most nkosi live in Omphaya and favor the savannah over the city streets.

DWARVES

Southlands dwarves are a race of skilled engineers and craftsmen, as well as alchemists, scribes, and mages. Less belligerent than their northern cousins, they are found throughout Nuria and in Sebbek Sobor, where they took refuge after the Green Walker destroyed their city of Haldaheim. Dark-skinned, they shave their heads and wrap their beards in gold or copper wire. Dwarves speak Dwarvish, Nurian, and the Southern Trade Tongue.



Earliest times

5,000+ years ago

4,400 years ago

4,000 years ago

3,800 years ago

- The giant Aurgelmir exhales, creating the four Wind Lords.
- War rages between the gods.
- The titans found Glorious Umbuso.
- Nuria is founded by seven human families.
- The first king of Ishadia ascends to the Phoenix Throne.
- The kingdom of Golden Ulthar reaches its zenith.
- Mardas Vhula-gai founded in the Mukupe Sahel.

GEARFORGED

Several thousand years ago the priests of Ptah created the shabti (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 343), humanoid constructs designed for building Nuria's temples and canals, and for serving the god-kings after death by guarding their tombs. Later, the priests discovered that a shabti made of copper, bronze, or another metal could be used to house a human's or dwarf's soul. By performing a ritual that transfers the soul into a shabti, they were able to create the first gearforged. These free-willed living constructs can be found throughout Nuria, with most living in the City of the River.

GNOLLS

Gnolls live in large numbers throughout the Southlands. The largest population is in Nuria, but they are also found in the Kingdoms of Salt and Steel, in Ishadia, and along the Spice Coast. In the region known as Dabu, a dozen or so loosely organized packs dominate the landscape.

Though they are often regarded as feckless, craven folk by other races, the truth about gnolls is more complex. Gnolls that live in the human-dominated cities of Nuria and elsewhere can find work as mercenaries, guards, and traders, thanks to their inherent strength and their talent for flattering those in charge. Even their more feral cousins in Dabu and the deserts have a well-defined society with strong traditions.

Nonetheless, most gnolls are bullies, brave only when they have the advantage and hardworking only when they can't force others to take on the labor. In recent years, the evil, zealous cult of Laughing Nkishi has spread among the gnolls, leading to increased conflict with other races.

HERUTI

Known as ravenfolk or huginn elsewhere in Midgard, the bird-like heruti (the plural form of "heru") are found in large numbers in Nuria Natal, where they are honored citizens, frequently living in or near the temples of Horus, their patron god. Communities of heruti also exist in Kimvai Canyon in the Abandoned Lands, in Sebbek Sobor, and in Shibai. Heruti often serve as scouts and intermediaries or fight in martial orders.

JINNBORN

Descended from powerful elemental creatures called the Jinn, the jinnborn are nomads who travel well-trodden ancestral paths through the Stone and Crescent deserts. A little smaller than humans and more stocky, jinnborn have skin color that varies from sky blue or pale violet to golden or brick red, and they often display otherworldly features such as small horns or gleaming eyes. Each jinnborn tribe tends to adhere to a single elemental path—air, earth, fire, or water—which influences the group's nature.

LIZARDFOLK

Lizardfolk appeared in the Southlands only 160 years ago, following the appearance of the Egg of Veles (see page 215), but they have proliferated at an astounding rate. Most are content to remain in the jungles or swamps and take little interest in human civilization. The lizardfolk of Veles-Sa, the Velesborn, believe themselves to be the World Serpent's chosen people, destined to conquer the surrounding lands in his name, but progress toward this goal has been slow. Their cousins, the Murkscale lizardfolk, largely dwell in the marshes and swamps of the Spice Coast and the Fendeel Jungle.

3,000 years ago

- Fall of Ankeshel. Refugees arrive in the Stone Desert at Jelle-Anda.
- Fall of Glorious Umbuso leads to the creation of the Abandoned Lands.
- The titan Kambe saves Munayo from the Lukwata.
- Narumbeki, Lignas, and Morreg founded by the disciples of the titans Mwari, Mamiwata, and Amhara.
- Followers of Alkush settle in the High Jungles and name their new homeland after their titan patron.

2,900 years ago

- The first tosculi arrive in the Southlands.

2,500 years ago

- Dynastic marriage joins the thrones of Ishadia and Aksaba.

2,200 years ago

- The sorcerers of Xangui-Xa create the white apes.

2,100 years ago

- Rebels fleeing Sikkim crash into Black Lotus Mesa and found the floating city of Aerdvall.



MINOTAURS

The biggest minotaur populations are found in Nuria Natal, and in Sudvall in the far south, but in the last ten years the bull-folk have been returning in ever greater numbers to reclaim their ancestral cities, Cindass and Roshgazi. Ferocious fighters and masters of labyrinth magic, minotaurs often serve on sandships or airships as sailors, guards, or even good-luck charms. In Sudvall, many minotaurs are knights and warriors who balance chivalry with meditative spiritualism. All minotaurs are wary of the ravaging disease that has plagued their race in the past.



RAMAG

The ramag were once humans allied with the titans of Glorious Umbuso, who used their aptitude for manipulating ley lines to construct the vast magical web that helped the titan empire achieve so much. Warped by strange magic, the ramag have long and lanky limbs and small torsos, making them appear rather odd to other races. They live in the city of Ramagani, which consists of nine major districts spread across the Abandoned Lands.

SUBEK

The kindly, scholarly subek have a reputation for advising others and lending their physical and intellectual prowess to local projects. However, these crocodile-headed humanoids possess a dual nature. During flood season, they become enraged, violent, and territorial. Subek dwell along the banks of the River Nuria and other major rivers of the Southlands, including the Selwheyha and the Amaja.

2,000 years ago

- The sorcerers of Xangui-Xa succumb to the arcane wasting and die out.

1,500 years ago

- Prince Fadokonu rises to the throne and establishes the Enlightened Empire of Morreg.

1,490 years ago

- Prince Fadokonu defeats the tosculi of Trumstone Hive at the battle of Narida Fields.

1,150 years ago

- Khensu tries and fails to seize the Nurian throne.

1,100 years ago

- Zunia Za of Narumbeki allies with Queen Firnia Makku of Terrotu to defend against Morregi aggression.

TIEFLINGS

The infernal-blooded tieflings are found throughout the Southlands, but the biggest concentration is in Kush, where they often hold positions of power. A significant population dwells in the Fallen Kingdom of Aksaba. Elsewhere, tieflings are received in various ways—the people of Nuria Natal refuse to judge them by their heritage, the Lignans tolerate them for their innate abilities, and in Ishadia they are widely shunned.

TOSCULI

The tosculi are a race of winged humanoid wasp-folk with a reputation for seeking to overrun and destroy all other civilizations. They build mud and resin towers that are ruled by ruthless hive-queens who send out swarms of warriors and drones to raid nearby communities.

Not all tosculi follow the commands of the queen and share the thoughts of the hive mind. These independent-minded tosculi, which other tosculi disdainfully refer to as hiveless, are cast out from the hive and must make their own way in the world, perhaps as adventurers or mercenaries.

TROLLKIN

Descended from fey and other immortal and monstrous races, trollkin are treated with suspicion, and sometimes fear, by the other races of the Southlands. As a result, they typically live in septs on the outskirts of other settled lands, where they get by through hunting and raiding. Most are hulking, brutish humanoids with thick green or brown hides, but their inhuman bloodlines make for wide variation between the septs and even in individuals. For example, zimwi-kin are capable of fierce lion-like leaps,

harpy-kin have vestigial wings and can lure prey with their singing, and gorgon-kin have petrifying breath.

divine sparks

A divine spark is a glowing sphere of energy left behind when a god or titan falls, capable of granting supernatural powers to someone who absorbs its divine energy. The rulers of Lignas, Narumbeki, Omphaya, and Terrotu each hold a titan's divine spark and wield its power. In Morreg, the dangerous spark of the titan Amhara is kept under guard in the royal treasury in Akxuum, City of Eyes.

Some divine sparks have remained lost since the fall of Glorious Umbuso. These glowing spheres, each around the size of a crystal ball, can be found in well-guarded dungeons and ruins in the Abandoned Lands and beyond, waiting for trail-blazing adventurer to rediscover their glory.

There are three ways to gain the use of a divine spark: to be given it freely, to claim it after the death of its current holder, or to integrate oneself with an unclaimed spark.

If a spark is offered freely by its current holder and that individual is within 30 feet, a character can claim it by succeeding on a DC 20 integration check. To make an integration check, a player rolls a d20 and adds the character's proficiency bonus and either its Constitution, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier.

When the current holder of a divine spark dies, a character within 30 feet can try to absorb the spark by succeeding on a DC 25 integration check. If the holder dies in combat, the character who delivered the killing blow can make the check with advantage as a reaction. On a failed check, another character can try to absorb the spark.

1,075 years ago

- Makuria secedes from Nuria Natal.

1,050 years ago

- Harnoch-Khedan the Splendid seizes the throne of the Ishadian-Aksaban Empire in the Blood Coronation.

1,000 years ago

- Prince Agajay becomes ruler of Morreg and provokes war with the allied kingdoms of Narumbeki and Terrotu, and with the gnolls.
- Lignas is sacked and its Great Library is burned to the ground.
- The Enlightened Empire collapses. Morreg is forced to grant Lignas independence.
- The city of Sar-Shaba is sealed by Azhanzar the Proud.
- Siwal breaks away from Nuria Natal.

900 years ago

- Skirmishes flare between Nuria and Roshgazi.

850 years ago

- Saph-Saph breaks from Nuria Natal.
- The giant city of Kadrana takes to the skies.



A character who discovers an unclaimed spark can try to absorb it by succeeding on a DC 25 integration check. They can make the check with advantage if they spend at least 4 hours contemplating and studying the spark before making the attempt.

On a failed integration check of any sort, the character falls under a permanent curse, as the *bestow curse* spell. Removing such a curse requires a *greater restoration* or *wish* spell, or the character might need to undertake a special quest determined by the GM.

If the character succeeds on the integration check, they absorb the spark's energy into their body and gain its power until they voluntarily surrender the spark to another or they die. Each divine spark provides a different, unique power to its holder. Possibilities include immunity to a single damage type or condition, magic resistance (advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects), limited shapechanging ability, or the ability to innately cast a particular spell of 5th level or lower three times per day.

ley lines

Ley lines are invisible rivers of magical essence that flow across the landscape. They are marked on the map as lines of lighter color over the sea or land. These lines also traverse the planes, primarily the Shadow Realm, allowing impossibly swift travel across great distances by those who know how to take advantage of their properties. The titanic ley lines of the Southlands are described below. For a detailed discussion of ley lines and shadow roads, see *Midgard Worldbook*, p. 38.

Angel's Road runs east from Nuria, across the Middle Sea, to Shuruppak in Ishadia. It is noted for being the location where the Oasis of Figs (see sidebar) can be found.

Chained Way runs from the sealed city of Sar-Shaba, southward down the Spice Coast, through the Viungo Jungle and into the Chando Mountains.

Debari's Tears originates in the large, deep lake of the same name, then heads south through the Webworks of the Skittering Ones and Terrotu. Like the other ley lines that were once part of the Great Web, the line is broken at several points where it crosses the Abandoned Lands, causing bizarre and dangerous effects (see "Aftermath of the Broken Web", page 182).

Demon's Walk begins in Nuria, then flows south over Black Lotus Mesa and through Kush, before turning east toward Shibai. Kushite sorcerers tap this ley line to call forth fiends from the Eleven Hells.

Endless Msana starts in Ramagani's Mamiwata District, then heads south through Akxuum, City of Eyes, all the way to Sudvall and beyond.

Granite Road begins in the Amud Mountains; it then passes through Chemeska in Dabu and crosses the Mukupe Sahel, before heading northeast along the Chelamite Mountains to Derrada.

Gray Titan's Way crosses the Showka Passage from the Red Wastes to Shibai, passing through the cities of Masirah and Mosylon, then extends east into Khandiria.

Howler's Road runs from Corremel to Bemmea, via Saph-Saph, Roshgazi, and Jelle-Anda. Mages who draw on its power are overwhelmed by the urge to howl their spells rather than merely speaking them, giving the ley line its name.

800 years ago

- War begins between the nature spirits that support Boreas and those that support the other Wind Lords.

750 years ago

- Sand giants arrive in Midgard from the Plane of Fire and lay claim to the southwestern Crescent Desert.

720 years ago

- Azhad al-Hani, leader of the sand giants, is transformed into sand, becoming one with the Ishmai Desert.

510 years ago

- Ama Zavoa drinks from the Pool of the Sky and founds the gnoll kingdom of Dabu.

500 years ago

- The Ramag open their city to the outside world, establishing trade houses to deal with foreign merchants.
- The Serpent Scholars are founded in Lignas.
- The flying city of Kadrana crashes into the Ishmai Desert.

Kipaji Promise begins in the Abandoned Lands, where it is broken in several places, producing unstable terrain and weird weather. After crossing Ramag's Bond, it passes through the Chando Mountains and into the Tethys Ocean.

Leviathan's Road runs south from Bemmea and passes through the Isle of Morphoi and the Burning Shores before splitting into two branches when it reaches Dabu.

Lotus Road flows from Mhalmel to Shibai and is said to devour travelers if its rituals are not performed correctly. Geomancers tapping its power always smell flowers and fresh breezes.

Ramag's Bond frames the Abandoned Lands inside its diamond shape, and it powers the magic portals that connect the major districts of the scattered city of Ramagani.

Serpent's Path starts in the Mbazha Mountains, then heads west into the Western Ocean. A planar connection to Bzeletalet, the Buzzing Hell of Insects, led to the foundation of the Bahima Azar tosculi hive.

Tamasheq Climb runs through the heart of the Stone Desert, passing through Kel Azjer, the hidden capital of the Dominion of the Wind Lords, where its presence allows doorways to other planes of existence to be readily opened.

Titan's Road begins out in the Western Ocean, then flows across the Eleyiti Mountains, crossing Ramag's Bond before reaching the Aggesai Plains.

Viper's Tongue arises in the Nyenga Forest in the Abandoned Lands, travels west to Lignas, follows the Nyanshsha and Selwheyha rivers to the ruined titan observatory at Dunhumadzi, and from there runs across the Djibbar Plains.

OASIS OF FIGS: PARADISE OR PERIL?

The mysterious Oasis of Figs drifts along the Angel's Road ley line, appearing at a different desert location with each sunset. It is ruled by a genie named Sultan Hajani the Benevolent, who holds sway over the place from his colorful palace. No traveler is refused entry, but those who indulge in the fruits and wines of the sultan's table without first offering proper gifts find that they cannot leave until the sultan allows them to do so. Those kept as guests must find ways to absolve their debt before they join the ranks of the mindless unfortunates who stare, unblinking, with only the whites of their eyes visible. Time seems to pass strangely in this roaming paradise, and tales say the sultan's iridescent figs have miraculous powers of youth, longevity, and strength.

Ziwa's Casting curls around Lake Trigola, flows southwest across Ramag's Bond, then heads south and east, crossing the sea to the island of Zanskar.

World trees

Ancient Yggdrasil, also known as the World Ash, is the first World Tree. Its mighty branches and twisting paths connect Midgard to other planes, including the Eleven Hells, Valhalla, and Ravatet, Plane of Rusty Gears. Where Yggdrasil's branches enter Midgard, they manifest as lesser World Trees, nodes of divine power that enable those who

460 years ago

- The Golden Pair declare the Moon Kingdom of Tes-Qamar independent.

430 years ago

- The rise of the Uata pack leads to the creation of a second gnoll territory, Dabu Uhlza.

400 years ago

- The Green Walker is summoned by the druids of Kush. Haldaheim and Lutonge are destroyed.
- The tribes of the Mbalenhle Forest make a pact with the spider demon Nash-Sed-Caki and become the Skittering Ones.

395 years ago

- Sebbek Sobor is founded by dwarves who fled Haldaheim.

370 years ago

- The druids of Kush sacrifice themselves to constrain the Green Walker's rampage.



climb them to travel to other realms. The lesser World Trees of the Southlands are listed below. For further information about World Trees, see *Midgard Worldbook*, p. 47.

Cloudreach Kapok, in the Zobanu Jungle (page 220)

Kondanamwali, a baobab near the border with Dabu Uhlza (page 128)

Mamiwata's Mangrove, in the mangrove forests of the Selwheyha river delta (page 144)

Mother of the Forest, an ancient baobab on the island of Zanskar (page 219)

Palm of the Sheikh, at the Menatayni oasis in the Crescent Desert (page 34)

Stone Heart, a petrified stump in Nangui, City of Sorcerers (page 117)

Whistling Acacia, on the Djibbar Plains (page 144)

a brief history of the southlands

Over the millennia, empires and kingdoms have risen to unparalleled heights across the Southlands, only to succumb to fire, war, and chaos. As each has fallen, new kingdoms have arisen, often making it hard to determine when one nation ended and another one began.

The greatest of the rulers and the cultures that have defined the Southlands are chronicled in the brief history presented here. There is more detail on the history of each region in the chapters that follow.

AWAKENING OF THE WIND LORDS

At the dawn of time, the primeval giant Aurgelmir's first intake of breath shook creation. His exhalation gave birth to the four Wind Lords—Chergui the East, Khamsin the South, Shemral the West, and Boreas the North. While the Vanir War (*Midgard Worldbook*, p. 12) raged between Aurgelmir's offspring, the gods and the titans, these four elemental lords took up residence in the newly created Stone Desert. In that sanctuary, they awakened the rocks, the lakes and rivers, the fires, and the wind to create the nature spirits that inhabit the Dominion of the Wind Lords to this day.

RISE OF THE TITANS

When the Vanir War came to an end, the titans descended upon the Southlands and laid claim to vast swaths of the continent, founding the empire of Glorious Umbuso. For thousands of years, the titans prospered as their civilization created wonders that were unmatched until the founding of Ankeshel. At its height, Glorious Umbuso stretched from the southernmost tip of the Southlands to the edges of the northern deserts. The titans built magnificent cities, crafted arcane devices to explore the planes, and constructed epic monuments to their own glory.

Perhaps their greatest achievement was their mastery of the ley lines, the mystical streams of magic flowing across Midgard. With the help of their human servants, the ramag, the titans altered the flow of the ley lines to create the Great Web, a network capable of supplying each of their empire's cities with arcane energy. As Glorious Umbuso flourished, the mortal races worshiped the titans as gods.

350 years ago

- Sudvall is founded by settlers from the Moon Kingdom, lost Magdar knights, and the kijani.

300 years ago

- Nulu Nagora becomes Eternal Lord of Kush.
- Dragons attack the minotaur cities of the Moon Kingdom. The Lost Fleet vanishes.
- The ramag district of Thakathi is overrun by aberrations from the Void.
- Arcane wards fail in Gala'ikos, unleashing dinosaurs and megafauna into the surrounding lands.

260 years ago

- An earthquake opens up a mile-long crevasse in the Land of Terrible Lizards, revealing the Egg of Veles.

215 years ago

- Delos Ridmark creates the Bottled City.

210 years ago

- Dragons attack the northwest Southlands again but are driven away by the Wind Lords; they turn toward Nuria Natal and seize the harbor city of Prezhan.

DAWN OF NURIA AND THE ANCIENT KINGDOMS

Over 5,000 years ago, seven human families arrived at the banks of the River Nuria at the end of a long journey. As they rested on the riverbank, the wizard Senewosret noticed the magical energy present in the water. After quenching his thirst, he realized that the water had given him the power to tap into ley lines. Taking charge of the situation, Senewosret named the river Nuria, meaning “numinous” in his native tongue, and ordered a new city to be built on its sandy banks.

The wizard-kings and sorcerer-queens who ruled Nuria in the generations that followed experimented with the ley lines and the river’s magical water, using it to prolong their lives until they achieved a sort of semidivinity, and developing rituals to reawaken them from the slumber of death should their descendants need to call upon their aid. Over the centuries, the Nurians have awakened their sleeping god-kings and god-queens occasionally for protection in times of crisis.

Nuria was not the only kingdom to be founded during this period. Six hundred years later, the first aasimar king ascended to the Phoenix Throne of Ishadia, while in the west the Kingdom of Golden Ulthar arose in the verdant lands that eventually became the Crescent Desert when unnatural forces destroyed the ecosystem.

UMBUSO'S COLLAPSE

Around 3,000 years ago, at roughly the same time that the island of Ankeshel slipped beneath the waves, a magical plague struck the titans of Glorious Umbuso. Its origin is unknown, but its effects were devastating—the plague slowly drove the titans into madness. Realizing

their empire was doomed, the titans imparted their divine sparks to their favorite mortals for safekeeping, in the hope that they could reclaim them when Glorious Umbuso recovered. It never did.

As the empire collapsed around them, the titans who had not yet succumbed to madness drove the mortal races living among them to the far corners of the Southlands. The gentle, kindly titans tore their empire apart as it was overcome by chaos and grief. A few escaped to the islands of the Tethys Ocean, taking shelter with the sea god Nethus in exchange for eternal servitude; others entered a deep slumber where they yet remain.

The central part of Glorious Umbuso turned into the Abandoned Lands, now dotted with lost cities and mysterious ruins, as the Great Web of ley lines fell into tatters, spilling uncontrolled magic into the wilderness and warping land and beast alike. Within a few generations, bizarre creatures roamed across the landscape, including dinosaurs, megafauna, and twisted aberrations from the Void and other planes.

LEGACY OF THE TITANS

After the fall of Glorious Umbuso, new kingdoms arose, led by the mortals who possessed the divine sparks of their former masters. Lignas and Morreg were founded along the fertile river lands of the western coast by the followers of Mamiwata and Amhara, Mwari’s erstwhile High Warlord established Narumbeki on the grasslands, and the disciples of Alkush went north to the High Jungles, where they founded Kush. Little is known of these dynasties in their early days, but over the centuries Lignas grew into a famed repository of learning, and Morreg became a mighty imperial power.

198 years ago

- The tosculi establish the Bahima Azar hive.

170 years ago

- The titan Gwazi returns from the islands to his lover Khule’s tomb in the Abandoned Lands and wakes her up. She is still insane, and he is forced to kill her.

160 years ago

- Rise of the lizardfolk in Veles-Sa.

125 years ago

- Dragons burn the city of Avaris. The fifth god-king, Aten-Akman, is awakened to defend the city. He invokes his death curse, creating the Black Spire.

115 years ago

- The dragons destroy the dam at Khazephon and flood the City of Jewels. The last king of Ishadia is drowned.



Ankeshel's collapse also impacted the Southlands. Refugees fleeing the sinking island landed on the shores of the Stone Desert at Jelle-Anda. The capricious Wind Lords allowed the newcomers to stay. They became the Tamasheq, the People of Wind and Sand, and spread throughout the northern deserts in the centuries that followed.

Another group of new arrivals was far less welcome. A hundred years or so after the fall of the titans, the first tosculi appeared. Soon afterward they had wiped the realms of the Molioba Kings and the Ivory Queens of Ylla-Maurefan off the map.

Three hundred years later in the east, the King of Ishadia married the Queen of Aksaba, forming a joint dynasty that ruled for centuries over a vast empire that stretched from the Ruby Sea to the Spice Coast.

AGE OF ARCANISTS

Two thousand two hundred years ago, an almost-forgotten race of sorcerers known as the Xangui-Xa built a city deep in the Olu Jungle and awakened the apes of the forest to act as their servants. Two hundred years after that, their civilization had collapsed—destroyed by the magical plague known as the arcane wasting, which is still carried by the white apes today.

A hundred years after the appearance of the Xangui-Xa, more arcanists arrived in the Southlands—rebellious mages from Sikkim who had fled westward after a failed coup, and then crashed into Black Lotus Mesa in their stolen flying castle. When they discovered that the Celestial Waterfall cascading down onto the mesa had magical properties, the mages were able to harness its power and return to the sky by raising the remains of their crashed fortress into the air. Dubbing themselves aeromancers, they named their floating home Aerdvall.

FLIGHT OF THE NORTH WIND

As the Tamasheq spread throughout the Dominion of the Wind Lords and surrounding lands, Boreas the North Wind grew more and more angry at their presence. Two thousand years ago, he snapped. Boreas wiped out the city of Jelle-Anda and blasted the Stone Desert with freezing blizzards until it was covered with snow. He would have killed every last human in his path but for the intervention of the other three Wind Lords, who considered his attack cruel and unfounded. They sheltered the Tamasheq and drove Boreas from the Southlands. He fled to the frigid lands of the north where he remains today, plotting the downfall of the Wind Lords and their mortal subjects. His allies among the nature spirits and the Tamasheq tribes of the Dominion have been waging a cold war against the Wind Lords for the past 800 years.

THE ENLIGHTENED EMPIRE OF MORREG

Long after the fall of the titans, around 1,500 years ago, a prince named Fadokonu rose to the throne of Morreg. After gathering a large army, he set out to expand his holdings. The scholars of Lignas were too inward-looking to offer much resistance and readily acceded to the Morregi demands for tribute. The tosculi of Trumstone Hive in the mountains to the south of the High Jungles were more recalcitrant, but Fadokonu and his cavalry decisively defeated their hive-queen at the battle of Narida Fields on the Aggesal Plains.

Twenty years after Fadokonu ascended to the throne, Morreg controlled the entire western coast from Veles-Sa in the south to the border with present-day Dabu in the north. The Enlightened Empire of Morreg, as it styled itself, was to last for 500 years before hubris led to its collapse.

110 years ago

- The arcane wasting spreads through Morreg's mages.
- The Ramag seal off the district of Ramagani on Black Lotus Mesa to prevent the spread of the arcane wasting.

102 years ago

- The Cult of Nkishi first appears in Dabu.

100 years ago

- The reign of the Saffron Rajah of Kesara begins.

99 years ago

- Bastet walks the streets of Per-Bastet in feline form for one day.

90 years ago

- Ama Ndamon perfects a distillate to tame dangerous reptiles in Lignas.

84 years ago

- The great wyrm Fanarash settles in the mountains near Sudvall and threatens the former satrapy.

BIRTH OF THE MOON KINGDOM

Minotaur sailors and merchants from Kyprion and other settlements at the eastern end of the Middle Sea traded regularly with the Nurians south of them and the Seven Cities to their north in ancient times. Around 1,500 years ago, they settled on the northern coast of the Lands of Wind and Sand, building harbors and warehouses to facilitate trade, then erecting palaces and labyrinths. The minotaurs founded the cities of Roshgazi, Cindass, Kadralthu, and Derrada, and they invited the Qamari, cousins of the Tamasheq, to settle there. These four cities paid tribute to the Queen of the Minotaurs in the Bull Palace of Kyprion for nearly 1,000 years, until the “Golden Pair” of King Kaprys and Queen Melenni declared independence and broke away to form the Moon Kingdom of Tes-Qamar 460 years ago.

TROUBLE IN THE LAND OF THE GOD-KINGS

Almost 1,200 years ago in Nuria Natal, the traitorous Khensu, vizier to Kemkhet II, God-King of the Ninth Dynasty, made a pact with a trio of devils in a bid to become a god and usurp the throne. Khensu’s attempt to achieve divinity failed; his corrupt legacy is a pyramid in the desert, haunted by the restless dead.

Then, 1,075 years ago, the city of Makuria seceded from Nuria after the Nurian army’s training grounds were moved north. Seventy-five years later, Siwal, City of Gardens, broke away too as a result of disputes over higher tariffs on Siwal’s goods than on those from Per-Bastet and Saph-Saph. After a few years without Siwalese trade, the capital relented and reduced the tariffs. Trade resumed on a mostly friendly basis, but Siwal did not rejoin the kingdom.

Nine hundred years ago, an avatar of the goddess Bastet and her priestesses tamed the gnoll tribes of the desert. Perceiving this as a threat to their kingdom, the minotaurs of Roshgazi dispatched armies to strike at Nurian trade routes and ports. This conflict was to smolder for another 300 years.

Saph-Saph, the third of the present-day free desert cities, broke away amicably from Nuria at the recommendation of Aten’s Oracle of the Sun 850 years ago.

FALL OF THE ENLIGHTENED EMPIRE

The Enlightened Empire of Morreg unraveled around 1,000 years ago with the ascension of Prince Agajay to the throne. A disciple of the dark god Mot, the newly crowned emperor attempted to enslave the learned caste of Lignas. That act led to the Flower Rebellion, in which the angry scholars poisoned their Morregi oppressors with wine laced with deadly jungle blossoms. Next, Agajay broke a treaty with the gnoll packs, which elicited howls of outrage from the gnoll matriarchs. He provoked a ruinously expensive war against a Narumbeki–Terrotu alliance, and to cap it all off, embarked on a foolish venture to establish sea trade with distant lands by building a fleet of fifty “winged ships.”

When Agajay’s Great Winged Fleet failed to return, his enemies formed an alliance. The Purple Horde of gnolls and nomads under the banner of Ama Uroyechef the Toothless sacked Lignas Proper and burned the Great Library of Lignas to the ground. Then the allied forces of Narumbeki and Terrotu dealt the Morregi army a series of heavy defeats in battles from Adulis to Lake Trigola. The Enlightened Empire’s fate was sealed: Morreg sued for peace and was forced to grant Lignas its independence.

77 years ago

- Yafram the Desolate attacks Siwal but is defeated by Faysal abn-Noor. She becomes a lich.

70 years ago

- The Eyes of Aten and combined Nurian and Siwali forces attack the Great Hive of Arbeyach.

60 years ago

- The Cattle Queens of Terrotu launch a crusade against the tosculi.

50 years ago

- Ra-Amon-Ra, the prophet of the Sun God Aten, is martyred by dragon fire in Per-Xor.
- Polinkai is destroyed by the wasteland dragon Teskhalera.

46 years ago

- The balor Wra’onai attacks Nurian territory but is defeated at Per-Xor by the god-king Sut-Akhaman.



CENSURE OF SAR-SHABA

On the eastern side of the continent, an even older empire came to an ignominious end around the same time as Morreg. Harnoch-Khedan the Splendid and his fiendish servitors seized the Peacock Throne of the Ishadia-Aksaban Empire in a violent coup known as the Blood Coronation. Harnoch-Khedan spent several decades quelling resistance to his rule before he was succeeded by Azhanzar the Proud, who expanded the empire's borders even more in a reign tainted by barbarity and infernal decadence.

Near the end of his rule, Azhanzar came to regret his sins and those of his offspring. After summoning to Sar-Shaba the demons commanded by his family, he activated the heavenly sigils inscribed throughout the city, sealing the demons and his own ungodly children within its walls for eternity. Following this event, known as the Censure of Sar-Shaba, the empire fell apart. Aksaba and Ishadia went into a long period of decline; Ishadia fell under Nurian control for several centuries afterward.

ARRIVAL OF THE GIANTS

Far to the north 850 years ago, in what are now called the Haunted Lands, giants took to the skies in a splendid flying city called Kadrana. Accomplished merchants, they visited Kel Azjer, Roshgazi, and Aerdvall and other cities of the Southlands for trade purposes.

A century later, another tribe of giants arrived in the southwestern Crescent Desert from the Plane of Fire. Under their leader, Azhad al-Hani, these sand giants laid claim to a large swath of territory, which became known as the Ishmai Desert. As the sand giants' influence grew, Azhad's power became too much for him to handle and he was transformed into sand, merging with the desert.

Then, 500 years ago, Kadrana's giants lost control of their flying city, and it crashed into the Ishmai Desert. Buried somewhere beneath the sands, it awaits rediscovery today.

THE GREEN WALKER RISES AND HALDAHEIM CRUMBLES

For more than 2,500 years, the world honored the druidic followers of the titan Alkush as they lived in harmony with nature in the jungles of Kush. But 400 years ago, their idyll was shattered. Demons masquerading as "nature spirits" tricked the druids into summoning the Green Walker, a monstrosity from an alien realm. The Green Walker rose out of the earth as an unchecked force of nature, warping the flora and fauna of the jungles and causing plant life to grow at an unnaturally fast rate. Like a leafy swarm, living vines crept out from Kush, turning the surrounding savannah into dense jungle.

As the Green Walker pulled itself from the earth, it left behind an enormous sinkhole, which swallowed the ancient dwarven capital of Haldaheim, destroying the city. The dwarves fled south to Sebbek Sobor. The kijani, the peaceful plant-like humanoids of the jungle, followed suit, fleeing even farther into the Zobanu Jungle.

In an effort to stop the monstrosity's rampage, the druids sacrificed themselves and the divine spark of their titan in a great ritual. The act met with only limited success, slowing the growth of the Green Walker but failing to banish it. The living jungle of Yawchaka remains one of the most dangerous places in the Southlands today. In the aftermath, many Kushites turned to darkness, making pacts with fiends to rebuild their kingdom. Kush is still ruled by Nulu Nagora, its Eternal Lord, 300 years later.

40 years ago

- Ebo Adashe becomes Mukani of Narumbeki.
- Yafnam the Desolate revives and begins rebuilding her undead forces.

37 years ago

- The Spider Prophet experiences a vision of Mharoti dragons disguised as Tamasheq.

35 years ago

- Mwato Yaav seizes the Lignas spark and the Viper Throne.

30 years ago

- Thabo Danai leads an expedition to Thakathi and becomes corrupted by the Void.
- The merchant houses of Shibai begin offering bounties on the pirates of Mhalmet and the Free Islands.

22 years ago

- King Thutmoses XXIII takes the throne of Nuria.
- Nmabi Makumba founds a new trollkin kingdom.

DRAGON INCURSIONS

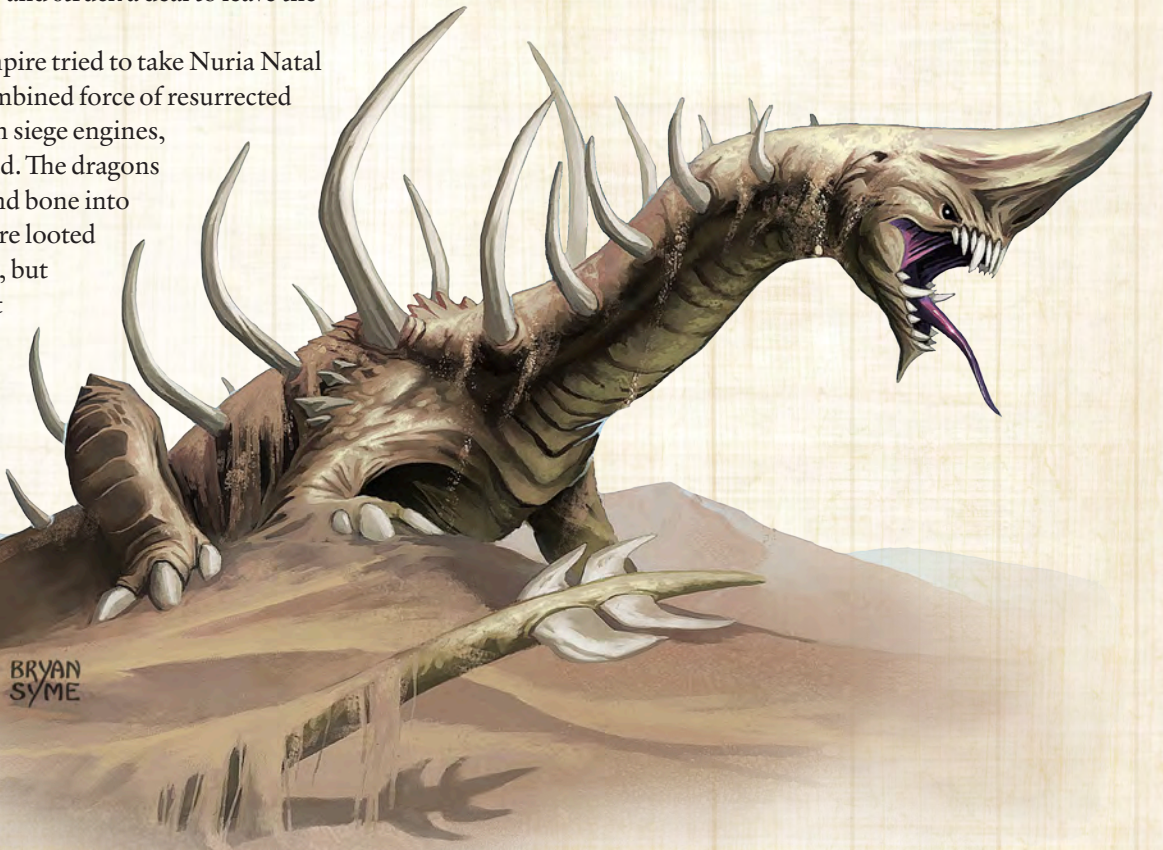
Three hundred years ago the Mharoti dragons descended on the minotaur cities of the Moon Kingdom. Kadralthu and Derrada were destroyed, while Roshgazi and Cindass were reduced to ruins. The minotaurs fled to Capleon and Kyprion in their ships, but the “Lost Fleet” never arrived.

Nearly a century later, the dragons attacked again, marching their armies into the Stone Desert. The Wind Lords set aside their feuding to unite against the common threat and rose up to protect their domain, unleashing the full fury of their legions of nature spirits. The dragons were forced to surrender and struck a deal to leave the dominion in peace.

Next, the Mharoti Empire tried to take Nuria Natal but was opposed by a combined force of resurrected god-kings, ancient golem siege engines, and a vast army of undead. The dragons blasted sand into glass and bone into ash, and many tombs were looted by the dragonkin hordes, but in the end they could not hold onto the territory. Turning their attention

northward, the Mharoti had to make do with seizing the Harbor City of Prezhan from Ishadia.

The dragons attacked Nuria again 125 years ago, burning the city of Avaris. This time they were defeated in a day-long battle by the awakened god-king Aten-Atman, who destroyed four blue dragons almost single-handedly. Aten-Atman was forced to invoke his death curse, summoning a five-mile-high pillar of molten rock that decimated the Mharoti troops and inflicted heavy losses on his own soldiers. The Black Spire still stands today on the coast not far from Avaris as a warning to the Mharoti of the god-king’s power.



20 years ago

- The Battle of the Western Gate takes place in Sar-Shaba.

13 years ago

- Naval clashes create tension between Shibai and Ishadia.

12 years ago

- The Whisperer in Shadows seizes control of Ankhrimari.

11 years ago

- Gamka Firemane returns to claim the Lion Throne of Omphaya.

10 years ago

- Josef Kranz unites the white apes of Black Lotus Mesa under his rule as New Father.

9 years ago

- Luan Krivoss becomes High Marshal of Sudvall.



Ten years later, the dragons struck once more, destroying the great dam at Khazephon and flooding the city. The last king of Ishadia perished in the deluge.

RISE OF THE ARCANE WASTING

Roughly 110 years ago, a disease known as the arcane wasting (see the sidebar for details) spread like quicksilver through the kingdom of Morreg and the ramag of Black Lotus Mesa, passing from one mage to another. Those affected began suffering from forgetfulness before their minds deteriorated and ultimately wasted away. The Morregi accused the serpent scholars of Lignas of creating the disease at first, but the blame lay with the sorcerers of Xanguì-Xa who had created the white apes 2,000 years earlier. The priests of Morreg eventually got the disease under control, but not until thousands had succumbed. The ramag took drastic action to protect the rest of Ramagani, closing the portals to the district of their city that lies on Black Lotus Mesa, thus abandoning their kin to their fate.

THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS

At the turn of the century, Vaghamesh Drustani Arenja became the Saffron Rajah of Kesara. Sixteen years later, the ancient dragon Fanarash declared the mountains near Sudvall his personal domain. To avoid potential bloodshed, Sudvall promptly signed a nonaggression pact with Fanarash.

Seventy-seven years ago, Yafram the Desolate raised a zombie army to attack Siwal. After being slain by her former lover Faysal abn-Noor, a paladin of Aten, Yafram became a lich. Seven years later, the knightly order called the Eyes of Aten and their allies burned the chimneys of the Great Hive of Arbeyach, weakening the tosculi hive for a generation.

Fifty years ago, following omens from their titan goddess, Enkai, the Queens of Terrotu launched a crusade against the tosculi. After five years of fighting, the war ended with the murder of the army's leader, the Red Priestess Anlais. In the same year, Ra-Amon-Ra, prophet of



ARCANE WASTING

When the bodily fluid of a creature infected with arcane wasting touches a humanoid or when an infected creature casts a spell that affects a humanoid (directly or indirectly), that creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or also become infected with the disease.

Beginning 1d6 days after a creature becomes infected, the creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw after finishing a long rest. On a failed save, the victim loses 1d3

Intelligence and 1d3 Wisdom. Lost Intelligence and Wisdom can't be recovered while the disease persists. On a successful save, nothing happens; the disease is cured when the victim makes two consecutive successful saving throws.

Once the disease is cured, lost Intelligence and Wisdom can be restored by greater restoration or comparable magic. The disease is also cured by lesser restoration if the caster makes a successful DC 15 check using the caster's spellcasting ability.

8 years ago

- iGohli kills Ebo Adashe and takes the Zebra Throne.
- In Per-Set, Izzadin Qallawun dies and is succeeded by his granddaughter, Shajar din Izzadin, as the militant leader of the cult of Set in that city.

6 years ago

- Nurian mages ally with the fleets of Capleon, Kammae, and Triolo to win a great naval victory over the Mharoti galleys.
- The Ape-Gnashers and Heyaad gnolls burn kraals in Narumbeki, provoking a violent response from the legions.

5 years ago

- The Spider Prophet's visions encourage the Dominion of the Wind Lords to allow foreigners into Inkabut.
- The dragonkin of the Mharoti Empire are defeated by the armies of Ishadia and Khandiria at the Battle of Wheeling Angels.

4 years ago

- Sa Shiru founds Yavet, a breakaway third gnoll kingdom, on the border with Narumbeki.

3 years ago

- The Lukwata stirs at the bottom of Lake Debari.
- Open hostilities between Nuria Natal and the Dragon Empire come to an end.

Aten, was burned alive by dragon fire in the city of Per-Xor, but again the Nurians successfully repelled the Mharoti dragons. Four years afterward, the balor Wra'onai led an army of Kushites across Nurian territory, only to fall before former God-King Sut-Akhaman in the Siege of Per-Xor.

Forty years ago, Ebo Adashe became Mukani (High Warlord) of Narumbeki. Five years later, Mwato Yaav murdered the queen of Lignas, seized her divine spark, and ascended to the Viper Throne.

Thirty years ago, five merchant houses of Shibai began offering sizable bounties on the notorious corsairs who attacked their vessels. Seventeen years later, Shibai clashed with Ishadia in a series of naval battles over slavery and the Showka Passage. Dozens of ships burned and sank.

Twenty-two years ago, King Thutmoses XXIII took the throne of Nuria, and Nmabi Makumba founded a new trollkin kingdom west of Lake Debari. Two years later, the Aksabans seized control of a section of sealed Sar-Shaba in the aftermath of the Battle of the Western Gate.

Twelve years ago, Ssessk'ai Us'kari, the Whisperer in Shadows, seized control of the ruins of Ankhrimari near Lignas Proper. The next year, the titan Gamka Firemane returned to reclaim the Lion Throne of Omphaya.

THE LAST TEN YEARS

A lot has happened in the past decade. For more on current events, see the chapters devoted to each region.

Ten years ago, a man named Josef Kranz declared himself to be the "New Father" of the white apes of Black Lotus Mesa. He has since set his sights set on Nuria Natal.

Eight years ago in Narumbeki, iGohli killed Edo Adashe, after the Mukani was revealed to be under the Green Walker's control, and claimed the Zebra Throne.

Six years ago, Nurian theurgues allied with the fleets of Capleon, Kammae, and Triolo won a great naval victory over the Dragon Empire near Marea. Over 150 Mharoti ships were seized or sunk. The next year, the Mharoti suffered another crushing defeat, this time at the hands of the Ishadians and Khandirians at the Battle of Wheeling Angels. In the Dominion of the Wind Lords, the Spider Prophet's visions led to foreign merchants being welcomed into Inkabut for the first time. To the south, the Ape-Gnashers and the Heyaad gnolls launched a series of raids into Narumbeki, burning several kraals and feasting on the inhabitants. This provoked a swift and violent response from Narumbeki's legions, and the gnolls were routed. The defeat allowed the exiled gnoll leader Sa Isha to seize territory on the border, establishing Yavet, a breakaway third gnoll kingdom.

Three years ago, the mighty Lukwata stirred in its sleep at the bottom of Lake Debari. In Nuria Natal, King Thutmoses XXIII put an end to open hostilities with the Dragon Empire and reached out to the Seven Cities and other territories north of the Middle Sea to increase trade.

In the last year, four ships from the Lost Fleet have made landfall at Roshgazi; their crew and passengers have no memory of the past 300 years. In Shibai, a slave revolt instigated by the Istagal Raiders has dealt a crushing blow to the slave trade. The warlord Faez is uniting the sand giant tribes of the Ishmai Desert, while elsewhere Ia'Affrat, Herald of Arbeyach, plots and schemes to bring the tosculi hives together. New rulers will soon be chosen to replace the dying Queen of Queens in Terrotu and the King of the Luminous Roads in Ramagani. And in the High Jungles, the druids have at last returned, inspired by the dreams of a sleeping titan.

2 years ago

- The lich Seth-rem Allasan and his undead army attack the oasis at Faheleel before moving south toward Per-Maraut.

In the last year

- Four ships from the Lost Fleet make landfall at Roshgazi.
- Sand giant tribes gather under the banner of the war chieftain Faez in the Ishmai Desert.
- King Thutmoses XXIII reaches out to the Seven Cities, the Magdar Kingdom, Zobeck, and Dornig to increase trade.
- The death of Thanjiwe allows the lost ramag of Black Lotus Mesa to partly reopen the portal to the rest of Ramagani.
- The Shibai slave revolt deals a crushing blow to the slave trade.
- The dying Terrotu Queen of Queens Akeuto Kibra makes her way to the Muster at the Temple of Onyx and Ruby.
- Potential successors to Zinchekra, ruler of the ramag, jockey for position.
- Queen-Goddess Jendayi Atla-Hebaya arises in Laksor.
- Raids on Makuria and Per-Kush by demon-worshipping cultists increase.
- Josef Kranz starts sending his minions into Nuria.
- The dreams of the titan Alkush bring the druids back to the Living Jungle.



nuria natal



2

nuria natal

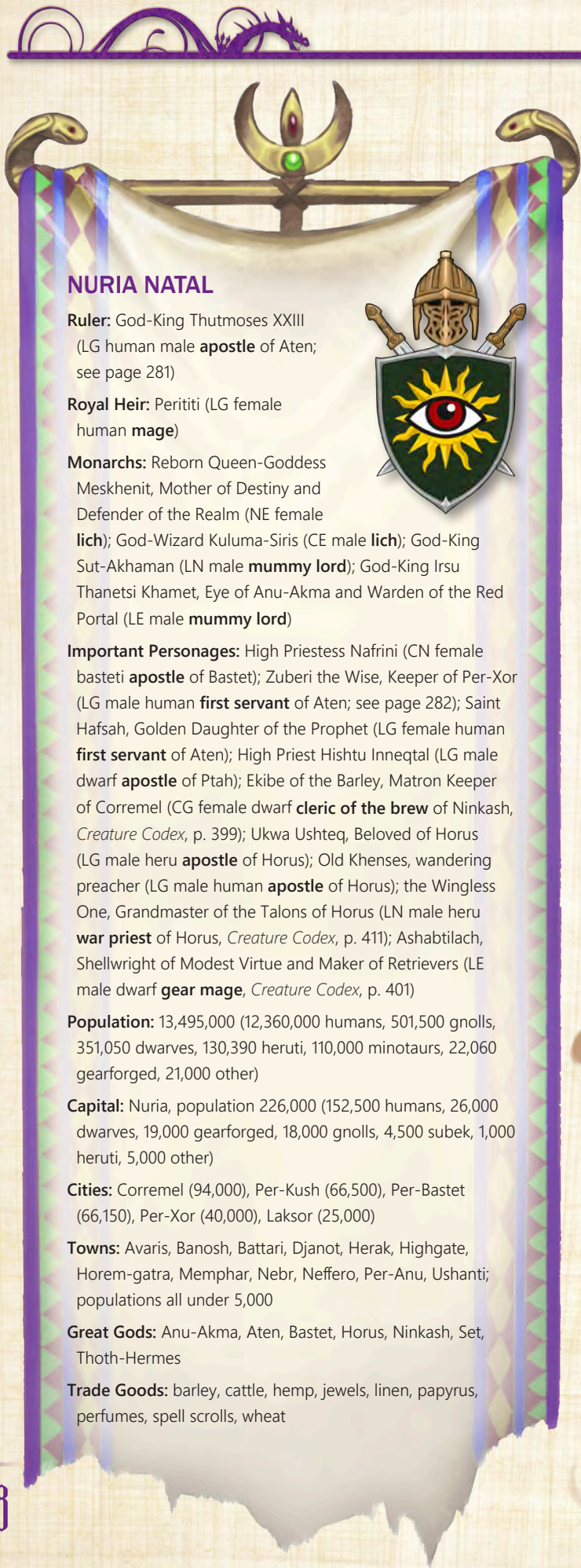
Nuria Natal is a land of ancient magic and cyclopean monuments; a land of desert siroccos and time-lost necropolises; a land where gods walk and nobles scheme. Nuria Natal is a land where the poorest beggar might cross paths with ancient monarchs. Coursing through it all is the River Nuria, the kingdom's lifeblood. The people of Nuria know they live in the greatest of lands, and that their kingdom and culture will endure until the end of all things as long as they respect and revere the river.



geography

The River Nuria runs the length of Nuria Natal, tumbling from Black Lotus Mesa in the south and thundering into the Middle Sea in the north. Stretching over a dozen miles away from each riverbank is the fertile farmland that nourishes the River Kingdom. Whether pastureland that feeds the cattle, expanses of golden wheat, or fields that produce flax and hemp used to make clothes and trade goods of all kinds, the farms of Nuria keep the people fed and clothed. Boats ply the river day and night all year round. Treasures find their way to the major settlements at the nation's heart, while excess goods are exported to other regions of Nuria and other lands.

When the waters rise in flood season, the kindly subek become violent, attacking river boats that venture into their territory.



NURIA NATAL

Ruler: God-King Thutmoses XXIII (LG human male **apostle** of Aten; see page 281)

Royal Heir: Perititi (LG female human **mage**)

Monarchs: Reborn Queen-Goddess Meskhenit, Mother of Destiny and Defender of the Realm (NE female **lich**); God-Wizard Kuluma-Siris (CE male **lich**); God-King Sut-Akhaman (LN male **mummy lord**); God-King Irsu Thanetsi Khamet, Eye of Anu-Akma and Warden of the Red Portal (LE male **mummy lord**)

Important Personages: High Priestess Nafrini (CN female basteti **apostle** of Bastet); Zuberi the Wise, Keeper of Per-Xor (LG male human **first servant** of Aten; see page 282); Saint Hafsah, Golden Daughter of the Prophet (LG female human **first servant** of Aten); High Priest Hishtu Inneqta (LG male dwarf **apostle** of Ptah); Ekibe of the Barley, Matron Keeper of Corremel (CG female dwarf **cleric of the brew** of Ninkash, *Creature Codex*, p. 399); U kwa Ushteq, Beloved of Horus (LG male heru **apostle** of Horus); Old Khenses, wandering preacher (LG male human **apostle** of Horus); the Wingless One, Grandmaster of the Talons of Horus (LN male heru **war priest** of Horus, *Creature Codex*, p. 411); Ashabtilach, Shellwright of Modest Virtue and Maker of Retrievers (LE male dwarf **gear mage**, *Creature Codex*, p. 401)

Population: 13,495,000 (12,360,000 humans, 501,500 gnolls, 351,050 dwarves, 130,390 heruti, 110,000 minotaurs, 22,060 gearforged, 21,000 other)

Capital: Nuria, population 226,000 (152,500 humans, 26,000 dwarves, 19,000 gearforged, 18,000 gnolls, 4,500 subek, 1,000 heruti, 5,000 other)

Cities: Corremel (94,000), Per-Kush (66,500), Per-Bastet (66,150), Per-Xor (40,000), Laksor (25,000)

Towns: Avaris, Banosh, Battari, Djanot, Herak, Highgate, Horem-gatra, Memphar, Nebr, Neffero, Per-Anu, Ushanti; populations all under 5,000

Great Gods: Anu-Akma, Aten, Bastet, Horus, Ninkash, Set, Thoth-Hermes

Trade Goods: barley, cattle, hemp, jewels, linen, papyrus, perfumes, spell scrolls, wheat



To the west of the river, the Crescent Desert extends to Dabu in the west, to the Dominion of the Wind Lords in the north, and to the Mbazha Mountains to the south. The Crescent is notable as a source of salt as well as for the number of sandships running to and from the free city-state of Saph-Saph.

To the east of the River Nuria lies the Sarklan Desert, which provides a necessary natural barrier between Nuria Natal and its hated enemies in the Mharoti Empire. Trade caravans ply the Mhalmet Road from Per Bastet to the Free City of Siwal and beyond to Mhalmet, carrying gems and other luxury goods while their guards and other mercenaries discourage or fend off raiders.

The climate is dry and arid in the deserts, with temperatures ranging from 32 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit in winter and 45 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. Rainfall is almost unheard of in the summer and is not excessive in the winter. Most rain falls along the coast of the Middle Sea and the northern portion of the river, with Horem-gatra holding the distinction of the wettest city in the kingdom. The river floods frequently from Goldflower through Harvest Tide as the snow and ice of the Mbhaza Mountains melts and causes it to surge.



Nuria Natal is rich in resources, trading in goods as diverse as linen and grain, jewelry and perfumes, and spell scrolls. Nurian goods can be found all across the Middle Sea due to the nation's excellent mercantile connections and the high quality of its exports.

desert terrain

Away from the river's environs, Nuria Natal's landscape is made up of four primary terrain types.

Windswept sand dunes called ergs comprise less than half the terrain, though these dry areas are what outsiders typically envision when they think of the desert. Captains propel their sandships along the trade routes of the Crescent and Sarklan deserts, gaining speed from the wind blowing across the ergs. The dunes change shape regularly due to the movement of the wind, sometimes swallowing or threatening to bury oases and villages that lie along trade routes.

The pebble-strewn landscapes known as hamadas also make up a great part of the desert environment. These areas are extremely dry and stony, often stretching for miles with no shade, water, or protection. All of Nuria Natal's salt mining operations are located in hamadas.

In a few places across the desert, outcrops of stone rise from the ground in long, tall, wall-like structures that run parallel to one another. Each of these jagged formations, called stoneworks, usually measures 20 feet or less across, though some are as much as 100 feet wide. The distance between the formations is similarly varied. Narrower channels between the stoneworks allow the wind to funnel through, sometimes producing small whirlwinds.

Oases and wadis are the least common environment in the desert. A wadi might be a pleasant pool of water surrounded by date palms and long grass, or it might take the form of a shallow ditch running among ferns and kudzu, a stony riverbed that briefly holds water after a rain, or a muddy pit hidden under windswept sand. Bandits sometimes take over a wadi to extort travelers who need to replenish their water.

culture and customs

From the moment the first god-kings attained near divinity by taming the magic of the River Nuria and the ley lines running the same course, the people of Nuria Natal knew they were part of something that the people of every other nation would covet. Nurian mages and scholars devised mountainous resurrection tomb-engines, powered and enhanced by ley lines, which the slumbering god-kings of the past could use to return in times of upheaval.

SANDSTORMS AND SILTSTORMS

When strong winds blow across the desert, they carry sand with them. A creature caught in a sandstorm has disadvantage on ranged weapon attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight. The winds extinguish open flames, disperse any fog, and make nonmagical flight impossible. Even a creature flying with the aid of magic must land at the end of its turn or fall. A creature can't gain any benefits from finishing a short or long rest in a sandstorm.

Siltstorms, which carry very fine dust and sand aloft, are even more dangerous. In addition to the effects of a sandstorm, creatures that don't have half cover or better during a siltstorm take 1d6 bludgeoning damage each hour. In addition, they must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw each hour or gain 1 level of exhaustion from the inhalation of these particulates. A creature reduced to 0 hit points by a siltstorm is knocked unconscious rather than killed, but an unconscious creature automatically fails any Constitution saving throws to avoid exhaustion.

Most sandstorms or siltstorms last only a few hours, though in the winter, one can rage for days and alter the landscape across hundreds of miles. **Earth elementals** and **dust mephits** are immune to the storms' effects and can often be found frolicking in the storms and their aftermath.

The citizens see themselves as the protectors of their enchanted river, and the construction of stone monuments, monolithic statues, and sphinxes are among the ways they express their love of the river and their devotion to it. Intricate temple complexes are built in veneration of their chosen gods, Anu-Akma, Aten, Bastet, and Thoth-Hermes, and the people know they are as important to these deities as the river and the land are. The god-kings and god-queens who rule them are worshiped as living deities. When they die, their bodies undergo a series of magical rituals and spiritual preparations before they are interred in elaborate pyramidal tombs. During

TAMASHEQ LITHAMS

In winter, when sandstorms and siltstorms are furious, the Tamasheq nomads often cover their mouths and noses with these lithams, which are made of layered linen and cotton. While wearing one, a creature has advantage on Constitution saving throws to avoid gaining levels of exhaustion during a siltstorm. A Tamasheq litham costs 1 gp.



times of crisis, the magic of their tombs interacts with the magic laid upon their bodies before burial, allowing former god-kings and god-queens to return to assist the kingdom. Usually the revived god-kings and god-queens return to their tombs when the crisis that awakened them has abated. As evidenced by the number currently active in Nuria Natal, however, this isn't always the case. Only the gods know which god-kings or god-queens will be revived for a particular crisis, or why some remain active after those crises have ended, while others return to their slumber.

Nurians are proud of their kingdom and all it has accomplished. History is important to them, and citizens can recount the names and deeds of family members going back several generations. Telling tales of their relatives' feats during significant events in the kingdom is a common pastime. Embellishment of family deeds is just as common; one cannot visit a tavern without hearing a dozen people telling improbable stories of how one of their relatives turned the tide in an important battle, or saved a god-king from certain death, or became the avatar of one of the gods of the realm.

Nurian pride is offset by the people's refusal to admit the costs of their kingdom's success. Nuria Natal's store of rich resources attracts all manner of monsters, of the humanoid and the bestial variety, out to claim their share of the kingdom's treasures and become part of its legacy. Secret societies of all kinds breed in the dark alleys and bright salons. Thousands of fiends, many summoned by Nurian mages and priests, spread their corruption throughout the River Kingdom. Many of the temples, monoliths, and other wonders in Nuria Natal were built by the labor of the kingdom's slaves. The slavery and oppression of nonhumans is routine, with untold numbers of them bought and sold on Nuria's auction blocks. A consequence of the constant threat of invasion from the northeast is Nuria's suppression of scalykind. Dragonborn, kobolds, lizardfolk, and serpentfolk are treated with revulsion and distrust, if they are not killed or enslaved outright.

a very concise history of nuria natal

Tales of its origin differ in the details, but all agree that Nuria Natal, the oldest kingdom of Midgard, was founded over 5,000 years ago by a group of seven families who gathered by the River Nuria at the end of a long journey. One of these 63 founders, a wizard, noticed arcane energy swirling in the water and realized that drinking the water enabled him to affect the area's ley lines. The wizard took control of the group, named the river Nuria, meaning "luminous," and supervised the building of a city at the location.

As the ages passed, the wizard's successor god-kings and god-queens, all of whom are descended from the original seven families, attained near divinity through their experiments with the enchanted water and its relationship with the ley lines. They also discovered or created rituals that would wake them from their death slumber if Nuria Natal becomes endangered. These semidivine beings, in conjunction with the gods of the Nurian pantheon, have watched over the River Kingdom since the time before the sinking of Ankeshel.

Over the centuries, Nuria has lost dominion over some of its former territory. The free cities of Makuria, Saph-Saph, and Siwal are glaring examples, but the River Kingdom still speaks of returning Ishadia and Kush to the Nurian fold. For their parts, the free cities are happy to trade with Nuria, but will fight to the bitter end to retain their independence.

Since the rise of Mharoti almost 400 years ago, Nuria Natal has been at war with the Dragon Empire. The conflict is not always hot, but it perpetually simmers in the background. It is largely driven by the expansionistic dragons sending war bands and raiding groups to test Nuria's defenses and resolve, which have held strong so far.

current events

Nuria Natal is in a period of growth. With trade burgeoning and a temporary peace with the Mharoti Empire in effect, God-King Thutmose XXIII is plotting to reclaim Ishadia, Kush, Makuria, and Siwal.

125 Years Ago, the fifth god-king, Aten-Akman, is awakened to defend the town of Avaris against an invasion by the Dragon Empire. Though Nurian losses are heavy, he wins the day by almost single-handedly defeating four adult blue dragons.

99 Years Ago, Bastet walks the streets of Per-Bastet in feline form for one day, performing small miracles for her followers. The faithful felines of that city believe she remains there to this day.

50 Years Ago, dragon fire in Per-Xor burns the prophet of Aten alive in front of thousands of witnesses. Ra-Amon-Ra's philosophy lives on through his disciples. The Nurian military repels the dragons' assault, but the city's defenses have yet to recover from the onslaught. Faith in Aten surges, however, and his followers fervently believe in the supremacy of their god.

46 Years Ago, the balor Wra'onai and a small army of Kushite cultists rage across Nurian lands before falling to the reborn god-king, Sut-Akhaman, at Per-Xor.

40 Years Ago, Yafram revives and again plans to conquer Siwal.



MIDDLE SEA

MEZAR
IRKALY

FIELD OF THE LOST ARMY
Iram

SARKLAN
DESERT

HARIK
HILLS

Per-Maraut

God King's Mirror

500
MILES

250

MUSHMES HILLS

ANGEL'S ROAD

Black Spire

Avans

Dunehowler's Hold

Tes-Mekaan

Naqesh

Horem-gatra

LAKSOR

NURIA

Neffero

Ushanti

Isis Tower

Herak

TAMASHEQ TRAIL

Menphiar

God King's Hall

Caterwauling Vault

Nebri

PER-BASTET

Anu-Asir

Djanot

Tesh-Haqeq

PER-XOR

Highgate

PER-KUSH

MAKURIA

Tes-Luria

FASSILI
HILLS

Serpent Shrine of the Red Desert Orate

Pyramid of Khensu

LION ROAD

Lost Tomb of Menet-ka

Tomb of Maraut

MAHMET ROAD
Rabiyah Watan

SIWAL

Per-Amama

Battou

government

22 Years Ago, the current god-king, Thutmoses XXIII, takes the throne.

6 Years Ago, Nurian theurges win a great victory over the Mharoti navy with the aid of their allies from Capleon, Kammae, and Triolo. Mharoti Admiral Tolga Serkhan-al-Harkesh is captured.

5 Years Ago, disenchantment with the churches of Aten and Bastet causes the worship of Set to grow, bringing about the reestablishment of Per-Set as the seat of his faith.

3 Years Ago, open hostilities between Nuria Natal and the Dragon Empire come to an end as the Mharoti turn their attention on targets to the west. A delegation led by Bebnum the Most Wise (LN male human **apostle** of Thoth-Hermes; see page 281) is sent to make new trade agreements with the rich kingdoms and city-states of the north, as well as strengthen existing ones.

2 Years Ago, the lich Seth-rem Allasan becomes leader of the undead haunting the Field of the Lost Army and turns them on the oasis at Fafeleel before moving south toward Per-Maraut.

In the Last Year:

Thutmoses XXIII sends his daughter and heir, Perititi, to strengthen ties with the minotaur queen of Kyrprion.

Raids on the southern cities of Makuria and Per-Kush by demon-worshipping cultists increase in frequency and viciousness. Residents of those locations have begun to realize that the seemingly disorganized cults are working together toward some purpose.

Occurrences of the arcane wasting are on the rise in Per-Kush, and white apes have been seen as far north as Per-Xor. Josef Kranz sends his minions into Nuria.

God-Queen Jendayi Atla-Hebaya arises in Laksor. No one knows why she has returned; they know only that she prophesizes doom for the city.

The reigning god-king, Thutmoses XXIII, frets on his throne in the city of Nuria Natal. He is a stately man of middle age with a shaven head, piercing eyes, and a regal nose. His perfumed beard is worn long and woven with mithral and gold.

Once an all-powerful monarch, Thutmoses has seen his influence wane with the return of his divine ancestors. Four of the seven god-kings and queens summoned to push the Mharoti armies out remain at large in Nuria Natal, building their own reputations while undermining the sitting monarch. A fifth god-queen has recently reanimated in Laksor, adding to God-King Thutmoses's seeming lack of control. Complaints casting aspersions on his ability and vigor, regularly reach his ears from Per-Bastet and Per-Xor. Word of growing violence near the ruins of the old capital of Tes-Luria has also begun to reach the god-king.

While Thutmoses worries about threats from within Nuria Natal, he benefits from a cooling of hostilities with the Dragon Empire to the east. Before tensions inevitably erupt into violence once again, the god-king has sent forth delegations to secure trade agreements with the wealthy lands and city-states of the north. Thutmoses intends to use the proceeds generated by this trade to build Nuria Natal's military strength, which he hopes will reduce or negate the need to call upon his divine ancestors in times of trouble.

Despite his shortcomings, average Nurians love their god-king and trust him to lead the River Kingdom to supremacy over their enemies in the Dragon Empire and elsewhere. As long as Nuria's enemies remain in check and there is bread and beer for all, Thutmoses can sit secure.

SANDSHIPS

Sandships cruise the desert, riding just above the dunes on a pair of narrow pontoons. A creature must have proficiency with sandships to gain the benefit of its full proficiency bonus while piloting a sandship, though it can apply half its proficiency bonus if it has proficiency with water vehicles or land vehicles.

Like sailing ships, sandships are made to a variety of specifications. A sandship costs 25 percent more than an equivalent-sized sailing ship and has the same speed as a sailing ship.



commerce

The bulk of Nuria Natal's imports and exports are moved by trade caravan. Camel trains are organized in Nuria and travel overland routes to Corremel or Per-Bastet, where they depart for the Crescent or Sarklan desert. Sandships skim across both regions, taking staples and luxury goods to far markets and returning with all manner of goods in exchange.

Nuria Natal is a hub of international mercantile activity. Trade with the Seven Cities is greatly increased of late, and goods now arrive from the Crossroads and the Magdar Kingdom. The god-king's trade delegation has journeyed farther, to the Northlands, to further its goal of enriching the kingdom. Sly merchants even do brisk business with the Mharoti Empire, though knowing citizens look askance at them for it.

CARAVAN ROUTES

There are four primary trade routes in Nuria Natal, each described below.

The Lion Road

From its start in Corremel, the Lion Road passes through Per-Xor and Tes-Luria in Nuria Natal, through Ashamba in Narumbeki, and through Negal, Avawa, and Dyula in Lignas before reaching its terminus in Sgudra. Slaves and raw goods are moved along this dangerous trail and are exchanged for dwarven metalwork, exotic hides, and mysterious writings on bark-like paper.

Basalt Trading Company

This company, run by Hasani Gbelo (N male **nkosi pridelord**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 306), primarily moves ore and high-quality metal goods from Ashamba to Per-Xor. The caravan leader and his crew are prepared for almost any eventuality; their route is plagued by raiders from Kush and less frequently by undead from the Pyramid of Khensu. Bandits led by Shierah Young-Eye (CN female human **berserker**) have attacked the company on each of its last four trips, nearly killing Hasani on the most recent one.

The Lotus Trail

Beginning in Per-Bastet and ending at Black Lotus Mesa, the Lotus Trail is the shortest of the major trade routes, running only 900 miles. The journey south is a grueling one because it runs against the current of the River Nuria, taking 35 days or longer. Goods that travel the trail by sandship move faster, arriving in around 20 days. Caravan runners bring small livestock, manufactured goods, and raw ore to the mesa, where it is traded to merchants from Aerdvall for incense, lotus blossoms, and poisons and other plant-based extracts.

Silver Serpent Trading Coster

Astari ibn-Fahlul (NE human male **mage**) uses his company, based in Per-Xor, as a cover for his trade in forbidden tomes. He hides his wares in shipments of linen, millet, and raw flax. Panya Mes-Khepro (LG female halfling **battle mage**, *Creature Codex*, p. 397), Ward-Mage of Makuria, suspects Astari is smuggling magical merchandise but has been unable to prove it. She is willing to pay modestly for evidence or more handsomely for the tomes themselves—and Astari's hands.

The Mhalmet Road

Goods travel to Siwal from Per-Bastet by way of the Mhalmet Road. Caravans resupply in the Free City before trekking across the Sarklan Desert, braving bandit attacks, to the God-King's Mirror, a large oasis. After watering at the oasis, caravans turn southeast to Mhalmet to feed the city's hunger for manufactured goods. Successful traders bring gold and rare luxuries back for the Nurian highborn.

Kafele's Clowder

Jungle cats, wildcats, and leopards have traveled along with this caravan, run by Kafele the Unclawed (CN male **basteti cat burglar**; see page 269), since its founding. He primarily transports flax, wheat, melons, pomegranates, and salt to Mhalmet and returns with cacao, diamonds, and amber. Kafele has recently discovered that he has been cursed by the Queen of Night and Magic to eventually be smothered under a legion of cats. He doesn't know how he offended her, but he is concerned by the surge in the number of cats traveling with the caravan and seeks assistance to stop it.

Tamasheq Trail

The Tamasheq Trail is the main method for getting salt from the Crescent Desert to the river. Caravans travel from the Ghatazi Salt Pits and the Khephani Salt Flats to trade translucent slabs of salt for slaves and raw materials in Corremel. Some trade from as far as Kel Azjer to the northwest also travels by this route.

The Brothers of Brine

This trade caravan is managed by a related pair of **salt devils** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 113) who trade salt of mysterious provenance to black marketeers. Other merchants who are slow to see the scores of lemures and other lesser devils pulling sleds of salt discover, to their dismay, that the brothers are happy to enslave them and take their wares in order to further fatten their purses. The brothers deliver their goods to Helia ib'Hunneir (female jinnborn **bandit lord**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 418), an underworld figure who takes them to market. Merchants from Corremel and its surrounding settlements are looking for doughty heroes to dispatch this infernal threat to legitimate trade.



OASES OF NURIA NATAL

Numerous tiny oases dot the desert sands, providing life-giving water for travelers. Some of these havens have endured for centuries, while others last for only a season or less. Described below are some of the oases that persevere in specific locations.

Al-Naheel

A small citrus grove owned by Al-Naheel family also bears its name. Long ago, Fariq Al-Naheel was posthumously rewarded with the oasis and surrounding lands as a prize for sabotaging a Mharoti incursion. The family has held the wadi since and charges the outrageous fee of 5 gp per hour for its use. Well paid and heavily armed guards, including some spellcasters, protect the Al-Naheel family's interests and keep the peace among visiting travelers.

Faheleel

A small trading town built at a crossroads and oasis, Faheleel has a thriving illicit market in battlefield salvage due to the constant stream of trade caravans that come through from both directions. At the center of town is the oasis. It is a large, shallow lake fed by several underground rivers and surrounded by tall reeds and date palms. The oasis itself is carefully maintained by locals, and travelers must go to one of the town's wells to get water instead of drinking from it directly.

God-King's Mirror

The God-King's Mirror is a silver-surfaced lake. Rumors persist that a resurrection tomb-engine, an inverted pyramid, lies at the bottom of the lake. The truth of the assertion is unknown, but underwater caves in this area house **fey drakes** (*Creature Codex*, p. 127) that are adapted to the aquatic environment.

Janqarim

Anyone who spends the night at this fecund wadi wakes tired, with memories of dreams involving music and dancing. Shadow fey merchants occasionally unroll gossamer mats here and sell goods of dubious provenance to the nomads of the Sarklan Desert.

Menatayni

An immense date palm towers over this lush oasis that also features much smaller palms, banana trees, and pineapple bushes. Known as the Palm of the Sheikh, this ancient palm is believed to be a World Tree, or perhaps a Red Portal. Either way, travelers flock to the oasis to rest under the Palm of the Sheikh's massive fronds while hoping that one of the honey-flavored "heavenly dates" falls from it. Those who eat one of the dates can pass into the palm's great trunk and enter the branches of

Yggdrasil. Crocodiles also bask in the shade of the tree and sometimes menace inattentive visitors.

Qitta

At Qitta, small fortified structures surround fig trees and date palms. A series of small wells provide cold, clean water that is free for everyone. The Lapis Falcon Knights (see page 37) usually keep a squadron of soldiers on site to protect travelers from raiders and other threats.

Rayamn

In the summer, the water of Rayamn shrinks to a mere trickle, while the hardy cactus and desert roses bloom. Winter rains often cause the wadi to overflow its banks, creating a muddy hazard.

Thoth's Temple

Black storks rest in the prickly pear and cherry trees surrounding the near-black waters of a large shallow, underground-fed pool. Travelers visit the nearby temple of Thoth-Hermes to make donations to the resident priests who maintain the pool and tend the orchard.

Zorom-Tet

Travelers speak of a desert siren that lures people to their deaths at this pool, which is surrounded by a coconut palm grove. The truth—that members of Selket's Sting (see page 38) use this oasis as a training ground for new assassins—isn't necessarily better news.

religion

Nurians are a religious people. They see evidence of the gods in their everyday lives, whether in the ancient god-kings reconstituted to fight their enemies, or in aspects of the gods themselves walking among them, or just in the magic waters of the life-giving river. Although many gods are venerated in the nation, only a few of their cults hold sway with the larger portion of the populace. The cults of Anu-Akma, god of the dead; Bastet, goddess of cats; and Thoth-Hermes, god of magic and learning and patron of the River Nuria, have been held in highest esteem for centuries. In recent years, the cults of Aten, god of the sun; Ninkash, goddess of ale and taverns; and Set, in his role as Friend to Strangers, have risen in prominence.

CULT OF ANU-AKMA

The Cult of Anu-Akma is tightly woven into the fabric of Nurian culture. At the forefront of that group are the priests of Anu-Akma, led by former God-King Sut-Akhaman. These priests perform the rituals and observances that allow the dead to pass into the

afterlife with grace. The cult is also responsible for the stewardship of Nurian culture and maintaining the divine right of the god-kings, ensuring that the crown passes to an heir who has successfully completed the Tests of Inheritance. Upon the death of a god-king or god-queen, the cult preserves and anoints the body before interring it, secure in the knowledge that these former rulers might return as mummies or liches if the gods decree the need is great enough.

In each of the cult's temples, called a House of Life by the faithful, the clergy teach lay followers about the body and the soul and the division between the two; about true names; and about the daily rites required of the faithful. Less visible activities take place in the temples as well. Gnoll champions are trained to guard necropolises. Adepts carve funerary statues for tombs. Cult elders recruit temple slaves, and also perform the secret incantations to transform beggars into ghouls.

CULT OF ATEN

Since the martyring of Ra-Amon-Ra more than 50 years ago, the Cult of Aten has enjoyed greater fortunes in the River Kingdom. It is led by Zuberi the Wise, Keeper of Per-Xor, and Saint Hafsa, Golden Daughter of the Prophet, from the Towers to the Sun in Per-Xor.

Adherents of Aten proselytize to passersby in all the cities along the river, promising the blessing of their jealous god to those who stop and listen. Lawyers pay homage to Aten as the Master of the Law, and most of those individuals are trained in history, religion, and rhetoric in Aten's temples. Atenite augurs observe the sun keenly through black lenses. They predict future events by the position of sunspots and the length of the shadows on the ground.

A cult of the True Aten is prominent in the capital and in Per-Xor. This sect venerates the jealous, destructive aspects of the god and is responsible for the assassination of many so-called heretics. The followers of the True Aten complain loudly about the incompetence of God-King Thutmoses and claim he has fallen away from the faith.

CULT OF BASTET

Bastet is a popular deity throughout the River Kingdom—not just in the seat of her power, which is the city that bears her name. Residents of Per-Bastet maintain that the cat goddess was born a mortal there when the place was nothing more than a small riverside village. They also believe that the goddess walks the streets of the Everlasting City today, in whichever guise suits her fancy.

The laws of Per-Bastet are dictated by the whims of the goddess's cult, led by High Priestess Nafrini and Reborn



Queen-Goddess Meskhenit. The cult is a mercurial entity like its patron. The hierarchy of the clergy is complex and divided into two categories: missionaries who preach the faith of Bastet outside the city, and clergy who serve the goddess's interests in her city. Titles that bring with them privileges and authority are granted to worshipers who please the goddess.

Despite its chaotic methods, the cult experiences little of the infighting and sectarianism found in other religions. The most important aspect of the worship of Bast is that the worshiper loves her. The priests' common goals of venerating their patron and promoting Per-Bastet as a destination for the faithful unites them, and their desire to hear Bast's name from the lips of every Nurian drives them to action.

CULT OF NINKASH

As Nurian society grows to include a middle class of prosperous farmers, artisans, and merchants, the popularity of the Cult of Ninkash also increases. Under the sometimes hazy eyes of Ekibe of the Barley, Matron-



Keeper of Corremel, the cult organizes festivals and other family- and community-related events. The Temple of Ninkash Reaping, which is dark when each day dawns, magically increases in radiance until sunset when it goes dark once again. Corremel's farmers know it is time to retire to dinner and ale once the temple blinks out.

Cultists of Ninkash can be found throughout the riverside cities, operating taverns, ale houses, and inns. A thriving beer-making culture has emerged in the cities along the river, with adherents of the goddess styling themselves as brewmasters and steadily perfecting their liquid tribute to the goddess. Wealthy patrons of the Mother of Beer move through all quarters of Nuria's cities during some evenings, carting kegs of ale and offering a drink to anyone who has interest and a cup.

The openness of Ninkash's cult has enabled foreign spies to pose as members with little difficulty. These agents frequent drinking establishments and listen at the tables where Nuria's important personages sit, hoping to learn vital information as the patrons get more inebriated.

CULT OF THOTH-HERMES

Of all the major faiths of Nuria Natal, the Cult of Thoth-Hermes is the one that attracts the most nonhuman adherents. Hundreds of heruti flock to the god's temples and shrines. These avian humanoids get along with the human faithful, but secretly believe they are more beloved by their patron.

The temples of Thoth-Hermes include the great library-temple of Siwal and the dual shrine of Isis and Thoth-Hermes at Laksor, which is the seminary and healing school of Isis and the librarium-temple of the Scribes of Thoth-Hermes (see page 38).

All cultists of Thoth-Hermes are considered the guardians of knowledge and truth. They are charged with the protection of the libraries and are responsible for innumerable holy texts and books on magic. In addition to this guardianship role, cultists form small groups, called circles, devoted to the goals of recovering the *Emerald Tablets of Wisdom* and locating the *Birthright of Divinity*, a hidden cavern holding books of gold in which all truths are expressed.

Members of the Cult of Thoth-Hermes investigate every scrap of information they feel might lead them to the tablets, which are unbreakable translucent slabs upon which the laws of Thoth-Hermes are inscribed. As far as most members know, they are lost, and there are untold numbers of sites they are rumored to be located at. The most brazen of the followers have begun to plumb the tomb-engines of the god-kings in their search, ignoring the fact that doing so violates the tenets of Anu-Akma.

These zealots fervently believe the tablets contain a secret to a power that could alter the face of Midgard or perhaps even alter reality in some way, and they want to find them so they can decide how and when that power is unleashed.

CULT OF SET

The Cult of Set, long considered one of the dark gods, has languished for ages. The reclamation of the Supreme Temple of the Wind Caller in Per-Set has revitalized worship of the Friend to Strangers. Banafrit al-'Qam (LE female aasimar **apostle** of Set; see page 281) oversees devotions at the temple and directs the growing legions of worshipers to lend aid to both friends and strangers.

The temple priests of Set train caravan guards and others who watch over their charges. They ensure that the lands near the temples are well patrolled, free of bandits, and safe for the common folk to visit. The cult stands ready to prevent the armies of Nuria from plundering the countryside as they march to war when conflict inevitably flares up again.

Less benevolent sects of the cult attract rebels and encourage them to commit acts of anarchy in the streets of the major settlements, especially in wealthy districts. The Boat Scarabs in Nuria are a guild of thieves, assassins, and duelists secretly controlled by an arm of Set's cult.

notable organizations

In a culture as old as Nuria Natal's, secret societies and esoteric orders proliferate. Every city includes organizations devoted to some task, cause, or philosophy. Most of these groups are open to anyone with an interest, though the most secret of them are difficult to locate and even more difficult to join. Some of the more powerful or insidious organizations are described below.

CHILDREN OF THE RADIANT ORB

This sect of Aten's faithful takes the ideals of the Cult of the True Aten to its farthest lengths. They believe that Aten is the only god, and all other so-called deities usurp the power of the sun. The Children of the Radiant Orb are responsible for a spree of murders targeting priests of all the other faiths. Their killings are grisly and ritualistic, often involving hanging a victim by the ankles and roasting the prisoner slowly over an open flame. Adherents use these tactics to extract information about future targets.

The Cult of Ptah is keenly interested in the doings of the Children. It has lost many of its Nurian priests to the organization, as well as one of its few remaining shrines in Naqesh.

DOOMSPEAKERS

Adherents of *The Book of Nine Dooms* drive their thralls and followers to commit depraved acts against any creature unfortunate enough to cross their path. Doomspeaker lairs can be found scattered throughout the River Kingdom and each operates under the purview of an antipaladin of some infamy. The gnoll tribes of the Sarklan Desert have been driven to frenzy by Doomspeaker Shallah Teqq (CE female human **doomspeaker**, *Creature Codex*, p. 399) a disciple of Narn the Crucifier, endangering the lives of all who travel the Mhalmet Road.

The fortress of **Narn the Crucifier** (CE male human, *Demon Cults & Secret Societies*, p. 62) has been located on some stoneworks near the oasis of God-King's Mirror. A great fee for the annihilation of him, and his scores of loyalists and gnolls, can be elicited from the many merchants, traders, and others who travel the area.

EMERALD ORDER

The custodians of the *Emerald Tablets* have increased their influence in Nuria Natal. Jalil im-Tep (LE male human **Emerald Order cult leader**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 421), an ambitious member of the Emerald Order, has been named advisor to God-King Thutmoses XXIII. It is at his suggestion that the god-king seeks to increase Nurian trade with the lands of the north. Jalil intends to slowly leverage his successes in this arena into complete control of Nuria Natal's governing mechanism. That he hopes to depose his rival, the powerful wizard Dromdal-Re (LE male human, *Demon Cults & Secret Societies*, p. 74), and take over leadership of the order is surely just a secondary goal.

The Order has enchanted the waters of The Ebullient Pools of Joy, a prestigious bathhouse in Nuria, making bathers more susceptible to suggestion. If the scheme is successful, the order hopes that members will be able to gain information and favors from the powerful figures who attend the bathhouse. The manager of the house, Adul Abdul-Ilaah (N male human **spy**), knows something strange is going on but can't figure out how it is happening.

HONORABLE SOCIETY OF PORTAL WIZARDS

This ancient organization is devoted to the study and manipulation of the Red Portals (see the sidebar on page 45). The Honorable Society credits itself with establishing the portals, but what those long-ago members actually did was reactivate existing magic that had been created by the Masters of the Red Portals, a sect of Kushite worshipers of Set and Aposis, before the reliable recording of Nuria's history began. Based out of Per-Anu, the society continues its work today and



regularly hires adventurous sorts to delve into active portals and report on their findings if they make it back.

Ahmore Sitkamose (LN female human **archmage**), Keeper of the Relics and Warden of the Red Portals, has located a Red Portal that leads to a parallel world where her spouse and children are still alive. She needs a group of adventurers to go there and bring them to this world—but not the other world's version of her. Ahmore secretly hopes that the rescuers will kill the other world's version of her so she can't try to retrieve her family.

LAPIS FALCON KNIGHTS

This military order devoted to Horus is led by Re-Horus Lowbeak (LG male heru **knight**) and operates out of the Cerulean Citadel in Per-Xor. The Lapis Falcon Knights patrol the Lion Road between their home city and Akanda Chegutu in Narumbeki. New aspirants to knighthood have their skill and resolve tested in grueling solo battles against the group's veterans.

The Queen of Dusts (NE female jinnborn warlock of the Genie Lord; see page 289) has vowed to make the knights and their leader pay for her defeats at their hands. She is gathering a force of raiders in the Fassili Hills and intends to start striking at targets on the Lion Road to draw the knights into the hills.

SCRIBES OF THOTH-HERMES

The scribes of Thoth-Hermes are an order of scholars, explorers, and devotees of Thoth-Hermes, based in the great library-temple of that god in Laksor, and roaming throughout Nuria. Their agents have been seen as far afield as Roshgazi and the Spider Prophet to the west, Parthia in the East, and the Seven Cities across the Middle Sea, as well as southward into Narumbeki, Omphaya, and Dabu. Their leader is the sage master of the tomes, Abdalmalek Al-Kitab (LG male human scribe of Thoth-Hermes; *City of Cats*, page 142).



SELKET'S STING

This sect of Selket, goddess of scorpions, originated with the Tamasheq nomads of the Sarklan Desert. Members of the organization are devoted to protecting desert-dwellers from the harsh sun and the venomous creatures that crawl beneath it while at the same time inflicting those dangers on city-dwellers, who have grown soft in their stone manses. Cells of the sect are groups of loosely organized zealots who hunt and butcher the thieves, raiders, and slavers that prey upon Selket's people, sometimes setting giant scorpions loose in a city to harass the inhabitants.

Members of Selket's Sting are currently killing the falcons roosting near the town of Nefferro with the intent of incurring Horus's ire. Adherents of Horus have flocked to the town to demand action from the city administrators, and their presence has sparked violence as they clash with members of the community. Nefferro's leadership would like the cause of the animal deaths to be determined and put to an end before a full religious war breaks out.

TALONS OF HORUS

The righteous knights and paladins of Horus, the Desert Falcon and patron of Nuria Natal, make up this elite group. As the realm's defenders, they are the hand of the king's



justice, often used to hunt down bandits, burn out heretics and cultists, and bring down monstrous foes ranging from Mharoti dragonborn spies to hordes of zombies from the deep desert. Most of these warriors are human, though a substantial minority are heruti sworn to Horus.

The leader of the Talons of Horus is Awk Kha-Hamenat (LG male heru **field commander**; see page 282). The group has a stronghold, the Rock of Horus, that lies on the road south of Makuria, serving as both a base of operations and a sanctuary. Keen of eye and a sharp judge of character, Awk commands a force of roughly 150 skilled combatants. At the same time, the group shelters the Wingless One (LN male heru **war priest** of Horus, *Creature Codex*, p. 411), the leader of a group of warriors who strike down corrupt priests, greedy merchants, and faithless princes.

cities of the river kingdom

Each of the large cities along the River Nuria contributes to the prosperity of the kingdom and the richness of its culture. Every city has an allure that is unique. Likewise, the problems and dangers that plague the people of one city might be entirely different from what the residents of the others are up against.

NURIA, CITY OF THE RIVER

Citizens of Nuria Natal's capital are simultaneously proud to be residents in the city of their beloved god-emperor and jealous of the greater profile they believe that cities such as Per-Bastet, Per-Xor, and Siwal have. Despite this perceived shortcoming, Nuria is a wonder of the world. One cannot walk a block without coming across a monument or a beautiful domed temple. Date palms line the boulevards, and small parks with pools, fountains, greenery, and blooming flowers abound within the city limits. During flood season, the god-king uses his control of the river's waters and the Angel Road to prevent the city from being washed away. Instead, the floodwaters are redirected to the fields and pastures surrounding the capital.

The city is divided into seven wards, each of which is summarized below:

The Heron Ward is the east portion of the city that lies along the south bank of the River Nuria. It is a commercial center with several well-known marketplaces, including the Souk of Barges (see page 40), and it suffers more from crime and theft than most of the other wards. The few residents are mostly well-off merchants and artisans. A small but growing community of subek has formed on the eastern edge of the ward.

The Scorpion Ward is the district south of the Heron Ward. The city's poorest, many of whom make their

livelihoods as servants, live here. Crime is relatively rare in this ward, as the community bands together whenever unrest makes its presence known.

The Falcon Ward is the only region of the city that lies along the north bank of the river. This ward is expanding rapidly as Nurian society grows to allow space for a middle class. Many laborers and small-time merchants live here. At least two thieves' guilds operate out of the Falcon Ward.

The Sphinx Ward houses many of the city's temples and colleges, and the Temple-Palace of the God-Kings sits at the city's heart. Philosophers, academics, and priests can be found debating the finer points of any subject in the streets, and gnoll avengers make regular patrols.

The Crocodile Ward, the smallest district in the city, houses many garrisons, barracks, and the offices that administer the god-king's military power.

The Bull Ward has a mixture of warehouses, moneylenders, workshops, and slave markets. Numerous small souks dot the district, and the air is heavy with incense, smoke, and cooking spices.

The Asp Ward, south and west of the Sphinx Ward, is mostly residential, home to the wealthiest inhabitants. Several large estates are located in this ward.

Palm Palace of the God-King

The current monarch's home is contained inside the Temple Palace of the God-Kings. The complex also holds the seven Lotus Chambers of the Divine Concubines, an area that houses the god-king's two hundred wives; the Wall of Lineages, where the family line of every god-king



NURIA

Ruler: God-King Thutmoses XXIII (LG human male **apostle** of Aten; see page 281)

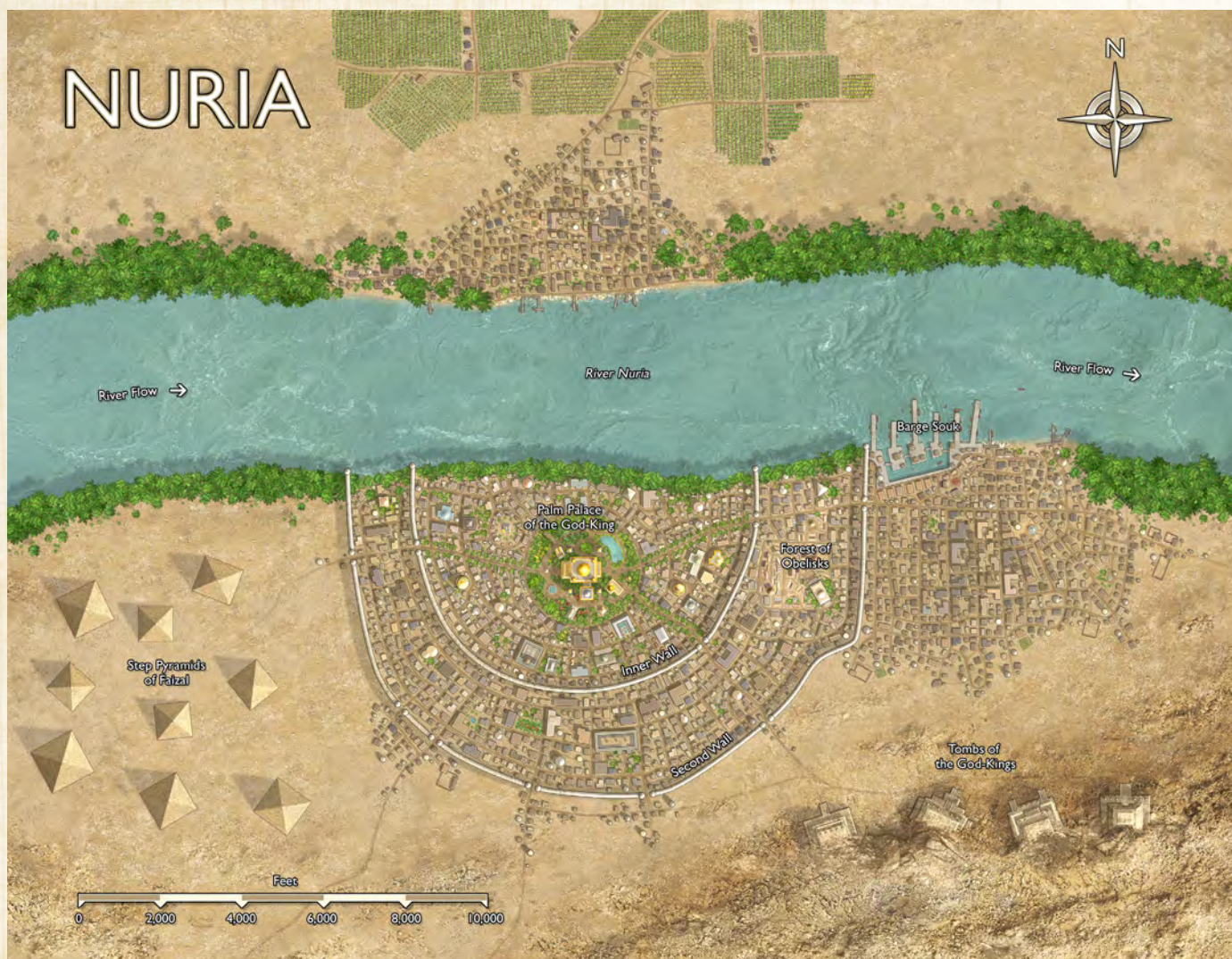
Important Personages: Perititi, the Orchid Princess of Nuria Natal (LG female human **mage**); Ebba Persdottir, consort of the god-king (N female human **spy**); Ghan ul Flauddih, proprietor of the House of Living Sphinxes (NE female dwarf **thief lord**, *Creature Codex*, p. 406); Adul Abdullah, manager of the Ebullient Pools of Joy (male human **spy**); Jalil im-Tep, advisor to the god-king (LE male human **first servant** of Thoth-Hermes; see page 282)

Population: 221,500 (152,500 humans, 26,000 dwarves, 19,000 gearforged, 18,000 gnolls, 1,000 heruti, 1,000 minotaurs, 4,000 other)

Great Gods: Anu-Akma, Aten, Bastet, Horus, Isis, Set

Trade Goods: glass, gold, fine jewelry, linen, papyrus, salt, wheat, worked stone





can be traced back to the nation's founding; the Hall of Stars, where the names of each god-king are etched into the obsidian floor and the arched ceiling that perpetually displays the night sky. The Temple Palace was created as a monument to the power of the everlasting god-kings, and its design mirrors the appearance of the god-kings' resurrection tomb-engines.

The Temple Palace also includes the consulates of other kingdoms and regions, enabling the god-king to discuss matters of state at all hours and ensuring that his allies are watched at all times. The complex is made up of numerous linked courtyards shaded by palms of prodigious size. The walls are inlaid with dwarf-hammered gold, and the place is guarded by walking statues, bound spirits, clockwork guardians, and dedicated gnoll and human guards.

The Palm Palace is a sprawling place big enough to house many more people than it currently does. The halls of the palace are abuzz at all hours as ambitious advisors and courtiers conspire with and against each other, all seeking the god-king's favor for one purpose or another.

Servants quietly move through the palace, cleaning and maintaining it while being ignored by the schemers.

Other notable locations in the Palm Palace include the Screaming Court and the Well of Ascension.

The Screaming Court: An enclosed pit that holds God-King Thutmoses XXIII's royal baboon troop. Traitors, spies, and others who greatly displease the god-king are thrown to the mandrills.

The Well of Ascension: An enchanted pool filled with essence of Black Urd Lotus sits in the center of this round chamber with a floor tiled in beaten silver. Here, potential heirs to the god-king imbibe the essence from the pool and face the Tests of Inheritance to determine whether or not they will ascend to the Petal Throne.

Souk of Barges

A long chain of skiffs and barges sits tethered together, three or four vessels deep, where the river and the city meet. The ever-changing Souk of Barges is a riot of colorful canopies and loud hawkers proclaiming the high

quality of their goods and cheerfully denigrating those of their rivals. This floating marketplace is occupied each day by merchants who don't want to spend a lot of time in Nuria but want to find out what is happening in the city and the cities upriver. City officials don't enforce moorage fees here, so prices are lower than at the souks and bazaars in the city proper. As a result, the souk is crowded with people, and there is a constant threat that a vessel will capsize under the weight of its passengers.

Perch and catfish are attracted to the waters beneath the market, where they snare the bits of grain and other foodstuff that falls in, and they in turn attract fishers who line the riverbank and cast lines from small boats. The crowds at the souk draw beggars, pickpockets, and other larcenous sorts to the area. River-borne predators, attracted by the activity, occasionally erupt from the water to lunge at shoppers and merchants alike.

The Floodworks

In ancient times, the construction of Nuria resulted in the deaths of hundreds of slaves. Their bodies were sealed in small alcoves set in the walls of narrow tunnels that were dug to protect the city from annual flooding. These tunnels, once so important to the city's survival, have been forgotten by most of the populace today. Over five millennia, layers of new construction have submerged the catacomb more deeply and sealed off more of the access points. What remains are rarely used, dust-filled passages. The dead in this crypt sleep easily, because they weren't rich enough in life to make their graves interesting to tomb robbers, and the blessings placed on them at their burials hold strong to the current day, despite the damage to the tombs. This doesn't make the warrens safe, however.

The tunnels are unstable, and portions of them collapse whenever a minor earth tremor occurs, spilling dust and debris into the corridors and sometimes blocking them completely. A slowly growing pack of **werehyenas** (*Creature Codex*, p. 259) has taken up residence in the northern sections of the tunnels. They don't tend to drag victims back to their warren, preferring to keep the places they eat separate from their homes, but they do bring an occasional resident down and transform them into a member of the family. A cell of Selket's Sting controls the southern reaches of the tunnels, using that area as a staging ground for guerrilla strikes against the wealthy residents of Nuria's Asp Ward.

Floating Gardens of Hadatha

These gardens located in the Sphinx Ward were built at the command of God-King Thutmoses XXI and named after his wife, who loved spending time here. They have been used by his successors as a private location to conduct private meetings and dally with their concubines. The

current god-king houses his consort and agent, Ebba Persdottir, in the garden when she comes to Nuria to report about matters in the north. The floating garden enjoys protections similar to those of the Palm Palace and is warded against all forms of scrying.

House of Livid Sphinxes

Each entrance to this gambling hall, located in the Crocodile Ward, is flanked by a pair of bronze statues depicting enraged gynosphinxes. The exterior is elegant, built of gray marble seamed with white and black, with wide staircases leading to the interior. Inside, a floor of alternating onyx and agate tiles holds dozens of dicing and card tables. Granite-topped bars run almost the entire length of the north and south walls with stewards ensuring that no patron goes thirsty. Slave attendants, all wearing naught but gauzy wrappings, leave little to the imagination as they carry drinks from the bars to the tables. The center of the hall holds a single stepped-down, 15-foot-square stage where fights are held nightly.

It has long been rumored that those who lose fights in the house's pit are sold into slavery by the proprietor, Ghan ul Flauddih. Whether or not this is true, she does sell those who are indebted to her into slavery if they can't pay her what's owed.



INHERITANCE OF THE CROWN

One of the responsibilities of the living god-king is to ensure the kingdom's security upon their death. Throughout their reign, they build a prioritized register of heirs and organize the education of those potential rulers. Heirs are usually chosen from the god-king's immediate family, with a few selections from the other six families responsible for the founding of the nation, though the law allows the god-king to choose any person of Nurian ancestry as an heir. The register of heirs must contain a minimum of twenty names, though it often contains many more.

Upon the god-king's death, the first chosen heir undergoes the Tests of Inheritance. The candidate is situated in the Well of Ascension in the Palm Palace where they imbibe Black Urd Lotus, the narcotic essence of lotus flowers originally found at the source of the River Nuria on Black Lotus Mesa. Upon consuming the Black Urd Lotus, the test-taker enters a catatonic state wherein they experience vivid, dream-like hallucinations.

The tests are taxing and sometimes fatal. Test-takers who don't survive are mummified and interred as guardians in the tomb of the recently deceased god-king. If a test-taker fails, the priests of Anu-Akma who oversee the test and refine the Black Urd Lotus administer the test to each potential heir until one survives and is crowned as the new god-king.





CORREMEL

Ruler: Ekibe of the Barley, Matron Keeper of Corremel (CG female dwarf **cleric of the brew** of Ninkash, *Creature Codex*, p. 399)

Important Personages: Brie Homeward (CG female halfling **spy**), Kimm Homeward (CG female halfling **veteran**), Ukani Moha Ani (NE male human **priest** of Selket), Steffonoy Hashedim, king of the smiths (LG male human **apostle** of Mbanu; see page 281)

Population: 94,000 (61,400 humans, 23,500 dwarves, 4,700 gnolls, 1,500 halflings, 900 heruti, 700 minotaurs, 1,300 other)

Great Gods: Ninkash (patron), Aten, Horus, Isis, Mbanu, Ptah

Trade Goods: ale, barley, casks, flax, hops, millet, spirits, wheat

CORREMEL, CITY OF ALE

The favored city of Ninkash has grown in importance and renown over the last few centuries. Corremel was founded by minotaurs as a fishing village, and it still commands an impressive fleet of fishing boats. When it was discovered that the soil of the delta could produce high-quality grain in immense quantities, the city's focus switched from fishing to agriculture and brewing. The yeasty smell of fermenting ale suffuses the entire city in the summer months as prodigious quantities of the drink are produced, consumed, and traded to other cities.

Corremel's exports have made the city prosperous while avoiding the pretension of Nuria or Per-Bastet.

UNSTABLE CORRIDORS

Corridors become unstable for a variety of reasons, from poor construction to tectonic shift. Fighting in such a place can quickly become more perilous than in a more stable environment. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), roll a d20. On a 19 or 20, a 5-foot portion of the tunnel's wall or ceiling collapses within 5 feet of one of the creatures involved in the fight, dealing 2d10 bludgeoning damage to that creature, or half as much damage if it succeeds on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw.

If an attack deals thunder damage, such as a *thunderwave* spell, roll a d20. On a 14–20, all sections of the corridor within the affected area collapse, creating difficult terrain, and dealing 4d10 bludgeoning damage to creatures in it, or half as much damage if the creature succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw.

The citizens are proud of the success they have achieved without a reborn god-king to prop them up, while at the same time they vigorously compete against one another. Rival breweries spare no expense in efforts to steal or foul each other's recipes. Occasionally, the church steps in to calm a situation that has become violent by levying a fine against all involved parties. The number of subek brewers in Corremel has grown dramatically in recent years, and their peaty ale has proven impossible for other beer producers to replicate.

A sizable population of **alehouse drakes** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 148) lives in Corremel, drawn by the abundance of brew. Poaching of the gregarious creatures has reduced their numbers of late, and the city officials would like to know why the creatures are disappearing.

Temple of Ninkash Reaping

Towering above the other buildings in the city, the Temple of Ninkash Reaping is recognizable from a distance. Its four bell towers radiate daylight from sunup to sundown each day. All priests of the temple are master brewers. Ekibe of the Barley, Matron Keeper of Corremel and leader of the church, allows them time to experiment with their techniques and recipes. The heart of the temple is the Evertun, a polished oaken keg tapped with a golden spigot. Blessed by Ninkash herself, a flow of cold mountain spring water from the heart of her realm pours forth when the spigot is opened.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

There are two cities that bear the name Corremel. The City of Ale is located on a delta along the River Nuria. Its sister, the City of Lanterns, also called Corremel-in-Shadow, is located in the Shadow Realm north of the Heart of the Shadow Fey. The two cities have a similar layout.

If a creature envisions having a drink with friends on a twilight evening while passing through one of the twenty-seven orange doors in the City of Ale, it will be transported to the Lamplit Road. This short shadow road winds through a nighttime field of mixed barley and wheat before depositing the traveler on the Queen's Road in the City of Lanterns.

To take the Lamplit Road back to the City of Ale, a creature must visit a tavern in Corremel-in-Shadow, place a candle in a tankard, and light it. The next door the creature passes through will lead back to Nuria Natal.

The City of Ale always has exactly twenty-seven doors painted orange. For more information on Corremel-in-Shadow, see *Warlock Guide to the Shadow Realms*.

House of Mbanu's Light

The sizable population of dwarves in Corremel gathers at the forge-temple as often as at the alehouse. Steffonoy, the high priest and smith of Mbanu, greets them here, where rust-streaked doors stand perpetually open to the sanctuary within, and where the bellows never cease their movements. It might seem odd that a human priest has a following of so many dwarves, but Corremel is used to ironworkers and coppersmiths, and their goods are prized in the markets. In addition to Mbanu's services, the temple also conducts the affairs of the Smiths Guild. Located along the water as it is, the acrid smoke that emanates from the building always drifts away from inhabited streets as if directed by a divine wind.

House of Golden Pearl and Silver Sheaf

The most successful tavern in the city is run by Brie and Kimm Homeward, former adventurers and rabble-rousers. The Gold n' Pearl, as locals call it, is open from noon until well after dark. The layout of the tavern mirrors that of the Dancing Friar in the free city of Zobeck, a favorite haunt of the sisters from their adventuring days. It serves generous helpings of lunch and dinner at fair prices, all washed down with delicious ale. The place is busy from open to close, packed with people from all walks of life and every social class. After the doors are locked for the night, the front patio is littered with patrons who drank until they could no longer walk.

The sisters run a spy network out of the tavern, gathering information about the goings-on in the city and along the Tamasheq Trail and passing it on to their contacts, who deliver the news to other ringleaders along the river.

LAKSOR, CITY OF THE TWIN TEMPLES

Hailed as the birthplace of Lada, goddess of healing and love, the temple city of Laksor has temples to all the major gods of Nuria Natal and at least one shrine dedicated to each of the nation's minor gods. It also boasts many shrines and several pantheist temples to the other gods of Midgard.

Hundreds of spires, domes, towers, and high archways dominate the city's skyline, seeming to reach for the gods themselves. Colonnaded courtyards and parks separate residential areas from businesses and labor yards. Lapis-lined fountains shower magically perfumed water into lotus- and lily-filled pools. The residents of Laksor claim that their city is the most beautiful and cosmopolitan in the River Kingdom.

As the closest Nurian city to the estuary of the Middle Sea, Laksor is frequently visited by foreign tourists. The governor, Tau Tehuti Ghi, ensures that visitors see the city

LAKSOR

Ruler: Governor Tau Tehuti Ghi, Keeper of the Temples and Scourge of the Unrighteous, Warden of the River Mouth, and Master of the Wise (LE male human **noble**)

Important Personages: God-Queen Jendayi Atla-Hebaya, Lady of Song and Beauty, Mistress of Prophecy, Friend to Isis and Wadjet, Mother of Temples, Divine Healer and Unerring Light (NG female **virtuoso lich**; see page 274); Her Holiness Yaminah Heppuru, the Smiling Matron of Teph-ha and Priestess of Isis (NG female elfmarked **apostle** of Isis; see page 281); Zehuti Kha-Se, Stern Patriarch of Memory and Learned Lord of Papyrus, First Among the Scribes of Thoth-Hermes (NG male human **scribe of Thoth-Hermes**, *City of Cats*, p. 142)

Population: 28,000 (21,000 humans, 3,000 dwarves, 1,500 jinborn, 1,000 subek, 1,000 gnolls, 500 others)

Great Gods: Isis and Thoth-Hermes (patrons), Anu-Akma, Bastet, Aten, Horus, Ninkash

Trade Goods: fish, healing herbs and unguents, papyrus, amulets, jewelry, reed barges, funerary goods, incense, decorated tiles

in its best light. Armies of slaves keep the streets free of garbage and debris and make swift repairs to temples and other public buildings. Landowners who don't keep their property in good condition are fined. Repeated violations can compel the governor to arrest a landowner and seize their property for resale. Tourism is encouraged and supported by the city's businesses, but at the same time Governor Ghi turns a blind eye if an occasional visitor ends up being sold on a slaver's block or pressed into service on a passing ship.

The governor is frustrated that God-Queen Jendayi Atla-Hebaya, a little-remembered monarch of antiquity, has arisen in his city and is gathering power. She has warned him of her fractured visions of rotting ships with tattered, ribbed sails, crewed by white-eyed wretches as they sail into Laksor's mist-shrouded harbor. She believes the visions represent a doom for the city that she has been awakened to counter. The governor sees her as a threat to his continued wealth and stature and seeks the means to return her to her slumber.

Healing School of Laksor

The tower of the Healing School spirals hundreds of feet into the sky and sparkles like a sun-bathed unicorn horn. Its interior is just as beautiful, with winding white stone corridors and opulent rooms appointed in exotic hardwood, lapis, mother of pearl, silver, and gold.

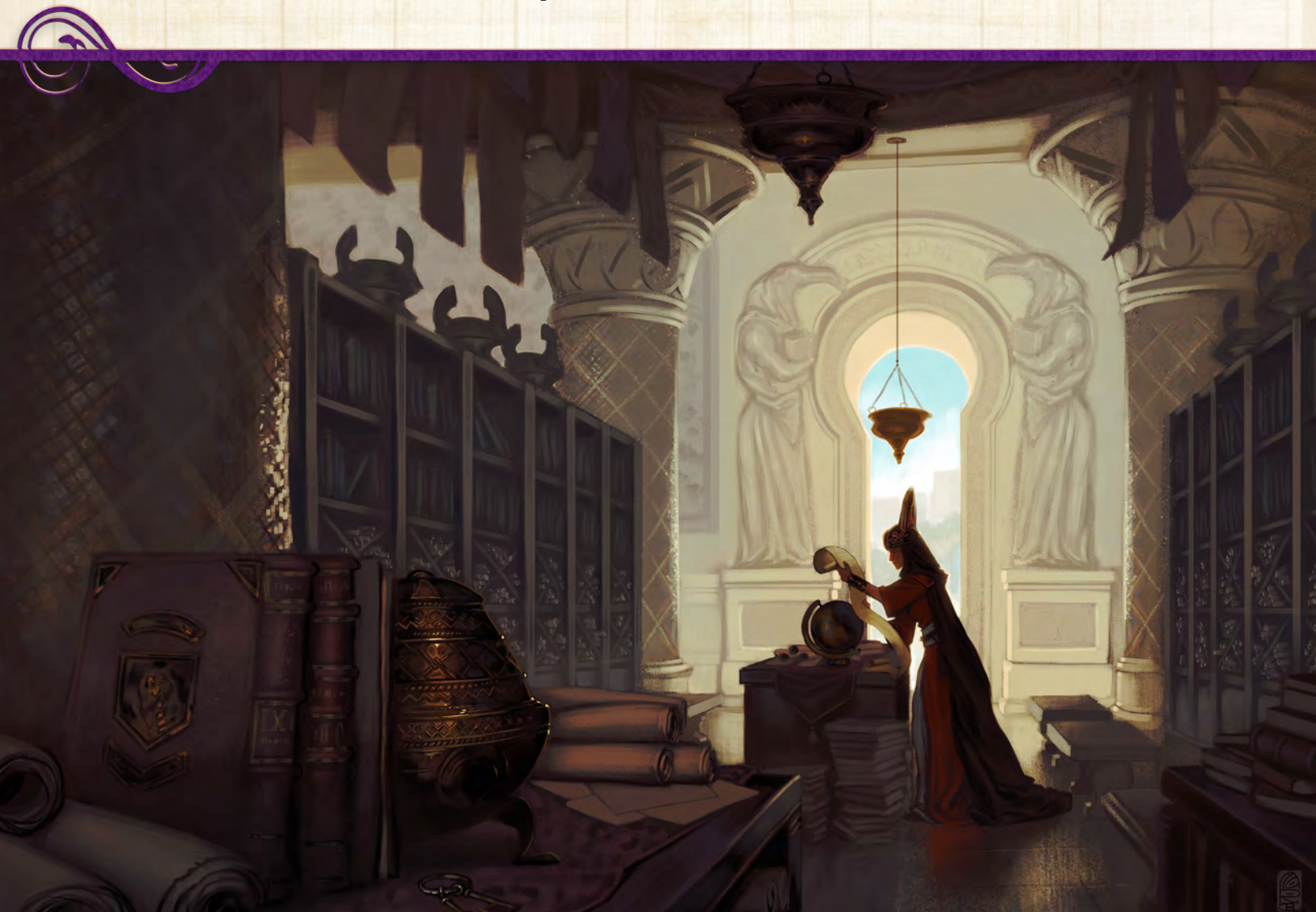
Clerics of the Healing School, overseen by Yaminah Heppuru, the Smiling Matron of Teph-ha, are charged with teaching the next generation of the priesthood. They also instruct secular doctors, midwives, and counselors in herbalism, surgery, birthing, and other healing arts. In addition, all priests are expected to spend time walking in the community, learning the concerns of the people and healing their injuries. No one who visits the Healing School with a complaint is turned away. Injuries are treated in order of severity, however, so those with minor maladies might wait some time before being seen to. The priests realize that illnesses of the mind and the spirit are just as debilitating as those of the body, and they treat them with the same care as physical ailments. Ill-intentioned priests sometimes use their ties to the church to exploit and harm others. The church leadership investigates allegations of clerical abuse vigorously.

Every twelve years, Isis's priests are expected to make a pilgrimage to her birthplace, causing a brief population surge in Laksor and making space at the temple a premium. During these periods, the rarely used undercellars of the temple are opened and readied for occupancy, which often means the use of hired blades to roust unwanted pests.

Library-Temple of Thoth-Hermes

Immediately beside the Healing School of Isis stands the library-temple of Thoth-Hermes, which is at once the seminary of the priesthood, the cradle of the famed Scribes of Thoth-Hermes, and one of the largest repositories of arcane and obscure lore in the Southlands, acquired over centuries of earnest effort and protected by shabti guardians, gearforged, scroll mummies, and the living priesthood.

The complex is overseen by Zehuti Kha-Se, Stern Patriarch of Memory and Learned Lord of Papyrus, who is oathsworn to defend the library-temple's collection of works and expand it, while also nurturing new members of the Scribes of Thoth and running a small spy network to ensure that threats to Laksor and Nuria are found and thwarted. In this effort he is helped by the hundreds of mendicant priests of Thoth-Hermes who serve as scribes to the illiterate and the wealthy, sending news throughout the River Kingdom while also watching and listening for anything unusual, suspicious, or diverting.





PER-ANU, CITY OF CRIMSON PILLARS

It is said that only those who usher mortals into the next life can enter Per-Anu. In addition to being difficult to find, the city is warded against entrance by anyone whose occupation doesn't involve death or the dead in some aspect, such as the priests of certain faiths, gravebinders, necromancers, butchers, healers, murderers, and killers. Because of these restrictions, few farmers, artisans, and other common folk reside in the city, though the throngs of undead inside ensure that the place is always busy.

Per-Anu sits in a sheltered hollow in the Mushmes Hills in the northeast part of Nuria Natal. It is a compact settlement, with many large buildings and temples of sandstone separated by small plazas. It gained its appellation from the thousands of red columns that hold up the roofs of the Royal Embalmer's Hall and the Many-Pillared Palace. The Red Market is also lined with these namesake crimson monoliths.

Wizards of all kinds enjoy the city and its loose rules about public spellcasting. They trawl the Red Market for rare components and attempt to cast spells in proximity to the city's three gates to Evermaw, the Plane of Undeath, comparing the actual results of their spellcasting to

the outcome they expected. The priesthood of Isis has abandoned Per-Anu, leaving empty the Temple of White Blossoms, previously one of the safest locations in the city. Rumors abound as to why this abandonment occurred, most of them involving people being ushered through a Red Portal at the order of the city's ruler, God-King Irsu Thanetsi Khanet, who will not comment on the matter.

RED PORTALS

Red Portals are doorways created by ancient wizards by manipulating the ley lines running the length of the River Nuria. They can lead anywhere: to shadow roads, or directly to other planes, parallel dimensions, or points in time. Some are anchored to a physical gate, archway, or door, while others are invisible or difficult-to-detect localized disturbances. To activate a Red Portal, would-be travelers must visualize themselves traveling along a shadow road before they step through.

For a longer discussion of Red Portals and a list of potential destinations, see *Midgard Worldbook*.

PER-ANU

Ruler: God-King Irsu Thanetsi Khamet, Keeper of the Passage to the Afterlife, Guardian of the Mysteries Beyond, Eye of Anu-Akma and Warden of the Red Portal, Witness to the Glories of Aten and the Depravities of Set, His Illuminated and Invincible Majesty, Returned to the Wadjet Throne and Rightful Heir to All Flesh (LE male **lich**)

Important Personages: Masaharta Hekaib, High Priest of Anu-Akma (LE male human **first servant** of Anu-Akma; see page 282); Senebsen of the High Peaks, High Priestess of Bastet (LE female nkosi **first servant** of Bastet); Nofret Aneksi, Champion of Kerberos (NE female darakhul **gladiator**); Ahmose Sitkamose, Keeper of the Relics and Warden of the Red Portals (LN female human **archmage**); Sebek-khu, Commander of the Red Company (LE male gnoll **black knight commander**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 418); Weshptah Zezemonek, Keeper of Tombs, Spirits, and Catacombs (N male human **apostle** of Wadjet-Vardesain; see page 281); Iumeri Lattek, Master Embalmer and Speaker for the Guild (NG male human **mage**)

Population: 9,710 (7,200 humans, 2,100 gnolls, 310 dwarves, 1,000 other)

Great Gods: Anu-Akma (patron), Bastet, the Hunter, Isis, Wadjet (Vardesain)

Trade Goods: ink, meat, silver, spell components, spell scrolls



PER-BASTET

Rulers: Reborn Queen-Goddess Meskhenit, Mother of Destiny and Defender of the Realm (NE female **lich**); High Priestess Nafrini (CN female basteti **apostle** of Bastet; see page 281)

Important Personages: Panshar el-Elai, Vizier of the Council of the Sands (LE male werejackal **mage**); Warlord Raykar-Takur (CE male **gnoll slaver**, *Creature Codex*, p. 189)

Population: 66,150 (20,600 humans, 13,000 gnolls, 10,000 slaves (primarily kobolds and dragonborn), 6,200 basteti, 3,600 dwarves, 3,100 domestic cat lycanthropes, 2,600 great cat lycanthropes, 2,000 jinborn, 1,500 ghouls, 1,000 darakhul, 500 aasimar, 500 tieflings, 220 werecrocodiles, 130 vampires, 1,200 other)

Great Gods: Bastet (patron), Anu-Akma, Aten, Ninkash, Wadjet

Trade Goods: diamonds, fine perfumes, gold, mithral, rubies



PER-BASTET, CITY OF THE CAT

The nine districts of Per-Bastet perch along the River Nuria near ancient monolith-statues depicting the gods. Felines rule the city. Uncountable numbers of them, along with gnolls, basteti, and feline lycanthropes of all varieties, walk the streets under the gaze of Reborn Queen-Goddess Meskhenit. The cats of Per-Bastet believe that the city's namesake walks the streets and alleys alongside them, occasionally stepping through a catslide alley (see the sidebar) to elsewhere for a time when she sees fit.

Per-Bastet enjoys cooler summers and warmer winters than the other cities of the river. Scholars cannot explain the phenomena in terms of what they know of the natural world, but divinations suggest divine interference and the manipulation of elemental magic might be involved. Regardless of the reason, subek inhabitants find they suffer less from flood fever during the rainy season. Winters and summers are extremely arid, while fog often billows over the city in the early hours of spring and autumn days.

River of Sand

A moving "river" of sand flows into Per-Bastet from the Sarklan Desert at a speed of 15 miles per hour, coursing through the city's core beneath numerous aging bridges, before pouring into a vast, funnel-shaped crater known as the Pit, where it vanishes. Objects carried into the Pit are sometimes found years, decades, or even centuries later, often hundreds of miles away in random locations in the desert. The river is home to earth elementals and emits a strong aura of elemental magic.

CATSLIDE ALLEYS

A dozen or so catslide alleys, magic portals that link places where felines are held in high esteem, are located within Per-Bastet. A creature that follows a cat into a catslide alley is likely to be transported to another cat-friendly place, such as Triolo of the Seven Cities, the court of the Dragon Emperor in Cathay, or the home of the winged cats in the Shadow Realm. The alleys are as fickle as cats themselves, but (much like Red Portals) they offer a way of moving the action from one locale to another.

1. Statue of Bastet
2. Monolith Colonnade
3. Seacat River Gate
4. The Pit
5. Hyena Gate
6. Lion Gate
7. Panther Gate
8. Tiger Gate
9. Leopard Gate
10. Jaguar Gate
11. Palace of Haty-a Haakim
12. Council of Sands
13. Pyramid of Anuut-Tan
14. Isle of Prophecy
15. Dome of the Divine Face of Bastet
16. Plaza of the Goddess
17. Pyramid of Shepkaru

18. Ramp to the Lioness District
19. Pyramid of Semerkhofu
20. Grand Souk
21. Endless Bazaar
22. Flood Market

23. Bazaar of Lamentation
24. The Flood
25. Sunken Pyramid of Wadjet

26. Pyramid of the Mother of Destiny
27. Pyramid of Neferkahor
28. Sandship Harbor
29. Great Sand Pyramid
30. The Pallid Court
31. Pyramid of Menkare
32. Temple of Anu-Akma
33. The Last Crucible



PER-BASTET

Caterwauling Vault

The forgotten tomb of Dhali Soliman, a long-dead high priestess of Bastet, has been rediscovered in the wilderness outside Per-Bastet. Wizards affiliated with the Slinking Sisterhood of the Untamed (see “Tes-Luria” below) have created a portal in Tes-Luria that leads to and from this location. The Untamed believe that Bastet’s feral, lusty aspect has been hidden from the goddess in this crypt. They seek to free it and make her whole once again.

Though the Untamed haven’t found what they want, they have uncovered an army of basteti and gnoll mummies, which they have corrupted and will release into Per-Bastet to destroy Meskhenit. They have outfitted themselves with magic weapons and relics from the crypt, and, as soon as they feel the time is right, they will make Per-Bastet’s streets run red with the blood of non-felines.

PER-KUSH, CITY OF IVORY

Rapid growth of its economy has made Per-Kush the envy of Nuria Natal. The hunting of the great beasts from farther south has brought incredible wealth into the city, to the presumed delight of its patron deity, the Hunter. If Per-Kush maintains its current rate of growth, it will exceed Nuria in area within two generations.

In addition to the Hunter, the city sees widespread worship of the elephant god Abu, and Ptah (Volund). City-wide games are held each summer, testing the physical competence of those who participate. The arenas and parks fill with jubilant revelers gathered to watch the best athletes in the city. Winners are showered with accolades and gold, while losers are sometimes stalked and slain by overzealous adherents of the Hunter.

PER-SET

Growing numbers of pilgrims have been flocking to the dark god Set’s greatest place of worship, the Supreme Temple of the Wind Caller. Over a decade ago this settlement, at the site of the once-thriving city of Per-Set, was little more than a caravan stop, but the recent upsurge in interest in the Cult of Set is causing a rapid increase in the area’s population.

Houses and other buildings have been mended or taken down and rebuilt from salvageable materials. The result is a mixture of ramshackle lean-tos, patchwork houses, and well-built dwellings lining the streets.

The souk is always busy, full of a riot of smells, sounds, and sights. Secret clergy of Set roam the souk, listening for those who would work against their god. Wagon wheels, livestock, trinkets, and holy symbols of Set, as well as other



mean treasures, fill the merchant stalls, and it has become one of the largest trading hubs in the Mushmes Hills.

The Supreme Temple of the Wind Caller

This is the most impressive structure in the city, built of red clay blocks. The coiling serpent statues look new, though they are many centuries old. The detail in their carving remains vivid even though the jet, gold, and emerald that once adorned them have long since been pilfered. The temple’s crypts are haunted by mummies, ghuls, and zombies, as many such sites in Nuria Natal are, but these denizens can sense Set’s faithful and will not raise a hand against them, avoiding or even fleeing from them if necessary. This behavior is not evidence of cowardice or a lack of resolve on the part of the walking dead, however, as they will relentlessly protect the temple from unbelievers.

Most of Set’s cultists can be distinguished from the common folk by their dun robes hemmed in black. These priests gather information about potential threats to the temple and report them to Seth-Ram Alumed (LE male

human **apostle** of Set; see page 281), the Sha-Lord of the Coiled Host.

Members of the Cult of Aten, incensed at the resurgence in Set's popularity, range the hills and fields outside Per-Set, assaulting pilgrims en route to Per-Set and burning their belongings. A clash between the two sects seems likely.

PER-XOR, CITY OF THE SUN

At less than 200 years of age, Per-Xor is the youngest of Nuria Natal's major cities. The sun god Aten seems to bless the city, his radiance shining from the four brass-bound Towers to the Sun, each fitted with a lens at the peak to focus the holy rays toward Martyr's Square. Aten's favor is barbed, however, and he has altered his towers so they increase the ambient temperature in Per-Xor above that of the surrounding lands to remind his people of his prophet's sacrifice. This alteration causes the reflected heat from the towers to make the portions of the city nearest to them almost unbearable during the heat of the day. In most places this phenomenon would be a source of complaint, but in Per-Xor the inhabitants stoically accept it, considering it their penance for allowing Aten's prophet to be martyred by dragon fire 50 years ago. The Tomb of the Prophet, on which construction began five decades ago, stands perpetually near completion but has never been declared finished. The monolith of red granite and marble draws thousands of visitors each year, most at the height of the rainy season.

The sect of the True Aten operates openly in Per-Xor, calling on the faithful to turn away from false gods and venerate only the life-giving sun. Behind closed doors, leaders of the sect plot to murder all the other priests in the city, including those who worship Aten in a less militant way. City residents feel the tension building, and those with the means to do so are leaving before the simmering holy war erupts into violence.

TES-LURIA

The former capital of the Kingdom of Luria, Tes-Luria fell into collapse centuries ago. What was once a hub of trade, a center of scholarship, and a land of rich harvests became a site of ruins. After the fall, the tombs of the richest godlings of Nuria Natal remained, guarded by mummified sphinxes, stone golems and undead gnoll warriors, but few of their faithful visited the site. Some years ago a cult of catfolk and gnolls, calling itself the Sisterhood of the Feral Scratch, who worship Bastet's darker aspects of ferocity and lust, took root at the location. Members of the sisterhood still venerated Bastet, though in a more primal form than her current aspect. Cultists performed

blood rituals in the ruins, and forged pacts in death, sex, and pain to summon demons, foul elementals, and the occasional efreeti.

For several years the sisterhood's members all worked toward the same goal, rebuilding the ruined Grand Fane of Bastet, but tensions began to grow. Unrest within the group led to fractures between the felines and the gnolls. The cult's priestess was killed, and many of her followers were chased from the still-unfinished Grand Fane. The new priestess, Mau-tet Tivali (CN female **nkosi pridelord**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 308), renamed the cult the Slinking Sisterhood of the Untamed. The gnolls, calling themselves the Braying Band, put forward their own leader, Iwi Helwa (CE female gnoll **black knight commander**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 418). Those who cross paths with the Braying Band describe them as more bloodthirsty than other gnoll bands known to have crossbred with demons. The leaders of the sundered sisterhood have brokered a tense peace, and both use the Grand Fane to venerate Bastet, though one group never approaches when the other is present.

The Three Dooms of Tes-Luria

It is uncertain when or why Tes-Luria collapsed, but the three most often conjectured reasons are these:

The city's source of water went dry, perhaps due to the intervention of Yemaja or Set, perhaps due to a disastrous magical experiment attempting to replicate the waters of the River Nuria from nothing, or maybe as a result of the war between Boreas and the other Wind Lords.

Bastet lost interest in the place. Over time, the intrigues between the felines, gnolls, and humans of Per-Bastet were more interesting to the capricious deity.

The ley lines shifted or were manipulated in some way. Whether because of a rakshasa plot initiated in deepest Kush, or a divinely mandated change to the power and strength of the ley lines, something occurred to weaken the lines that Tes-Luria relied upon to survive.

Whatever the reason, Tes-Luria ceased to be the favored city of Bastet and its influence faded to nothing. In the ruins, the societies of gnolls grew, and indeed, some gnolls believe that they are the true rulers of Nuria.

MEMBERS OF THE SISTERHOOD

The Slinking Sisterhood of the Untamed welcomes all potential members of all genders, as long as they worship the jealous, feral, lustful aspect of the cat goddess. Regardless of gender, all members receive the rank of Sister, though some prefer not to use their rank in everyday address.

free cities

The three free city-states—Saph-Saph to the west of the river, Makuria to the south, and Siwal to the west—serve to expand the boundaries of Nuria Natal and provide a first line of defense against any threats that might arise on the borders. Trade flows through these places just as the river pours toward the ocean, enriching the free cities and Nuria as well through the proceeds. Despite the prosperity the free cities bring in the present situation, there is a small but growing sentiment in Nuria Natal that they need to be properly brought back into the fold.

MAKURIA

Makuria is the ugliest city associated with Nuria Natal. Smoke from the smithies fills the sky, and the sound of hammer on metal rings out endlessly. Soot settles atop the buildings—mostly simple, hard-angled structures of sandstone—coating everything in an oppressive gray. Little vegetation survives under this gray layer, so Makuria has less greenery than other desert cities. Patrols march the street in lockstep, punishing both major and minor infractions harshly with little consideration for the scale of the crime. The migration patterns of geese and other wading birds draw them to Makuria every year from late Harvest Tide through Deep Winter, before returning north to hatch and raise their young in the spring and summer. At that time they congregate in the river and on the banks, forming a gray, white, and brown blanket. Thousands of the birds never make it to their next destination, as they are killed for meat and for quills to feed Makuria's market for scribing materials.

Caravan leaders, mercenary captains, and operators of fighting pits often spend a lot of time exploring Makuria's garrisons and training yards. The soldiers trained in the city's Citadel of Winged Truth are among the best in all the River Kingdom. In addition to fighters, Makuria produces weapons and armor in great quantities and boasts the most talented smiths in the land. Every evening, chariot races and performative gladiatorial combats take place as many of the training yards become hippodromes. Many gladiators are purchased as a result of these battles, and competition is fierce for charismatic warriors.

Queen Baktweret, the city's ruler, is a practiced schemer. She has been playing the nobles of Nuria against the border princes of Kush for more than a decade, profiting from each skirmish she instigates. The queen's spies carry word to her of potential rivals for her throne, and in each case she tries to squelch the competition with threats or persuasion. When she can't solve a problem with words, she has her rival disposed of in a manner that dissuades others from trying to unseat her for a while.

MAKURIA

Ruler: Queen Baktweret sint Taweretsa (N female human **thief lord**, *Creature Codex*, p. 406)

Important Personages: High Priestess Halima Soltawaresi (LN female human **apostle** of Horus; see page 281); Howker Paarwoo, leader of the order of Horus (LN male heru **veteran**); Anis Otkofer, leader of the School of Thoth-Hermes (LE female human **apostle** of Thoth-Hermes)

Population: 43,000 (33,000 humans, 5,500 gnolls, 2,250 heruti, 1,250 dwarves, 1,000 other)

Great Gods: Horus (patron), Bastet, Ninkash, Taweret (Yemaja), Thoth-Hermes

Trade Goods: bananas, copper, dates, gourds, kava beans, palm oil, papyrus, quills, turquoise



Palace of Salt and Jade

Queen Baktweret oversees the affairs of Makuria from this building of white clay bricks. The corridors and courtyards are tiled with brilliant green nephrite. A statue, carved from a single piece of jade, of the queen standing triumphant before twelve kneeling gnoll warriors stands at the top of the stairs at the main entrance. The queen's Scimitar Throne sits in a large audience chamber with a recessed arena in the center so that she and her favorites can watch blood sports at her leisure. Rumors suggest that the queen chooses a companion from among the victorious fighters each night. Baktweret allows the gossip to continue, but the truth is that she has no interest in dalliance. Those she chooses are either already her agents or someone she sees value in using as a spy.

The queen's handmaiden, Gaarwine Farag (NE female human **scorpion assassin**, *Creature Codex*, p. 405), has been indoctrinated into Selket's Sting (see page 38) and has gradually been finding work for other members of the sect in the palace. She has yet to be found out, and she is preparing to murder Baktweret so that Wacian al-Mokhtar (NE female human **archmage**) can replace her and advance the goals of Selket's Sting in the city.

Steel Fang Circus

This stadium hosts combat three nights a week. The ringleader, Ib Safwat (N male dwarf **veteran**), hires the best gladiators in the city and pairs them off against other warriors, exotic beasts, dangerous monsters, and—when he can procure them—dinosaurs. When he schedules

a match involving a tyrannosaurus rex, every seat in the arena is filled. Under the terms of a contract with the queen, criminals are made to fight in the pit for the entertainment of the crowd before succumbing to their inevitable punishment.

Ib is occasionally plagued with nightmares and takes a regimen of rare herbs to ensure that his sleep is restful. But his supply is running dry and his regular contact has been silent for months, so he is searching for trustworthy agents to procure herbs from the depths of the Yawchaka Jungle.

SAPH-SAPH

Saph-Saph, situated on the Tamasheq Trail in the Crescent Desert, is often thought of as a city in its own right, but is actually a state composed of several smaller settlements, the most notable of which are Per-Saph and Saph-Ket. The settlements of Saph-Saph are located in a large wadi dotted with a few small spring-fed oases. Long, deep, natural depressions, filled with many springs and date groves, provide sustenance to the residents.

The people of Saph-Saph are hardworking and dedicated to the community. There is little strife between the settlements.

Per-Saph

The city-fortress of Per-Saph, a wonder of the desert in its own right, is one of the largest settlements in Saph-Saph. Here the Temple School of Aten has instructed generations of priests and paladins. The citizens of Per-Saph are universally devout, demonstrating a palpable dedication to Aten.

The Temple School of Aten

The Temple School of Aten is the literal heart of the city; the homes of Per-Saph's citizens are arranged around its walls, which stand six stories high in some places. Many of the residents of Per-Saph work or study at the temple school, with some doing both. Some other buildings, including rooming houses, taverns, and general stores, dot the landscape around the residences and the temple school.

The fortress's thick walls make Per-Saph a haven if the area is attacked. In times of peril, senior students of the school are paired with veteran paladins to assist in defending the fortress. Although some of the paladins and priests who learn at the school remain in Per-Saph after their training is complete, all are encouraged to travel to new lands, or return to their hometowns to bestow the teachings of Aten and promote his worship. Some extremely zealous members of the temple take it upon themselves to hunt down priests and cults of other gods, eliminating them in hopes of currying favor with their own jealous deity.

SAPH-SAPH

Ruler: Sultan Benerib, the Most Generous Patron of the First Temple (NG male human **archmage**)



Important Personages: Agleed, Most Capable and Wise Shipmaster (NG male heru **veteran**); Akhraten, Lord Commander of the First Temple of Aten (LG male human **first servant** of Aten; see page 282); Hemada, Keeper of the Fortress Embers (LN female human **gladiator**); Remitaug, Steward of the Spring of the Sun (N male dwarf **druid**); Wewanjet, Captain of the Trade Gates (NE female human **knight**)

Population: 17,450 (15,500 humans, 600 gnolls, 300 dwarves, 250 heruti, 800 other)

Great Gods: Aten, Nun, and Naunet (Yarila and Porevit as water and chaos gods); Ptah, Sothis-Shai (Rava), Thoth-Hermes

Trade Goods: barley, dates, glass, herbs, millet, papyrus, salt, sandship transport

Saph-Ket

Near Per-Saph lies the prestigious settlement of Saph-Ket. Here the Oracle of the Sun foretells the destinies of Nurian lords, and the greatest lens grinders and glassblowers from many nations work at the observatory. Saph-Ket is a destination for those looking for exquisitely made glassware and lenses. It is also home to a cedar grove that the grovemaster of Saph-Ket tends. Wood harvested from the grove is used to build a single new sandship each year.

The citizens of Saph-Ket tend to be more inquisitive than their neighbors in Per-Saph, challenging themselves to improve their craft, to discover the secrets of the stars, or otherwise stretch their abilities to attain their goals.

The Grand Observatory

A large domed building where scholars gather to study the marvels of the night sky is the center of activity in Saph-Ket. Since it is a high honor to work at the Grand Observatory, the greatest lens grinders and glassblowers of the land travel to Saph-Ket in hopes of being chosen. Artisans who are chosen for the observatory staff work tirelessly to improve the telescopes housed in the place. Some of those who are not selected open stalls or shops to sell their wares, optimistically anticipating a day when they might be needed at the observatory.

The Oracle of the Sun (LN male aspect gearforged **first servant** of Aten; see page 282) operates out of the observatory, as he has for over one thousand years. The oracle spends each night observing the alignment of the stars, the phase of the moon, and the movement of other

celestial bodies, and dictates his observations to a pair of scribes, one of whom scribbles them onto papyrus as quickly as he makes them. While going about this task, the oracle sometimes falls into a fugue state wherein he speaks of events as though he is observing them firsthand. When this occurs, the second scribe attempts to capture the stream of words verbatim, and the oracle interprets them the following day. The Oracle of the Sun's predictions are always true, though not often important; many of his predictions are of events of too little magnitude to act upon most of the time. When he predicts an event of significance, he sends a copy of his interpreted transcript to the living god-king to act upon, and if the event is imminent or local to Saph-Saph, he dispatches priests of his church to look into the matter. All of the oracle's original transcriptions are rolled and stored in the vast, dusty archive beneath the observatory.

SIWAL, CITY OF GARDENS

The free city of Siwal is a wonder to behold. The city is the largest stop along the Mhalmes Road between Per-Bastet and Mhalmes, meaning valuable merchandise passes along it daily, and merchants and caravans making the trip must have enough armed support to run a gauntlet of raiders and bandits.

Siwal is a beautiful city of basalt minarets, granite fountains, and marble monuments. Elemental water magic keeps the many parks and rooftop gardens lush year-round. Small souks occupy courtyards and other open areas, where merchants' carts and stands offer goods of all kinds. These markets draw scores of beggars, though the threat of corporal punishment for criminals who are caught keeps the incidence of theft reasonably low. The Grand Necropolis, just a few minutes' travel north of the city, attracts many visitors who pay for the privilege of viewing the tombs of the heroes interred there.

Commerce trumps all other considerations in the City of Gardens. As long as the profits continue to roll in, the city's ruler, Sultan al-Mamun, and his vizier, Akil ibn Khaldun, are inclined to ignore trouble on other fronts, trusting that any distress or deviation will right itself eventually. Others find this freewheeling commerce deeply appealing, including members of the cult of Selket's Sting, who run a protection racket and skim profits from caravans and sandships. The operation is under the direction of Sadiki Sefu, who has organized a group of more than thirty human and dwarf priest-bandits called the Desert Scorpions. Their efforts finance the work of Selket's Sting throughout Nuria and the deserts, and their carefully brewed poisons are shipped under careful eyes to assassins throughout Nuria Natal. They consider themselves secret rulers of the city's trade.

The gravebinders and priests of Anu-Akma, who hold sway over Siwal's Grand Necropolis, would argue that it is the Purifier of Souls who actually rules everything. The Cult of Anu-Akma holds immense influence in the city, and it is rare for something they advocate to not come to pass.

Grand Necropolis of Siwal

The most famous graveyard in Nuria Natal houses the remains of ten thousand dead heroes. The necropolis is also the resting place of ordinary folk from every walk of life, from babes who drew only a few breaths to wizened elders who outlived their children and grandchildren, and from acclaimed generals to meanest wretch.

Library-Temple of Thoth

Siwal's great library-temple of Thoth-Hermes retains copies of works entirely unknown elsewhere; while merchants thrive in Siwal, the scholars and keepers of lore likewise learn a great deal from the steady stream of sandships and caravans from distant lands. An adept of the Scribes of Thoth questions visitors at the quays; often this is Seshat Kha-Thoth herself, the leader of the scribe-priests, dressed in her leopard-skin robe and wearing a crescent diadem marked with an ibis and stars.

SIWAL

Ruler: Sultan al-Mamun (LN male human **thief lord**, *Creature Codex*, p. 406), with his vizier Akil ibn Khaldun (LN male human **knight**)

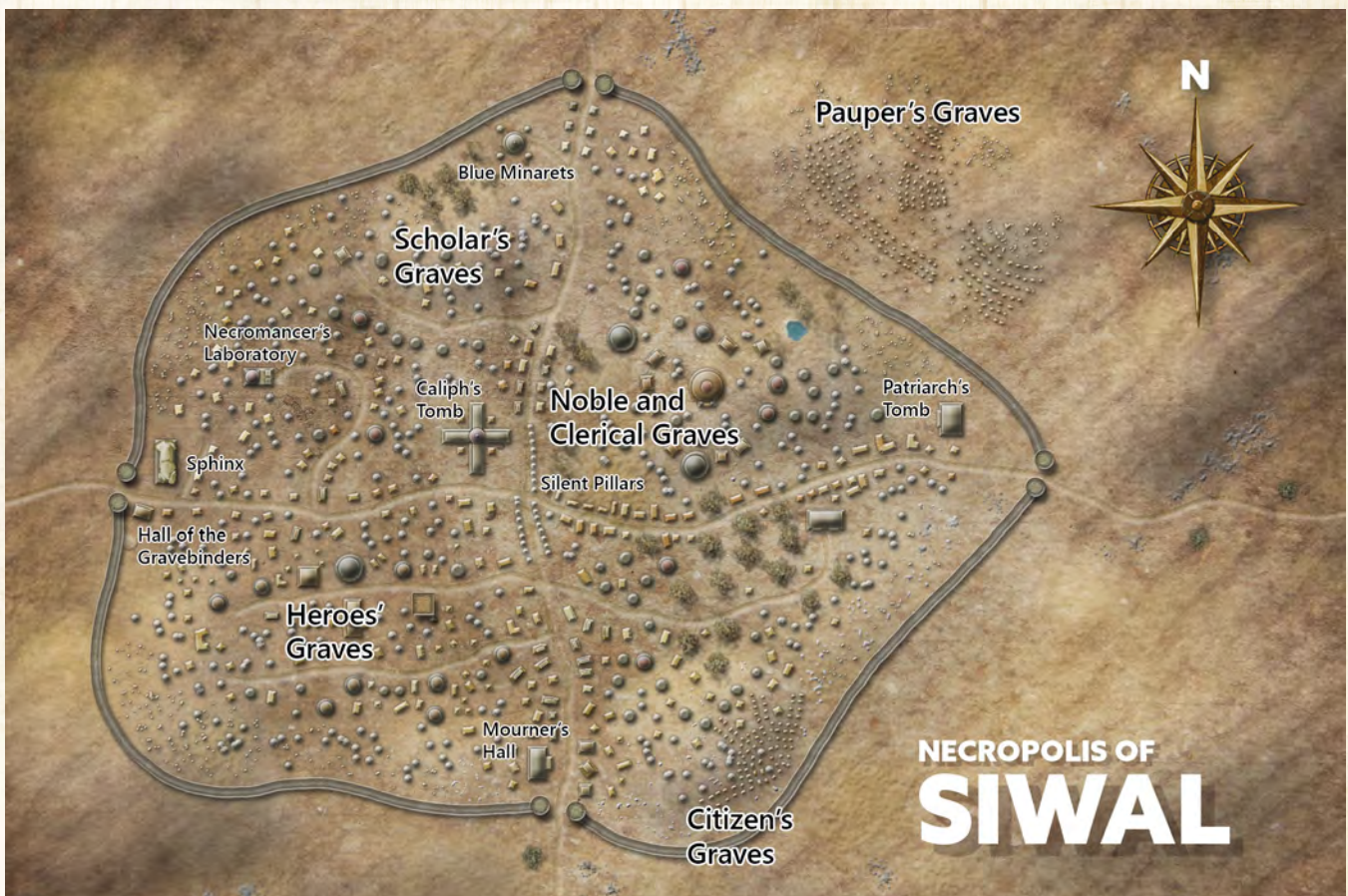
Important Personages: Meshna Elai, salt merchant (LN male human **spy**); Muadil abd-Muadil, Master Gardener (CG male human **priest**); Mehmes the Caravan Master (LN male human **veteran**); Panshal al-Mahrji, Master Gravebinder (LN male human **mage**); Ikhnaton of Siwal, wandering preacher (LG male **first servant** of Aten; see page 282); Sadiki Sefu, leader of the Desert Scorpions (LE male dwarf **thief lord**); Seshat Kha-Thoth, First among the Scribes of Thoth-Hermes (LN female **acolyte** of Thoth-Hermes)

Population: 11,000 (9,000 humans, 800 gnolls, 500 dwarves, 300 heruti, 400 other)

Great Gods: Anu-Akma, Aten, Nun and Naunet (Yarila and Porevit as water and chaos gods; *Midgard Worldbook*, p. 373), Ptah, Sothis-Shai (Rava), Thoth-Hermes

Trade Goods: barley, dates, herbs, millet, mummy dust, opals, rare flowers, salt, sandship transport







THE LAW OF THE NECROPOLIS

The law of the Grand Necropolis is simple: under the sun, the living reign and may make what arrangements they will. After night falls, though, the spirits, ghouls, and vampires hold their own court, and the living that dare enter are their fair prey.

At night, the Grand Necropolis becomes a true city of the dead. Ghouls crawl from their burrows, vampires emerge from their crypts, and mummies shuffle from their tombs to see to their interests and take part in a weird mockery of living civilization. The lords of the dead levy fines and enact harsher punishments on those that break their laws.

In the depths of one of the necropolis's crypts, a **ghul** (see page 269) has apotheosized into a more powerful form. This self-named ghul king has upset the power balance in the necropolis and flouts its laws by allowing its agents to act at any hour they wish.

warrior, rose from his grave two centuries ago and considers himself to be the arbiter of law in the necropolis. He has dispatched hundreds of undead and living souls alike, adding them to his army of ghoulin. Since the rise of the ghul-king, he has been noticeably absent. Young men and women sometimes visit the oracle, Tanya Ollevit (N female **vampire priestess**, *Creature Codex*, p. 367), to trade blood for charms and her oracular visions. A family of **gyposphinxes** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 359) led by Shafiq Siham lives in the upper reaches of the tallest crypts. She is sometimes visited by desperate folk seeking information, but rumors now circulate that she has left the necropolis to find a new home for her family.

Master Gravebinder Panshal al-Mahrji and his family are the gravebinders of Siwal. The preparation of the body for the afterlife is a sacred calling, and the gravebinders oversee all aspects of it: making shrouds, embalming and grooming corpses, performing mourning ceremonies, and consecrating graves. The purpose of all this is twofold. First, the gravebinders ensure that all steps are taken to assure their charges' acceptance into the afterlife. Second, the preparations prevent the rise of new undead in the necropolis. Funerals are held in the necropolis daily, and the walls occasionally need to be expanded. Gnoll warriors patrol the streets and avenues by day, destroying any undead impertinent enough to be active.

In addition to the gravebinders, the necropolis has several notable residents. The gravedigger, Golamesh Abu Karim (LE **desert troll**, *Creature Codex*, p. 356), and his nephew-apprentice Gulgash Karim (LN **desert troll**) keep a watch fire lit all night at the Eastern Gate. Desert trolls have been the appointed gravediggers for centuries, and members of the Karim family have been employed there for decades. Wakkil Al-Ghul (LN male **darakhul black knight commander**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 419), a famed



perilous sites

Nuria Natal has too many interesting and notable locations for all of them to be enumerated. The brave will find danger and adventure around every alley and beyond every dune. A few of the most significant locations in the River Kingdom are detailed below.

DUNEHOWLER'S HOLD

A rocky butte shaped like an enormous egg once served as the hidden headquarters for a group of cutthroat gnoll pirates. The holding and its operations are now run by Hurgrek the Slim (CN female gnoll **thief lord**, *Creature Codex*, p. 406). Hurgrek does not delight in unnecessary violence, and the means by which she removed the previous leader, Dunehowler, are unknown. She has struck a deal with King Thutmoses's representatives: in exchange for protecting the coast from pirates, she and her clan are allowed to keep half of all the valuables they confiscate.

The privateers are generally allowed to operate as they please. The Nurian Navy doesn't interfere unless ordered to by its leadership. Hurgrek's loyal followers push at the bounds of legitimacy, blurring the line between privateer and pirate. Some of the older sea dogs murmur that Dunehowler is still alive, and they have formed a rebel group to find him and put him back in power.

FIELD OF THE LOST ARMY

Long ago, the remnants of a Mharoti army were swallowed up by the desert and churned out as hungry shades. These restless spirits, doomed to follow their general's last command, have recently been raiding the Faheleel oasis. Merchants who use the Mhalmes Road are more than concerned about how these undead have come to leave the area they were thought to be trapped in.

Unbeknownst to them, the lich Seth-rem Alassan has gained power over the undead spirits of the hapless soldiers of the Dragon Empire and is already increasing his army. He intends to eventually command the undead spirits inside the Necropolis of Siwal and use them to turn all of Siwal into a city of undeath.

GHATAZI SALT PITS

The ragged crews of the Ghatazi Salt Pits, located deep in the Crescent Desert, are surely the most wretched slaves in Nuria. The pitiless sun beats down on these doomed souls as they remove precious pink-hued salt from the cratered ground with pick and shovel. The operation is overseen by Khemunsiri, a **gilded devil** (*Tome of Beasts*,

p. 106), with discipline provided by the cultists and other devils that follow him.

The pits are regularly visited by **night hags** who collect the souls of the dead to sell in the infernal markets of the Eleven Hells. A brave few have visited the pits to petition for their loved ones' safe return, or for the welfare of their souls if the desert has already claimed them. The luckiest of these people have walked away with their lives intact, and the rest have joined their relatives in perdition.

KHEPHANI OUTPOST

A modest mining operation on the edge of the lake in the Khephani Salt Flats has seen some trouble in recent months. The enslaved workers of the Tamasheq nomad lords have been disappearing at an alarming rate. The Tamasheq overlords, furious over their dwindling workforce, and the subsequent decline in the removal of large bricks of salt from the shores and nearby pits, are capturing any souls who stray too close to the site. New prisoners are pressed for information regarding the disappearance of the captives before being forced to do the grueling work themselves.

LOST TOMB OF MENET-KA

The tale of Menet-Ka, a minor Nurian king of antiquity, is one of jealousy and hubris. The greedy monarch was turned into a pitiful ghost when his plans went awry and the ritual he performed to be reborn after his death backfired. Becoming increasingly paranoid as he constructed his tomb, he turned his resting place into a death trap that steals the breath of any who dare enter.

PER-AMARNA, CITY OF SCORPIONS

Unsurprisingly, Selket's Sting holds sway in the ruins of Per-Amarna. The scorpion goddess's largest temple is located, still intact, among the broken buildings and foliage of the old city. Per-Amarna was built over an aquifer, so the faithful of the temple and whatever Tamasheq nomads are in residence at any time have no risk of dehydration.





The temple at Per-Amarna is dangerous to any who don't worship Selket. The many mummies housed there fulfill the vows they made in life to protect it, though they are rarely called upon to do so. The resident cultists, swarms of poisonous vermin, and gypsosphinx guardians destroy intruders before they can get far inside.

Selket's high priestess, Dakhamunza Sat Selket (NE female human **first servant** of Selket; see page 282), keeps a few prisoners in a chamber off her quarters on the third level of the temple. Her guard, Latidus (CE male gnoll **berserker**), often whiles away his idle hours watching the temple's scorpions sting the captives; their screams are the only sounds that bring him joy. The husband of one of the prisoners seeks the rescue of his wife, a matronly woman with white feathers in her hair, named Haalah (N female aasimar **commoner**). He knows she was taken near the Hariek Hills and is willing to pay a small fortune for her safe return.

PER-MARAUT

Once a beautiful city of glossy black stone and narrow, steeply sloped pyramids, this location became a haven for demons, constructs, and the restless dead after a legion of Mharoti warriors plundered the graveyard, cursing the city. The lich Seth-rem Alassan is in the process of turning the area to his own purposes (see "Field of the Lost Army", page 55) and plans to use it as a base of operations as he urges his growing army of undead toward the Necropolis of Siwal.

PYRAMID OF KHENSU

This pyramid, once haunted by the restless souls of the laborers sacrificed in a failed blood ritual, is now the site of a cult devoted to the arch-devil Arbeyach. Many of the wights, mummies, and ghosts that haunted the site have been destroyed, while others have been driven deeper into the pyramid. The cult shares the new environs with a growing hive of tosculi.

WATAN RABIYAH

Located less than two day's travel from Siwal, the village of Watan Rabiya is a barely remembered ruin. Yafram the Desolate (NE female human **lich**) has placed her phylactery, an immortal black desert rosebush, in the village's still-intact cistern, where it is guarded at all times by a quartet of **ghuls** (see page 269). The lich also uses the site as a base of operations where she tries to divine the locations of her moon dial, periapt, and spear, which were lost when her body was destroyed during an attempt to conquer Siwal. To date her efforts have failed, but when

she recovers her relics, she will once again raise an army of undead and attempt to wrest control of Siwal from its current leaders.

TES-MEKAAN

This small but rapidly growing village on the coast of the Middle Sea was established only six years ago. Founded by smugglers and treasure hunters as a place to move Nurian relics out of the country, it has become a haven for minotaurs relocating from Kypriion. The buildings, made of sun-hardened coastal mud, have high ceilings and wide doorways to accommodate the minotaurs' frames.

The original leader of the settlement, Vikter Hammerhaft (NE male dwarf **bandit captain**), was ousted when the minotaurs began to arrive in significant numbers. His replacement, Halfrith Lekkas (LN female minotaur **gladiator**), is opposed to the continued smuggling of antiquities, which has forced the group into hiding. Vikter's companions have been searching the Mbhaza Mountains for the *Kissing Blade of Tik'mbesi* (see page 292) for two years. When they return with their prize, trouble will undoubtedly follow.

TESH-HAQEQ, MANSION OF THE ANTBEAR

Abandoned during a siltstorm several centuries ago, this fallen temple of Set is located near Djanot and Per-Xor. The city has recently reemerged and is now inhabited by a group of **ink devils** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 107) that have amassed a large, esoteric library. Forays into the temple have thus far been unsuccessful.

adventures in the river kingdom

Adventures in Nuria Natal typically involve ancient ruins, secret societies, feuding nobles, or out-of-control magic.

DEVILISH DEAD

A necromancer is kidnapping slaves from the Ghatazi Salt Pits and leaving their infernal overseers dead. He's taking the grateful "liberated" slaves to his redoubt, located between the salt pits and Saph-Saph, where he is subjecting them to experiments using the blood and fluids extracted from the dead devils. He is hoping to discover a method of creating more powerful zombies, but up till now his experiments have done nothing but kill the subjects and cause them to rise as normal zombies. Khemunsiri, the lord of the salt pits, is seeking agents to discover the cause of his stolen property and will pay handsomely for information.

MECHANICAL HISTORY

The characters are invited to join an expedition by members of the Honorable Society of Portal Wizards. They are told that strange, pod-like mechanical structures are growing near the Red Portals along the Angel Road between Horem-gatra and Avaris. When the expedition travels through the portal, it emerges millennia in the past in a village located in Far Cathay that is under assault by a group of **ahu-nixta** (*Creature Codex*, p. 11). The aberrations try to capture some of the characters to learn how they traveled here, making an immediate escape difficult.

DIABOLICAL ARCHIVE

The characters, while traveling the Lotus Trail, encounter a tribe of demonic gnolls near the ruins of Tesh-Haqeq. Although they behave threateningly, the gnolls don't attack; instead, the gnolls offer to leave the characters unmolested if they agree to enter the nearby ruin and procure a book, *Al-Qirari's Tome of Ten Doors*, from the ink devils residing inside the ruin. The gnolls believe the

book contains a ritual that will allow them to summon their patron, the demon lord Alquam. The gnolls don't assault the site themselves because they believe the rumors that the devils have spread, asserting that the arch-devil Totivillus is also inside, examining the rare volumes in their library.

VISIONS OF DISASTER

In the city of Nuria, a distraught young priest of Aten approaches the characters, telling them of a prophetic vision he has had of a corpse-filled plaza located near the Palm Palace of the God-King. The priest knows that the location in the vision will be full of festival revelers in a few days, as it is every year. In truth, a Mharoti saboteur who has an axe to grind against both Nuria Natal and the Mharoti Empire is plotting to attack the festivalgoers, hoping the carnage will reignite hostilities between those regions. The enemy agent is hiding in plain sight as a member of a city maintenance team and can be found making notes in the plaza when the characters visit it.



lands of wind and sand



3

The northwest corner of the Southlands is a harsh and foreboding place, and yet human and jinnborn nomads, minotaurs, and gnolls all call it home, and the region is highlighted by a lush valley in the middle of a barren desert.

Once, this area boasted a kingdom that was a shining example of arts and learning, but that was before the Mharoti dragons leveled Roshgazi and the other minotaur cities. Once, the magical Valley of Golden Ulthar gave birth to an advanced culture that could coax verdant life from the sand, but that was before Sepenret, the Desolate Priestess, lost her way. Once, the city of Jelle-Anda preserved the wondrous legacy of Ankeshel, but that was before the angry Wind Lord Boreas slew every person who lived there.



Today, these lands are occupied by the pale shadows of those marvels, as well as treacherous nature spirits, dangerous monsters, and nomadic cultures as mercurial as they are haughty. Much of the territory remains under the sway of the mighty Wind Lords, the ancient elemental lords who have ruled the high plateaus and deserts for thousands of years.

No one who has visited the region can deny the raw beauty of this ancient land. For those who look hard enough, its hidden cultural, magical, and natural treasures are breathtaking, and its lost riches promise great fortune to the finders.

Fighting breaks out at the oasis between a group of adventurers and the camel-riding servants of Boreas the North Wind and his wind spirits.





geography

In the Southlands' extreme northwest, the great Stone Desert stretches to the sea in sun-baked plains of red and black rock. This is a brutal environment devoid of the crescent-shaped sand dunes found throughout the other deserts of the South. Though the terrain is seemingly barren, the Stone Desert hides bubbling springs, seasonal waterholes, and a scattering of oases.

The elevation of the land increases to the south, where it merges with the high plateaus in the center of the Dominion of the Wind Lords. Here, the terrain becomes mountainous, and more frequent rainfall enables oaks, cedars, and junipers to grow on the high slopes and in the deep canyons. Nature spirits (see page 63) inhabit every crag, hilltop, oasis, and stream throughout the Dominion; animals thrive here too, including lions, leopards, bears and macaques (monkeys).

South of Hartani Bay, between the coast and the Chelamite Mountains, are the Granite Teeth, a broken, stony badlands of jagged canyons, rock spires, and crumbling cliffs, home to abominations that prey on Tamasheq caravans. To the southeast, the semiarid, windswept Mukupe Sahel serves as a transition zone between the Stone and Crescent deserts.

Travelers crossing the western part of the Crescent Desert must remain wary of the many fearsome monsters that inhabit this area, including **dune mimics** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 162), **sand silhouettes** (p. 332), and **sandwyrms** (p. 334). Some of the oases are occupied by crocodiles. Others are the creations of a **mirager** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 291) or an **oasis** (p. 310). East of the Howler's Road ley line, the sands give way to the hidden Valley of Golden Ulthar, a miraculously lush strip of verdant land in the middle of the desert.

Far to the south, near the foothills of the Amud and Mbazha mountains, the Crescent Desert is known as the Ishmai Desert to its primary inhabitants, the proud sand giants (see the sidebar on page 77).

dominion of the wind lords

The vast Dominion of the Wind Lords extends from the ruins of Jelle-Anda to the borders of Dabu more than a thousand miles to the south, encompassing the Stone Desert and much of the coastline. Here, the Wind Lords exert their rule over thousands of nature spirits, and nomadic Tamasheq tribes travel across the wastes, alert for gnoll and minotaur raiders. In addition to the blue-turbaned Tamasheq nomads, jinnborn tribes with their own elaborate culture, traditions, and magic live throughout the Dominion. For generations, the people and spirits who serve the Wind Lords have fiercely protected this secretive world of wanderers, hidden cities, and unparalleled treasure.

The nature spirits of the Dominion toy with the Tamasheq, aiding or hindering them as their whims dictate. Most Tamasheq individuals offer small tokens to the spirits before undertaking any activity, in hopes of currying their favor. Fiercely protective of their homeland, the Tamasheq have always taken great care to reveal as little as possible about the spirits to outsiders. This secretiveness makes them seem proud and standoffish to others, but once the Tamasheq have accepted a stranger into their confidence, the desert people honor the friendship for life.

Things are beginning to change in the Dominion. After receiving a series of visions, the mysterious Spider Prophet has encouraged the Wind Lords to allow foreign traders to visit the city of Inkabut, and they have even begun to permit a privileged few entry into wondrous Kel Azjer.

THE WIND LORDS

The Wind Lords are ancient and powerful entities from the earliest ages of the world, created from the breath of the giant Aurgelmir. They have almost no interest in the lands outside their borders, but they take an active and personal role in the Dominion's internal affairs.

Chergui, the East Wind, is the most benevolent to mortals, representing the cleansing winds that blow from the sea to ease the Stone Desert's heat, and acting as a calming influence on the other two lords. At the other extreme is Shemral, the West Wind, who hates mortals and wants to drive them from the spirits' lands. The West Wind is an enveloping storm of rocks and grit that scours flesh from bone and wears down mountain peaks. Khamsin, the South Wind, embodies the hot winds that blow from the southern wastes. As a being of extremes, both in temperature and temperament, Khamsin's mood vacillates between those of his fellow lords.



STONE DESERT

DOMINION OF THE WIND LORDS

GRANITE TEETH

CRESCENT DESERT

DABU ZAVOA

ISHMAI DESERT

MBAZHA MOUNTAINS

BEAR'S CAVERN

TAMASHEO CLIMB

CHELAMITE MOUNTAINS

MUKUPE SAHEL

GRANITE ROAD

HOWLER'S ROAD

AMUD MTS

MIDDLE SEA

HARTANI BAY

JAGGED COAST

MARAGIA

VALERA House of Swords

LUNNAUM Tarracinaeum

KAMMAE RINGWOOD

ANTIBA

UMBARDIA

CAPLEON

The Torralva Maze Brintarro

Jelle Anda

Al-Rassor

Ziss

Harmattan

Al Naheel

Gregale

Suchabar

KEL AZJER
Shamal's Tower
KUOMA PEAK
Chergui's Tower
Khamsin's Tower

Khepri Khnum

Jeshima

Tirag Ajdir

Kadralhu

Derrada

Golden Ulthar

Ghatazi Salt Pits

MARDAS VHULA-GAI

Castle Halcyon

Menatayni

SAPH-SAPH

Rayamn

Zin-sha

ZIN'S BANE

MUKU-NA

CHEMEKSA

Hallampor

Kadrana

FENU-NA

Fenu-na

ZARODA

ALMAA

Almaa

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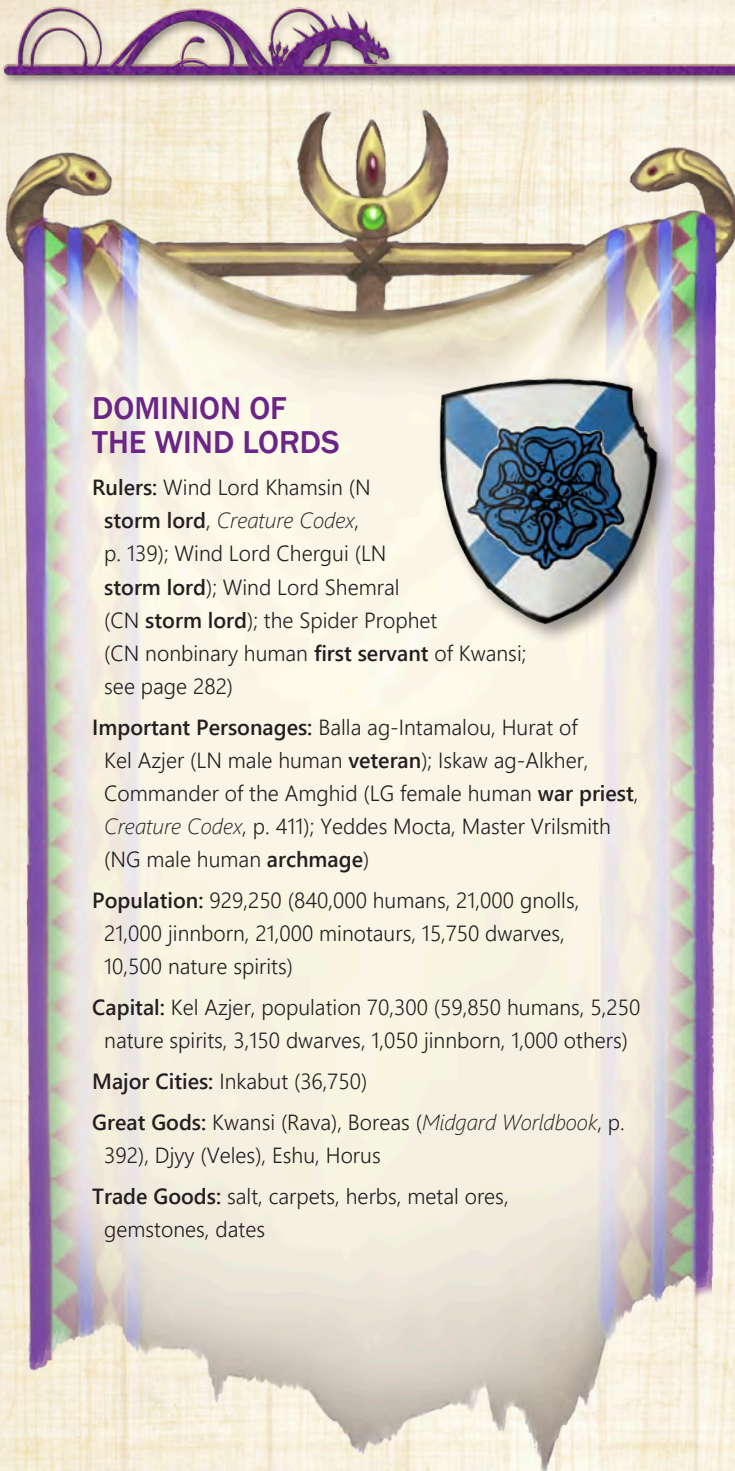
NIMEA

Nimea

SKIN STEALERS

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DOMINION OF THE WIND LORDS

Rulers: Wind Lord Khamsin (N **storm lord**, *Creature Codex*, p. 139); Wind Lord Chergui (LN **storm lord**); Wind Lord Shemral (CN **storm lord**); the Spider Prophet (CN nonbinary human **first servant** of Kwansi; see page 282)

Important Personages: Balla ag-Intamalou, Hurat of Kel Azjer (LN male human **veteran**); Iskaw ag-Alkher, Commander of the Amghid (LG female human **war priest**, *Creature Codex*, p. 411); Yeddes Mocta, Master Vrilsmith (NG male human **archmage**)

Population: 929,250 (840,000 humans, 21,000 gnolls, 21,000 jinnborn, 21,000 minotaurs, 15,750 dwarves, 10,500 nature spirits)

Capital: Kel Azjer, population 70,300 (59,850 humans, 5,250 nature spirits, 3,150 dwarves, 1,050 jinnborn, 1,000 others)

Major Cities: Inkabut (36,750)

Great Gods: Kwansi (Rava), Boreas (*Midgard Worldbook*, p. 392), Djyy (Veles), Eshu, Horus

Trade Goods: salt, carpets, herbs, metal ores, gemstones, dates

Opposing these three is Boreas, the North Wind, who was driven out of the Dominion nearly 2,000 years ago. Boreas has been reborn as a true god, and he maintains a separate realm far to the north, but he often visits the Dominion to stir up trouble. Serving him in these efforts are the spirits he has gathered as allies and three major Tamasheq tribes. For more information on Boreas, see *Midgard Worldbook*, p. 392.

THE SPIDER PROPHET

The Spider Prophet possesses immense power in the Dominion, second only to the Wind Lords. They are Kwansi's highest-ranking priest and are also favored by the nature spirits, who whisper secrets from across the Southlands. The prophet's knowledge of plots and machinations in the Dominion is unrivaled, allowing them to plan and prepare for the war with the Dragon Empire that will almost certainly come. Old enough to have seen the fall of Roshgazi and Cindass, they relish the prospect of chaos to come when the dragons return. If the Wind Lords decide to go to war, the Spider Prophet will lead the spirits and the Tamasheq into battle.

The Spider Prophet is a perplexing figure, often described as both young and old, male and female, who always speaks with the same voice from a body covered in swarms of spiders. Many worshipers believe that the swarm is actually the Spider Prophet, and the body beneath it merely a vessel.



The Amghid, Hand of the Spider Prophet

Shrouded in black turbans and lithams, the Amghid are the foot soldiers of the Spider Prophet, and the closest thing the Dominion has to an army. Five thousand in number, they are commanded by the imajaghan, Iskaw ag-Alkher, who takes a pragmatic approach to the tenets of her oath, training her soldiers in stealth and assassination as well as large-scale military maneuvers. The Amghid are charged with protecting the borders of the Dominion, although they more often work to keep rival tribes and nature spirits from annihilating each other. Their ranks include lightly armed scouts for stealth work, and heavily armored imajaghans who are adept at handling otherworldly foes. Imajaghans use the **knight** stat block, with the following additions:

Spellcasting. The imajaghan is a 5th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *burning hands*, *shield of faith*, *thunderwave*
2nd level (2 slots): *acid arrow*

Imajaghan's Strike (3/Day). As an action, the imajaghan can imbue its weapon with the power of the elements, choosing air, earth, fire, or water. For 1 minute, its weapon deals an additional 3 (1d6) damage of a type based on the element chosen: lightning or thunder (air), acid (earth), fire (fire), or cold (water).

NATURE SPIRITS

Within the Dominion, most elements of nature have an animating spirit bound to them. These spirits of wind, stone, fire, and sea were awakened by the Wind Lords thousands of years ago, and they remain aware and conscious, like any other living thing. Beholden to the Wind Lords, the nature spirits prefer to interact with mortals through Tamasheq and jinnborn tribal leaders and the imajaghans, but they can speak and act when they choose. Only the foolish risk angering the residents of a living world—including the wind, the rocks, and the oases of the world—that could turn quickly turn against them. All nature spirits in the Dominion can communicate telepathically with the Spider Prophet, but they avoid troubling the prophet unless the message is of the utmost importance.

The Stone Desert has a large population of nature spirits, each exhibiting its own personality and character. Those whose names are most widely known are Simoon, a poisonous and cruel wind spirit; Aejeje, a wise whirlwind of flame; Gregale, a kindly oasis near the western coast; and Harmattan, a rocky outcropping into which the Dominion's laws are chiseled in an ancient script.

For centuries, the spirits of the Dominion have been locked in a civil war between forces loyal to the Wind

Lords and those beholden to Boreas. As immortal beings, the spirits wage war on a temporal scale beyond the comprehension of mortals. The build-up to even a minor skirmish takes months or years, and the time between major battles is usually measured in decades. To mortal eyes, the conflict is barely perceptible; nonetheless, the warring sides still stubbornly vie for mortal and immortal allies, important resources, and strategic locations.

The war's protracted timeline does not make it any less dangerous for mortals who end up caught in the middle when things flare up. For reasons of their own, warring spirits sometimes lash out at passing caravans, and on rare occasions entire groups of nomads are crushed beneath battling earth elementals.

TAMASHEQ, PEOPLE OF THE DESERT

Virtually unknown outside the desert, half a million Tamasheq inhabit the Southlands. Most live in the Stone Desert, but they are also widespread throughout the Crescent and Sarklan Deserts. They speak their own tongue, called Tamasheq, as well as the Southern Tongue and not infrequently Gnoll, Draconic, and Minotaur. Organized into vanhu, or tribes, of several families each, their lives are spent on the move from oasis to oasis, keeping herds of goats and camels and conducting trade. A secretive people, they take great pleasure in convincing the Nurians and Kushites that they are simple nomads. The truth, however, is that the Tamasheq have a thriving and advanced civilization, though they have taken great pains to hide this fact from the world until recently. Only in their secret capital of Kel Azjer do they show evidence of their greatness.

The Tamasheq display signs of status in their long white robes and colorful turbans, their exquisitely tooled saddles, and the copper and silver hilts of their takoba

SEPARATE BUT SIMILAR

The nature spirits of the Dominion have primal personalities tied to their essential makeup. Although their identities are unique and varied, most spirits of a particular sort conform to common assumptions and stereotypes. Rock spirits, for instance, are stubborn and patient. Wind spirits exist for the moment and revel in new experiences. Water spirits are flighty, flowing from one thought to the next. Fire spirits are focused and intense. The GM should treat a nature spirit as an NPC if the characters engage one in social interaction. If they need to enter combat or otherwise act physically, nature spirits can manifest as **air**, **earth**, **fire**, or **water elementals**.



(shortswords). Their prowess in forging a life in the desert gives them wealth, valuable trade routes, and a position of great influence. They are expert travelers who can ensure a caravan's safe passage—and also raiders who can disrupt or destroy even a well-defended caravan or sandship. Several of the most significant Tamasheq tribes are described below.

Vanhu Dewabi

This tribe of nomads wanders the Crescent Desert between the Valley of Golden Ulthar and Nuria Natal, trading with other Tamasheq tribes, the jinnborn, and with city dwellers in Saph-Saph and Corremel. Their cunning leader, Dizsa Zhalar (CN female human **priest** of Eshu), loves to indulge in a bit of camel rustling when she isn't captivating the locals with her tall tales of adventure. Vanhu Dewabi should have returned to the Stone Desert five years ago to swap places with the Mawai tribe, but Dizsa has no interest in spending the next generation trapped inside the Dominion, so they have stayed away, risking the anger of hot-tempered Khamsin, their former patron.

Vanhu Kozar

This tribe serves Chergui, the East Wind. Its leader, Haushi Kewaldi (LN male human **druid**), can converse freely with all the spirits of the wind and rocks in the Stone Desert. By nurturing friendly relationships with these nature spirits, Haushi has been able to steer the vanhu away from conflicts between those loyal to the Wind Lords and those serving Boreas.

Vanhu Lejai

Led by an imajaghan named Salim Remala, a warrior-chieftain with a fine pair of hunting cheetahs, the Tamasheq of Vanhu Lejai are seasoned warriors but also wealthy traders. The tribe wanders the western badlands of the Stone Desert around Hartani Bay and trades with merchant sailors from the islands of the Western Ocean. Vanhu Lejai gives a significant portion of its profits to Shemral, the West Wind, as tribute.

Vanhu Owey, Vanhu Adagh, and Vanhu Dinnij

These tribes all serve Boreas, meaning that other vanhu loyal to the Wind Lords attack them on sight. Centuries ago, members of these vanhu were among the soldiers hired as mercenaries by the Dragon Empire to attack the minotaurs of Roshgazi, and they remain the best war camel riders

in the Southlands. Thirty capable imajaghans from each of these tribes guard Boreas's broken tower atop Kuoma Peak overlooking Kel Azjer from those who seek to uncover the North Wind's secrets.

JINNBORN TRIBES

Scattered throughout the Dominion of the Wind Lords, and to a lesser extent the Crescent Desert, are insular tribes of jinnborn. Natives who emerged from the deepest deserts, the jinnborn claim they were the first mortals to walk the world. They say that in the beginning, all the world was a vast desert beneath a fiery sun; in those times, the jinnborn wandered where they wanted and ruled over all they saw. They refer to themselves as the *sab siraat*, or "people of the path." Descended from powerful elemental creatures called jinn, the jinnborn use the gifts of their lineage to help them survive in the desert. Air jinnborn are proud and aloof. Fire jinnborn are impulsive and draconian. Water jinnborn are carefree but mercurial, and earth jinnborn are stoic and determined. Within these broad tendencies, though, jinnborn tribes exhibit great variety in customs, laws, lore, and mannerisms.



Passionate people, the jinnborn seek wealth when they can, revel in revenge when they must, and cherish close companionship always. Outsiders consider them capricious or even wild, never fully aware of the veil that hides the jinnborn's true nature. For more information on jinnborn as characters, see *Southlands Player's Guide*.

Each jinnborn tribe has a patron jinn—the powerful immortal being revered as the tribe's original founder. The tribe is typically dominated by the extended family of the patron jinn's first creations, and its members tend to have the same elemental aspect. Some of the more notable jinnborn tribes are described below.

Sailors of the Scorching Sands

This small tribe of around a hundred fire jinnborn uses a trio of sandships to traverse the Crescent Desert, following a route that takes them from the Menatayni oasis to the Ghatazi Salt Pits, where they sell slaves to the salt devils before heading west to the Derrada oasis.

Just before they reach Derrada, their leader, Jemlat (NE male jinnborn **gladiator**), a hot-tempered brute with vermilion skin and a permanent sneer, opens a large glass jar filled with sand. When he speaks the proper command word in Ignan, the three sandships shrink until they are small enough to fit through the neck of the bottle. With the ships safely stored, Jemlat and the other jinnborn enter the oasis on foot to purchase camels for the trip through the sandless Stone Desert.

The tribe's path passes through the Jeshima oasis far to the west, then on to Hartani Bay, where the jinnborn buy slaves captured by pirates sailing the Western Ocean. When they leave the Stone Desert, the jinnborn sell their camels, Jemlat restores the sandships to their normal size, and the tribe sails back to Menatayni to start the circuit all over again. Characters who run into the Sailors of the Scorching Sands on this last leg of the trip should be on their guard, since the jinnborn have been known to add unwary desert travelers to their living cargo.

Sand Devils

With around four hundred members, the Sand Devils tribe is made up mostly of air jinnborn, but several dozen earth jinnborn are also in their ranks. Arrogant and aloof, the Sand Devils wander a path that follows the Howler's Road ley line, always camping outside the cities along this route rather than entering them. They wear pale blue hooded robes, decorated with tiny tubes and bells that chime when they move. They trade in dates, bronzework, and embroidered cloth.

The Sand Devils are on good terms with the wind and rock spirits of the Dominion, and with the djinn of the deserts. Dharal, a djinni ally of the tribe, was recently

tricked into serving a minotaur merchant-captain named Himilcar (see page 68) for 1,001 days. The Sand Devils were outraged when they heard about this, and their leader Zitane (CN male jinnborn **warlock of the Genie Lord**; see page 289) is assembling a war party to rescue Dharal the next time Himilcar returns to Inkabut.

Children of the Secret Springs

Times have not been good for the Children of the Secret Springs, a tribe of water jinnborn. They wander the northern coastline of the Dominion, from the ruins of Jelle-Anda to the south and west as far away as Succhabar, stopping at springs and oases along the way, many of which are known only to them. Violent confrontations with angry nature spirits and desert trolls have thinned their numbers, and, worse still, those who have died have not traveled to the Hidden World as they should have. The Hidden World is a place of delights and wonders where jinnborn go after death if they have diligently followed the tenets of their *sab siraat* in life. Sages have theorized that the Hidden World is a hybrid of the Ethereal Plane and the Elemental Planes.

Instead, for some reason, the Children who have died recently have become monstrous **ghuls** (see page 269) and have returned to stalk the rest of the tribe. In despair, Saadia (CG female jinnborn **druid**), the tribe's young leader, has brought the two dozen surviving Children to the Ziss oasis to seek help. Perhaps a band of adventurers at the oasis might be willing to drive off the ghuls, or even be able to travel into the Hidden World to deal directly with the source of the corruption.

Jinnborn of the Medina

It is dangerous for jinnborn to turn their backs on the desert and spend too long in the towns and cities. Those who do often pick up strange quirks and mannerisms, and risk descending into madness. Despite this danger, there is a large tribe of nearly a thousand jinnborn whose path requires them to spend part of each year in Kel Azjer, the capital of the Dominion.

Known as the Jinnborn of the Medina, members of this tribe are of mixed elemental origin and display a vast variety of skin tones. To follow the traditions of their path—and to avoid succumbing to the mental afflictions that affect urban jinnborn—they cannot stay under the same roof for more than seven nights. The Jinnborn of the Medina own more than two hundred homes scattered throughout Kel Azjer, enabling each family in the tribe to move on to a new house every seven days until it is time for all of them to return to the Stone Desert.



RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

Although the Wind Lords are undoubtedly powerful beings, only Boreas has the status of a deity and thus has actual worshippers among the Tamasheq. The jinnborn generally don't worship gods; instead they honor their patrons, the jinn, but these immortal beings do not grant divine spells. Eshu, god of travelers and nomads, is revered by many Tamasheq; Vanhu Dewabi is led by Dizsa Zhalar, one of the god's priests.

Other Tamasheq follow Kwansi, Horus, or Djyy. The Spider Prophet is Kwansi's highest-ranking priest and receives revelations from the desert god in the Oracle Shrine beneath Inkabut on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for the Dominion.

Traveling temples, mobile shrines dedicated to Horus, often accompany Tamasheq caravans in the Crescent Desert. The Desert Falcon's great temple, Khepri Khnum, stands on a mountaintop in the Chelamite range. This huge open space is home to Horus's army of 10,000 birds. Its priests are beautiful **harpies** with fantastic plumage; some are **owl harpies** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 246).

Holy sites dedicated to Djyy are interspersed along the Tamasheq Climb ley line in the Stone Desert and along the Granite Road in the Chelamite Mountains. These places are often caves with springs or streams running through them that offer shelter and respite to Tamasheq caravans.

COMMERCE

Trade in the Dominion is centered on its hub, the wondrous market of Abeu Plaza in Kel Azjer, where goods from all over Midgard and beyond are for sale. Tamasheq and jinnborn caravans travel west from the hidden city to Hartani Bay and around the Stone Desert, or east to the cities of Inkabut, Cindass, and Roshgazi, transporting fabulous carpets, precious metals and gemstones, and exotic goods. From here, many caravans continue east, following the Tamasheq Trail through the Crescent Desert to Saph-Saph and distant Corremel before exchanging slaves and dates for salt at the Khephani Salt Flats or the Ghatazi Salt Pits on their return trip to Kel Azjer.

Until recently, outsiders were discouraged from visiting the Dominion, but the Wind Lords' policy has relaxed in the past five years, leading to an influx of foreign merchants to the souks of Inkabut from as far afield as Capleon, Barsella, and the Kingdoms of Salt and Steel. Most travel overland from Cindass, but a few arrive in airships powered by bound air elementals or djinn.

KEL AZJER

North of the Chelamite Mountains, on a high mesa, lies the fabulous city of Kel Azjer, hidden capital of the Tamasheq. In stark contrast to the Tamasheq's reputation as simple herders and camel traders, the city is filled with golden-spired towers, wide plazas, and bustling workshops of skilled leatherworkers, vrilsmiths, martial orders, and elemental scholars.

The Tamasheq Climb ley line passes through the center of the city, enabling Kel Azjer's citizens to open doorways to other planes.

Palace of the Spirits

This ornate and sprawling palace holds amenities for mortals and spirits alike. Gold, jewels, and other precious materials adorn practically every surface. Guarded by ever-vigilant imajaghans, as well as by nature spirits, the palace has never been robbed. Or, at least, the Tamasheq have never admitted to such.

The palace's throne room contains three dish-shaped thrones of jade on a golden dais. The Tamasheq designed these thrones for the avatars of the Wind Lords, should they ever visit. By all accounts, this hasn't happened in any living Tamasheq's lifetime; in the stories of old, however, the Wind Lords regularly sought respite in the palace. And so the Tamasheq keep these thrones polished, patiently waiting for their patrons' return.

Five steps below the platform is a simple marble chair. Here, the current Hurat of Kel Azjer, Balla ag-Intamalou, holds court. Although technically the leader of all the Tamasheq, the Hurat is really only responsible for the rule of Kel Azjer, deferring to the Spider Prophet for decisions on the defense of the Dominion and spiritual matters.

Abeu Plaza

At the center of Kel Azjer, a market runs day and night below the four ebony arches that stretch over this golden marbled plaza. Goods from every corner of the world find their way here, including scrimshaw from the Northlands, poisons and herbs from Kush, porcelain from Far Cathay, slaves from the Western Ocean islands, and even cast-off experiments from Demon Mountain; all of that and more await under the canvas coverings of six hundred stalls, shops, and carts. Abeu Plaza also has two permanent portals to the planar commerce hub called the Marketplace (*Midgard Worldbook*, p. 47), so it is not unusual to see celestials, fiends, and fey mingling with the Tamasheq.

Vril Mines

Below the streets' golden cobblestones hides Kel Azjer's greatest secret: extensive deposits of a key mineral used in vril magic. Faded runes and markings in some of these locations seem to indicate that the mineral must have been

traded between the Dominion and the island nation of Ankeshel before the latter fell.

The entire mesa is threaded through with veins of this rare metallic ore, called vril stone, which the artificers and mages of the city use to power wonders unseen since the fall of Ankeshel. Kel Azjer fiercely guards this industry, but some smuggling still occurs, creating a thriving black market for the ore. (See *Midgard Worldbook*, p. 258, for more information on vril technology.)

Towers of the Wind Lords

Nestled atop lofty mountain peaks near Kel Azjer are the four black towers of the Wind Lords. The Tamasheq believe that the Wind Lords know everything that has ever been uttered aloud, and those who climb to the top of one of their towers will be granted great knowledge.

Three of the towers are still inhabited by the South, East, and West Winds, although they are rarely seen. The Wind Lords do not receive visitors, but petitioners are permitted to climb as far as the bases of their towers to leave gifts. Boreas's broken tower on Kuoma Peak was abandoned by the North Wind following his exile and has proven to be a tempting destination for those seeking obscure lore.

To ascend Kuoma Peak, would-be knowledge hunters must first get past the vicious elementals lurking in the caverns and tunnels beneath the frost-covered

mountainside, then defeat the finest imajaghans from the Vanhu Owey, Vanhu Adagh, and Vanhu Dinnij tribes to reach the top of the tower, which lies open to the elements. It is said that petitioners who can endure the brutal cold for a night and a day will hear the answers they seek in the howling wind.

INKABUT

The Dominion's second largest city is its only large settlement as far as most outsiders are concerned. Situated just inland from the eastern coast of the Stone Desert and north of the former Moon Kingdom, Inkabut is home to the enigmatic Spider Prophet who safeguards the Dominion's borders and commands its armies. The city's gates are continually busy with caravans arriving from Cindass and beyond, and its narrow, maze-like streets are lively from dawn to dusk.

The Casbah

Built on top of a large, rocky hill, the Casbah is Inkabut's walled citadel, consisting of a central keep called Cloudstretch Tower, a 150-foot-tall watchtower with a commanding view of the desert; the barracks of the Amghid, the Dominion's elite fighting force; and at least one secret entrance to the Spider Prophet's palace. Zegura,





a powerful earth spirit, inhabits the hill; anyone who intends to visit the Casbah must first convince the ornery spirit they have a right to be there.

Citadel of the Spider Prophet

Beneath the rock of the Casbah lies the underground citadel of the Spider Prophet. The inverted fortress is guarded by Tamasheq imajaghans, who train here in the arts of war and protect its entryways. At the heart of its twisting corridors is the Oracle Shrine, a temple to the chaotic desert god Kwansi, where the prophet performs divinations. The deepest level of the palace holds the dungeons where Tamasheq and jinnborn suspected of being Mharoti spies are imprisoned until the Spider Prophet is satisfied of their innocence. Only three prisoners have ever been released; some have been held here for decades.

The Grand Square

The center of Inkabut is dominated by the Grand Square, a huge plaza. Anthropomorphic statues of the Wind Lords stand on the western, eastern, and southern sides of the square; an empty fourth plinth on the northern side symbolizes the treachery of Boreas. By day, the Grand Square is home to water sellers, snake charmers, and performing monkeys, but as night falls, food stands appear, serving roasted sheep's heads, snail soup, and spicy meat stew to hungry diners who congregate at communal tables. Once everyone has eaten, the storytellers ply their trade in the square, enchanting the crowds with their tales of wonder.

One of the most popular entertainers is Tazzarit Ahmadi, an earth jinnborn **mage**, who has become somewhat eccentric, if not actually mad, from spending too long in the city. Tazzarit punctuates her stories with magical pyrotechnics and other special effects, sometimes carelessly singeing the eyebrows of her listeners.

Adventurers who want to learn the tale of the legendary tomb raider Meskhenet or how to sneak inside the castle of Tarkun the Dessicated would be wise to seek her out—just don't stand too near the front!

The Souks

Encompassing a large area southwest of the Grand Square, Inkabut's souks form a confusing network of narrow, covered streets and cramped alleyways. Each souk is dedicated to selling a particular kind of item, from slippers, spices, and lamps to musical instruments, leather goods, or books. It's easy to lose one's bearings in this area, but luckily there are dozens of urchins willing to escort you to your destination—or to their uncle's shop—for a few coppers.

Famous Merchants of the Souks

A few of the most well-known traders in Inkabut's souks and bazaars are detailed below.

Himilcar. This minotaur merchant-captain plies his trade between Inkabut and Capleon in his airship, *Wind's Fury*. Himilcar buys wine, olive oil, and spices in Capleon or Kaptaria, then sells them in the Dominion, where he purchases carpets and gemstones for the return trip. *Wind's Fury* is powered by a **djinni** named Dharal, who was tricked into serving Himilcar for 1,001 days. Himilcar is looking to hire guards to protect him from the jinnborn of the Sand Devils tribe, who are determined to free Dharal.

Iken Ag Azimi. Iken is a loquacious Tamasheq carpet seller with a missing left arm, the result of an altercation with an angry gnoll. Buying a carpet from Iken is a lengthy process, involving several glasses of mint tea and much exposition on the origins of each carpet, but his shop in the souk is well known for the quality of its merchandise. Iken sometimes has magic carpets for sale.

Memsul the Water Seller. Clad in bright red robes and wearing a red broad-brimmed hat, Memsul is a lugubrious water jinnborn with a well-weathered blue face. He rings a bell to announce his presence, and sells brass cups filled with cool, refreshing water drawn from a leather water skin strapped to his back. A cup costs a pricey 5 sp, but the water has invigorating magical properties. Memsul fills his skin from a spring in the Gardens of Tranquility that is inhabited by a nature spirit. A cup of the water removes 1 level of exhaustion from the drinker.

Silyuna Ghazi. A golden-skinned fire jinnborn with eyes that blaze red, Silyuna was cast out from her tribe for disrespecting its patron jinn. She sells ornate brass lamps, copper urns, orichalcum rings, and crystal vials with an asking price of 1,000 gp or more. These skillfully crafted items are inscribed with words of binding in one of the four elemental tongues—Auran, Aquan, Ignan, or Terran—and are designed to be used in summoning and imprisoning genies. When one of these items is used as a material component for a *planar binding* spell to force a genie into service, the genie makes its saving throw with disadvantage. Two constantly squabbling genies, a **djinni** and an **efreeti**, guard Silyuna's shop. The wily Silyuna tricked them into serving her for a year and a day, and they still have six months to go.

Tamu Ult Abu. A troubled Tamasheq spice merchant, her hands stained yellow by saffron, runs a stall in the bazaar that is a riot of bright colors with pyramids of many spices and herbs piled up in wooden trays. Tamu obtains her spices from as far away as the Spice Coast, Sudvall, and Khandiria. She recently suffered a big loss when a caravan bringing a valuable shipment was whisked away by an angry wind spirit and is offering a *carpet of flying* as

a reward for its recovery. Characters willing to undertake the mission must travel to the wind spirit's lair high in the Chelamite Mountains and either find a way to placate the spirit or defeat it in battle.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Ancient ruins, perilous badlands, and cool oases are scattered throughout the Stone Desert and the Dominion of the Wind Lords.

The Granite Teeth

Long ago, the land between the Chelamite Mountains and the western coast was fractured by a cataclysmic blow, creating the broken, stony terrain known as the Granite Teeth. Scholars among the Tamasheq argue about the cause; theories include a rock falling from the sky, a godling crashing to earth, and the influence of a mighty being from another plane. Whatever their origin, the Granite Teeth are an inhospitable badlands that has been corrupted by dark powers. In these twisting corridors, **sathaq worms** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 337) and other abominations lurk. Occasionally, these creatures venture out to prey on passing Tamasheq caravans.

Harmattan

This natural stone outcrop rises nearly 100 feet above the rugged landscape. Carved into each side of the formation in worn Tamasheq script are the ancient laws of the Dominion, as decreed centuries ago by the Wind Lords. These laws include the names of the nature spirits responsible for looking after each mountaintop, valley, cave, stream, and spring, as well as pronouncements on the routes that each Tamasheq vanhu must follow across the Stone Desert, and the number of camels permitted in a caravan (one hundred forty-four).

The outcrop has the same name as the nature spirit bound to it. When Harmattan talks to visitors, its voice booms out from inside the rock. It answers questions about the Dominion's laws and its nature spirits in a ponderous, gravelly voice.

Hartani Bay

Along the western coast of the Dominion, the steep-sided Hartani Bay offers the best harbor in the Stone Desert. Although the area has no permanent settlement, the beach at the bay's cove is a popular place for Tamasheq and jinnborn tribes to rendezvous with merchant ships traveling from the islands in the Western Ocean, or pirates with slaves to sell, so nomads are often camped here. Meeting on the beach is not without risk, however, since it is dangerously close to the Infernal Fortress of Succhabar, and the cultists sometimes send a **stryx** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 369) here to watch for visitors.

Succhabar

Centuries ago, the place now known as the Infernal Fortress of Succhabar was the stronghold of a dao noble named Kaseyeen the Illustrious, who ruled a small fiefdom in the Stone Desert until he was banished to the Plane of Earth by Shemral, the West Wind. Today, the aboveground part of Kaseyeen's stone fortress lies in ruins, but the extensive tunnels beneath the castle are more or less intact. These chambers and passages are home to a demonic cult dedicated to **Alquam, Demon Lord of Night** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 84).

The cult is led by a **darakhul shadowmancer** (*Creature Codex*, p. 173) named Idren, who has gathered a group of around sixty Tamasheq and jinnborn **cultists** and **cult fanatics** to pay homage to the Hunter by spilling the blood of human captives on his black glass altar. Their prayers have not gone unanswered: Alquam has sent a **lunar devil** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 110) and a pair of **karakuras** (*Creature Codex*, p. 235) to Succhabar from his palace in the Eleven Hells to bolster the cult, and his demonic blessings have created the following effects in the vicinity of the fortress:

Owls and other nocturnal beasts within 5 miles of Succhabar are enraged and hostile, attacking intruders individually and in swarms.

Within 1 mile of Succhabar, all light sources except artifacts shed light out to only half the usual distance.

Haunting music sounds throughout the ruins. Creatures that can hear the music must make a successful DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become afflicted with short-term madness. The cultists and other inhabitants of Succhabar are accustomed to the music and are immune to its effects. Once a creature has successfully saved against the music, it is also immune.

Visitors to the ruined fortress aboveground are bound to encounter the black-feathered **owl harpies** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 246) and **stryx** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 369) that watch over the entrance to the subterranean areas. Characters who venture into the tunnels below will face Idren, dozens of cultists, and their fiendish allies. If they survive, they might be able to find Kaseyeen's hidden cache of magic gemstones.

Jelle-Anda

Now a coastal ruin, Jelle-Anda was the first city founded by Ankeshelian refugees fleeing their fallen kingdom. It was destroyed nearly 2,000 years ago by the angry Wind Lord Boreas, who smote down every last citizen and razed the city to the ground.

Little remains of Jelle-Anda's magnificent domed buildings, but that doesn't stop explorers from digging in the rubble in the hope of finding lost Ankeshelian artifacts. A tribe of **desert trolls** (*Creature Codex*, p. 356) lives here,



occupying chambers they have tunneled out inside the sand; several of them are armed with functioning vril weapons and armor scavenged from the ruins.

The most exciting potential discovery lies in the water just offshore beneath the cliffs. Covered in barnacles and coral and teeming with sharks and other marine life, an ancient, vril-powered submersible rests on the seabed. Its vril batteries (*Midgard Worldbook*, p. 258) are long dead, but an expert artificer might be able to fit the vessel with fully charged replacements and get it moving again.

Oases of the Stone Desert

The Tamasheq and the jinnborn rely on the oases scattered throughout the Stone Desert to provide them with fresh water, shelter from the winds, and shade from the pitiless sun.

Al Naheel

Situated on the Tamasheq Climb ley line, this oasis is in a narrow canyon crossed by a natural bridge. Several springs, each bound to a different nature spirit, burst out of the rock to feed a pool and a small stream that flows down through the valley.

The stone bridge is 20 feet wide, 10 feet thick, and 150 feet long. Its proximity to the ley line has distorted the effect of gravity in the area: someone can walk straight up the canyon wall, traverse the underside of the bridge while walking upside down, and then walk down the wall on the opposite side. Tamasheq and jinnborn children find this route endlessly amusing.

Gregale

This oasis near the western coast is home to a friendly water spirit, also called Gregale, who lives in a deep pool surrounded by small pomegranate trees and date palms. Although most people move on after visiting the oasis, a small settlement of a hundred or so Tamasheq have given up their nomadic lifestyle to farm the fertile ground around the pool. These inhabitants raise goats and grow fruit and olives, all of which they trade with visiting caravans. In recent days, the desiccated corpses of several goats and a couple of farmers have been found among the olive groves—the work of a band of **accursed defilers** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 12) who have entered the area.

Jeshima

A distinctive rock pillar, resembling a raised arm ending in a clenched fist, rises out of the landscape to mark the location of this popular oasis. Nearly 300 feet tall, the pillar is sometimes used as a perch by giant vultures that come here to feed on the bodies of Tamasheq nomads when fighting breaks out. Such battles are not unusual—Jeshima lies on the caravan route used by Vanhu Owey, one of the tribes that serves Boreas, as well as several tribes loyal to the other Wind Lords.

Jeshima, also the name of the rock spirit bound to the pillar, finds violence at the oasis distasteful. If combat occurs, the furious spirit will animate the pillar, which then swings its giant rocky fist to punish both sides for their lack of respect. Treat Jeshima as a **Huge earth elemental** with maximum hit points that deals double damage with its slam attack.

Ziss

The fantastical shapes of a dozen sandstone formations are clustered around this large oasis, which offers respite to travelers in the bleak northern part of the Dominion. From a distance the weird pinnacles resemble the towers of a faerie castle—and this is appropriate, as the residents of the oasis include a handful of **dau** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 70). Regular visitors to Ziss are accustomed to the mischievous antics of these fey, but first-timers might be caught off guard when they are invited into a dau home inside a sandstone spire for a glass of mint tea and are expected to follow the dau's peculiar rules of etiquette. If things get out of hand, Yasul, the rock spirit bound to the tallest of the spires, might intervene, but it is notoriously slow in waking up.

Tirag Ajdir

South of the Jeshima oasis lies a network of web-shrouded canyons patrolled by **Stygian fat-tailed scorpions** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 340), **sand spiders** (p. 364), and other deadly arachnids. An opening in the side of a cliff is the entrance to an ancient desert temple known as Tirag Ajdir. This is the lair of Chelamma, the **Queen of Scorpions** (see page 286).

Once a powerful member of the animal lords, the fey queen was cast into exile by her peers for her many bloodthirsty deeds. Her pride bruised, she spends her days plotting revenge against the other animal lords and anyone they hold dear and manufacturing deadly poisons to spread mayhem and murder throughout the Southlands.

A cult known as the Aculeus Edge has sprung up to worship the queen in ecstatic rituals involving blood, the drinking of poison, and the sacrifice of captured prisoners. About fifty **cultists** and **cult fanatics** live alongside their mistress in Tirag Ajdir, helping her make poisons and paying her homage.

Members of the Aculeus Edge are Tamasheq and jinnborn who were seduced by the queen's promises of power and magic and have long since abandoned their tribal traditions. Groups of cultists travel to nearby oases to sell poisons and acids to nefarious middlemen, who in turn sell them to assassins' guilds, members of the Hand of Nakresh, and other underworld organizations. On the return trip, the cultists try to snatch a few of their kinfolk to serve as unwilling participants in the next bloody ritual in the temple. Sometimes they bring back a Tamasheq chief or

imajghan—the queen enjoys taking her time killing these prisoners with slow-acting but excruciating venoms.

The canyons surrounding Tirag Ajdir are warped by the presence of the Queen of Scorpions in the following ways:

Within 5 miles of the temple, the Queen of Scorpions can choose to see or hear through the senses of any arachnid in the area and can speak through such a creature while doing so.

Arachnids within 5 miles of Tirag Ajdir have advantage on all Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide.

The Queen of Scorpions leaves no physical evidence of her passage when within 1 mile of the temple unless she wishes to. In addition, creatures and plants native to her domain don't cause her harm or cost her extra movement when she moves through their area.

If the Queen of Scorpions dies, these effects fade over the course of 10 days.

Tomb of Nakresh

This ancient temple-tomb to the dark god Nakresh the Many-Handed is built into the side of a rocky cliff a week's travel southwest from Cindass. Its whereabouts were unknown for a century until a rockslide caused by two battling nature spirits uncovered a pair of sandstone gates carved with the face of a grinning monkey.

The tomb is over 1,000 years old and is said to be full of fiendish traps and wondrous treasures plundered by servants of the demonic god of thieves. A century ago, a renowned explorer and devotee of Nakresh named Meskhenet discovered the existence of the temple late in her life. Knowing death was close, she went inside the tomb, intending it to be her final resting place. A rockfall moments later buried the entrance, again concealing it from the outside world.

Meskhenet was surprised to find another explorer inside the tomb. She slew that trespasser in an epic magical battle and found out afterward that he had been researching a way to preserve himself after death. After taking up his work, Meskhenet transformed herself into a lich before she succumbed to old age. She remains inside the tomb to this day.

Those who intend to plunder the tomb must not only face Meskhenet and the place's many deadly traps and guardians, but might draw attention from Nakresh himself.

ruined cities of the moon kingdom

Around 1,500 years ago, minotaurs from the eastern end of the Middle Sea settled in the Lands of Wind and Sand and founded the cities of Roshgazi, Cindass, Derrada, and Kadralthu. These places housed both minotaurs and their human allies, the Qamari, cousins of the Tamasheq. Some 460 years ago, the cities of the west broke away from the rule of the Queen of the Minotaurs in Kyprion and declared their own independent realm, the Moon Kingdom of Tes-Qamar. The "Golden Pair" of King Kaprys and Queen Melenni readied themselves for a martial response from the eastern minotaurs, but this reaction never materialized. Instead, the Queen in the East, as she was later styled, strove (and failed) to win them back through peaceful overtures, and then ended that effort when she became occupied by the growing threat from the dragons.

The Moon Kingdom prospered until the Mharoti Empire attacked 300 years ago. The dragons razed Derrada and Kadralthu to the ground and destroyed much of the great coastal cities of Roshgazi and Cindass. The minotaurs fled across the sea to Capleon, Triolo, and Kyprion, but not all arrived safely. The famed "Lost Fleet" of Roshgazi disappeared in the mists before it reached Capleon, and entire minotaur clans were assumed to have perished in the disaster.

Now, affairs have come full circle—with Kyprion under threat from the Dragon Empire, a steady stream of minotaurs is returning to Cindass, where the dynamic Emir Palana Tellisha is rebuilding the ruined city. In addition, four ships from the Lost Fleet have recently made landfall at Roshgazi—three centuries after vanishing at sea. The ships' crews and passengers do not appear to have aged, and they have no memory of the intervening years. See "Return of the Lost Fleet," page 82, for details.

CINDASS

Once a beautiful port famous for its deep-water harbor and fine marble buildings, Cindass was the northernmost city of the Moon Kingdom. Much of it was reduced to rubble by the Dragon Empire's attack, but that was not the end for Cindass. Many of those who survived the attack refused to abandon their homes and remained behind to start rebuilding.

Now, under the wise leadership of Emir Palana Tellisha, the city's population has grown to around 15,000—half of them minotaurs—and trade with the minotaur strongholds of Kyprion, Triolo, and Capleon is thriving, so much so that the descendants of many other Cindass families are returning to their former homes.

CINDASS



CINDASS

Ruler: Emir Palana Tellisha
(LN female minotaur **mage**)

Important Personages: Ulaak Red
(LE male minotaur **war priest** of Baal, *Creature Codex*, p. 411); Betron Ya, High Priest of Baal-Hotep (LN male minotaur **first servant** of Baal-Hotep; see page 282); Yllisu Whitetail, High Priestess of Hecate (LN female minotaur **apostle** of Hecate; see page 281); Sebbella Kha-Ptalem (LN female dwarf **first servant** of Pthah); Jinda Shaba-Tenships, Captain of the Cindass Fleet (LN male minotaur **gladiator**); Hamid Mareshi, First Warmage (LN male jinnborn **battle mage**, *Creature Codex*, p. 397)

Population: 15,000 (7,800 minotaurs, 4,700 humans, 1,500 jinnborn, 500 gnolls, 500 dwarves)

Great Gods: Baal-Hotep, Isis, Pthah, Sabateus (Hecate), Yemaja

Trade Goods: fish, millet, reeds, salt, spices, white marble



New walls have been built, the harbor has been repaired, and a new labyrinth has been constructed by Cindass's pragmatic and capable minotaur and Qamari inhabitants. Glistening marble statues of former rulers and heroes of the Moon Kingdom stand on plinths throughout the city. In Tes-Qamar Plaza, a magnificent statue of the Golden Pair, some thirty feet tall and carved by the master sculptor Ashtzath Surechisel, honors the independent Moon Kingdom's founding monarchs.

The merchant-captains of Cindass transport salt, spice, and marble north to the Seven Cities, accepting timber, amber, and pearls in exchange for sale in Inkabut, Saph-Saph, and beyond. In the last few years, merchants of Kyprion, Triolo, and even Barsella have established a presence in Cindass to take advantage of the overland trade with Inkabut and the desert cities. The foreigners have built secure stone warehouses, nicknamed the Strongboxes, to store their trade goods. The Strongboxes are a tempting target for local cells of the Hand of Nakresh, a cult dedicated to the demon-god of wizards and thieves.

Cindass's fleet, under the command of Captain Jinda Shaba-Tenships, has been strengthened, and a cabal of wizards has been attached to the navy, led by First Warmage Hamid Mareshi, a water jinnborn. Returning minotaurs have brought knowledge of labyrinth magic with them, reintroducing Cindass's mages to ancient magical traditions that they have combined with elemental spells learned from the jinnborn. The emir hopes that Cindass will be strong enough one day to launch a long-overdue revenge attack on the Mharoti.

Shrine of the Maze Builder

One of the first sections of the city to be restored was the shrine of Ptah, whose role as an architect to the gods makes him highly revered in the city. The shrine's new timbers hold up a beautiful roof of blue-glazed tile, and hymns of praise echo from its walls. Architects, stonemasons, carpenters, and smiths all bring offerings. Ptah's stature among the faithful of the city is rising rapidly, while the worship of Takhar has declined somewhat. A sacred mithral anvil and a set of mason's tools of pure gold are among the shrine's altar implements. These tools and more mundane ones are wielded by the young dwarf priestess Sebbella Kha-Ptalem, from Sebbek Sobor, who is devoting herself to the city's rebuilding. She is Emir Palana's right hand in the planning of new walls and the refurbishing of old ones.

Old Labyrinth

Those parts of Cindass still in ruins are dangerous and sometimes attract the attention of brave or foolish adventurers. Located beyond the new city walls, the Old Labyrinth is one such place; it dates back to the founding of the city 1,500 years ago. A perilous place inhabited by feral gnolls, **owl harpies** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 246), and a pair of devious **gypsosphinxes** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 359), the ruined labyrinth is rumored to hold the lost treasures of Cindass's former rulers. Somewhere inside the maze is the Chamber of Twelve Lamentations, the resting place of the Golden Ark of Herosh, a gold-plated acacia chest that is the subject of much minotaur lore and many tales of overwhelming riches. Finding the ark might not be as difficult as finding one's way out again, and looters often learn the hard way that the labyrinth is warded against teleportation magic.

ROSHGAZI

Until its destruction by the Mharoti Empire, Roshgazi was the capital of the minotaur kingdom of Tes-Qamar and the center of western minotaur culture. Today it is a sprawling ruin, dominated by its iconic landmark: the continually changing First Labyrinth.

Three centuries ago, the Mharoti dragons attacked Roshgazi under cover of night, hoping to destroy the *orb of dragonkind* that the minotaurs supposedly possessed. The orb was said to be capable of dominating not only dragons, but also the scions of Mharot himself. Whether this orb existed is unconfirmed, but the dragons were not about to leave things to chance. Over fifteen days a terrible battle played out as a score of dragons and two legions of dragonborn and kobolds attacked the city and burned its vaunted Queen's Navy. Once the Mharoti had breached the walls, the invaders poured in to sack the city and enslave the survivors. When they left, they filled in the wells and destroyed the city's aqueduct.

Now, around 2,000 or so souls make their homes in Roshgazi, where nearly 100,000 once lived. Some are explorers from the Seven Cities, seeking to plunder gold from the deepest tombs of the necropolis, while others are Qamari; the rest are flesh-hungry **ravening minotaurs** (see page 271).

But there is fresh hope in Roshgazi. After three centuries lost at sea, Senator Evadne, master of labyrinth magic, has returned to the city with ships from the Lost Fleet, and she believes she knows how to repair the damaged *Heart of Roshgazi*. If she succeeds, more minotaurs will surely return to Roshgazi as they have done in Cindass.

Much of Roshgazi lies in ruins, and the magic of the First Labyrinth discourages investigation of the buildings that remain intact. Even so, the city has a number of sites of interest to explorers.

The First Labyrinth and the Heart of Roshgazi

The most well-known landmark in Roshgazi is the First Labyrinth, called Mazuli Sul in the minotaurs' tongue. This place was used for trials and executions in the heyday of the kingdom. Now, each day, the crumbling magical maze alters its configuration above and below ground in unpredictable ways, as the mad artifact known as the *Heart of Roshgazi* vacillates between its two extremely different personalities. This decline in the maze's functioning has a cascading effect on the sacred labyrinths in other minotaur cities such as Cindass, Capleon, Susa and Vespras, because all minotaur mazes are linked through the plane of the Great Labyrinth. The plane is a bewildering mix of endless extradimensional corridors and rooms connecting the sacred labyrinths of the minotaurs. Wizards who have mastered labyrinth magic (*Deep Magic*, p. 304) can open portals to the plane of the Great Labyrinth to summon guardians, take refuge, or travel vast distances between cities.

The *Heart of Roshgazi* was a gift from Hecate to one of the city's finest poet-wizards when the Moon Kingdom was at its height. The intelligent artifact takes the form of a glass



sphere with a tiny model of Roshgazi inside, and it rests in a small domed chamber that changes location within the Labyrinth each sunrise. The crystal sphere is marred by a long, hairline crack.

Legends of old state that Roshgazi would be safe as long as the *Heart* remained undamaged. Just before the Mharoti attack on the city, a captured dragonkin spy was thrown into the labyrinth. Using a smuggled magical hammer, the saboteur found the chamber of the *Heart*, and cracked the globe before its guardians killed him. The damage was done, the *Heart* was driven insane as a result, and eventually, all of Roshgazi fell.

Now the *Heart* shifts between two disparate personalities. Sometimes it is the benevolent “Poet” that tries to bring people in through its maze-gates to help rebuild the city. Just as often it is the homicidal “Broken,” a personality that thinks the city is still under attack. Broken seeks to kill any “strangers” in the labyrinth and reshapes itself to send the blood-crazed ravaging minotaurs that walk its halls in the direction of any new arrivals.

The New Moon Clan, a small group of minotaurs led by Arous-ok-Hebb (LN female minotaur **moon priestess**; *Creature Codex*, p. 267), enters the labyrinth every few years to heal the *Heart* temporarily when its madness

becomes critical by bathing it in the light from a crystal called the *light of reason*. Broken’s paranoia makes this very dangerous, but Poet does its best to protect them. Hopefully, the arrival of Senator Evadne will lead to a more permanent solution.

Crushed Temple of Hecate

Once a grand three-sided pyramid temple devoted to Hecate’s three aspects, this beloved house of the Lady of Darkness was one of her oldest places of worship. During the Mharoti attack, the minotaurs brought down a great black dragon with a ballista shot, and the beast crashed into the temple. Between the force of the impact and its death throes, the dragon destroyed two-thirds of the structure and sprayed the interior with its acidic breath, melting both stone and wood. The collapse killed nearly all the temple’s priestesses, and many of the temple’s relics still lie beneath the rubble.

Two Harbors

As the common Southlands saying goes, “A minotaur’s second home is upon the sea,” and nowhere did those words ring truer than at the Grand Harbor of Roshgazi. Separated from the open water by a stone seawall and

divided into a Market Harbor and a Lunar Harbor for the Queen's Navy, the Grand Harbor was an engineering masterpiece. It held one hundred military ships in great sheds, with drydock space for another forty. The Market Harbor opened directly into the Trade Plaza, allowing goods to be quickly transferred from a ship's hold to the merchants' bazaar.

Today, the seawall has been destroyed and only blasted ruins remain of the naval facility. Its ropes, timbers, and tools were looted long ago, but a few fishing boats and nets are stored in one of the sheds that once housed the queen's warships. But as the city is slowly being rebuilt, a new jetty has been built at the Market Harbor, and the Trade Plaza has reopened, allowing ships from Capleon and Cindass to dock here again.

Moonrise Amphitheater

In ancient times, many philosophers admired the Senate of Roshgazi, calling it one of the world's best examples of an equitable and just government. The elders of Roshgazi ruled wisely and well, meeting each day in the splendid Moonrise Amphitheater. The senate's final session ended horribly in a blaze of dragon breath; the stage and half the stands were flattened and scorched by dragon fire.

Hall of Cinders

The Roshgazi took great pride in their necropolis, which served both as a garden of contemplation and a subterranean hall to house cremated remains. Built into the side of a hill, the Hall of Cinders consisted of a long, wide tunnel with side passages and niches, each holding the ashes of the deceased; some large chambers contained several generations of certain families. The area above this vast structure was a well-tended garden, filled with statuary and reflecting pools.

During the sack of Roshgazi, terrible atrocities took place in the necropolis, including the slaughter of groups of children and their caretakers who had fled there for safety. Most of the tombs and ossuaries were ransacked, or blasted into rubble. Recent reports from intrepid delvers claim that a few of the necropolis's deepest tombs still bear golden plates embossed with the histories and tales of the minotaurs' dead heroes. Many of these older tombs are protected by active guardians and defensive magic.

Temple of Baal

Stories of antiquity referred to the Temple of Baal as the Bronze House of Fire and Sorrow, and indeed it had an unparalleled reputation as a place of sacrifice and godly communion. A few historians claimed that the minotaurs sacrificed prisoners of war, criminals, and—in the most extreme cases—their own children to slake the god's thirst for power.

After the siege of Roshgazi, the Mharoti dragons stripped the metal from the walls of the Bronze House and looted its riches. The draconic general Ghurlza al-Sumani personally shattered the great idol of Baal, saving its head for her own treasure hoard and sending trophy pieces back to all the empire's other great lords. The minotaurs still bitterly bemoan the loss of this holy artifact, which now rests in the temple of Baal in Harkesh, the Mharoti capital.

DERRADA

After the Mharoti dragons razed the minotaur city of Derrada, there was almost nothing left of the place. Today, Derrada is a small settlement around an oasis on the southeastern edge of the Stone Desert where the original city once stood. The village is essentially a fortified caravanserai adjacent to a large pool surrounded by shady trees.

The pool is home to a powerful nature spirit named Loundja, who came to the oasis after the fall of Derrada to discover that the dragonkin had poisoned the water and salted the surrounding land. Furious, Loundja purified the pool and restored the earth to health, allowing trees, plants, and animals to thrive once again amid the rubble and debris.

Over the years, Tamasheq and jinborn nomads were allowed to rest at the oasis during their travels through the Stone Desert as long as they showed proper respect to Loundja. After a decade or so, a permanent settlement began to emerge, built by a tribe of water jinborn who used stone blocks from the ruins to construct a caravanserai for protecting travelers from gnoll raiders and other dangers.

First-time visitors to Derrada are taken aback when Loundja manifests from the pool and delivers a stern lecture on how to behave while at the oasis. They must promise to respect the jinborn, other travelers, and the animals, trees, and plants before they are allowed to stay. Those who wander among the palm trees might stumble across a bronze trinket, a piece of broken pottery, or a chunk of stone from fallen Derrada—the few signs that a city once occupied this place.

KADRALHU

The ruins of Kadralthu lie in the northern Mukupe Sahel, the arid buffer zone between the Stone and Crescent deserts. Like Derrada, Kadralthu was razed by the Dragon Empire, and much of what's left today lies beneath the shifting desert sands.

The Tamasheq and the jinborn avoid Kadralthu, which has a fell reputation—too many of their ranks have died while exploring the ruins, victims of the monsters that

perilous sites of the western desert

Although the map suggests that the vast expanse of desert west of Saph-Saph and the Howler's Road ley line is empty, there are ancient ruined cities, wondrous valleys, and faerie castles hidden amid the dunes, awaiting discovery by those who know where to look.

CASTLE HALCYON

Travelers in the western Crescent Desert sometimes catch a glimpse of a castle of white marble shimmering in the distance as they emerge from a sandstorm. This is Castle Halcyon, the home of a fallen fey lord known as **Tarkun the Desiccated** (see page 287).

dwelling here. **Sandwyrms** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 334) lie in wait below the surface, with only the ribcage-shaped bones on their backs exposed, hoping to lure prey to its doom.

Dune mimics (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 162) lurk here too, ready to engulf their victims.

Explorers are drawn to Kadralthu by stories of the legendary treasures of the minotaurs who hid themselves in the city's Spiral Labyrinth to avoid capture or death at the hands of the dragonkin.

The entrance to the Spiral Labyrinth is marked by a pair of giant-sized bull's horns carved from marble that stand above a flight of weathered stone steps leading down under the earth. Beyond lie the near-endless corridors and chambers of the maze, which contain fiendish traps, animated bronze statues, and a group of **lost minotaurs** (*Creature Codex*, p. 268), the undead forms of the minotaurs who shut themselves inside and failed to escape.

These foul creatures are led by Baltsar, the city's former ruler, a lost minotaur with maximum hit points who wields the *Labrys of the Wyrmslayer*, a +2 greataxe that deals an extra 3d6 damage to dragons and grants its wielder advantage on saving throws against a dragon's breath weapon.



Once a well-respected fey lord, Tarkun fell victim to his hubris when he attempted a coup against a fey lady. When the coup failed, he was stripped of his power and banished to the depths of the Crescent Desert to wither and perish. Close to death, Tarkun seized hold of the ley lines flowing through the desert. Although the effort marred his once-beautiful form, he was able to survive by harnessing the power of the wastelands.

Tarkun draws strength from the desert and cannot move beyond its borders, either by mundane or magical means. Trapped within its confines, the fey lord has constructed a castle of sand in the deep desert, shrouded in illusions so that it appears to be a palace of white marble surrounded by palm trees. Here, Tarkun is gathering an army of **apaxrusl** (see page 268), constructs created by using demonic magic on corpses and the desert sands. Some of these foul creatures ride on tamed **sanddrift drakes** (see page 273); Tarkun himself rides a **zalikum** (see page 278) named Hevni.

The fey lord welcomes visitors to Castle Halcyon if they pander to him with excessive flattery and splendid gifts. If guests fail to show him the proper respect, Tarkun becomes angry. Gaps appear in his beautiful frame, providing glimpses of his shriveled and marred true form, while the illusions shrouding the castle fade to reveal a sand-swept and ruined desert fortress. Woe betide those who remain in the castle when Tarkun's full fury is unleashed.

KADRANA

Deep in the southwestern wastelands, the top of an ancient tower can sometimes be seen protruding from the dunes when the sands drift appropriately. This is the Phoenix Tower, the tallest point of the crashed flying city of Kadrana, which lies buried beneath the desert on the Howler's Road ley line.

Centuries ago, giants living in what is now the Haunted Lands (*Midgard Worldbook*, p. 259) built a magnificent temple-city called Kadrana to honor their patron deity Kaima, the goddess of rebirth. After the goddess died, her body was enshrined in a specially prepared Vault of Rebirth to await her return in a thousand years' time. As Kaima's divine essence flowed into the vault, it allowed the city of Kadrana to rise into the sky.

The giants of Kadrana spent many generations as traders in their flying city, visiting Valera, Kel Azjer, Roshgazi, Aerdvall, and other wondrous places. As time passed, the egotistical giants began to lose their affinity for their goddess, coming to see the Vault of Rebirth as merely the means by which the city flew. Factions formed, and the giants squabbled among themselves.

Around 500 years ago, the city's water supply was poisoned by some of the giant's disgruntled servants,

SAND GIANTS

The sand giants came to Midgard from the Plane of Fire around 750 years ago after a dispute with the efreet. Under the leadership of their tribal chieftain, Azhad al-Hani, they carved out a huge swath of the southern Crescent Desert as their own. As their territory grew, so did Azhad's power, until it overwhelmed him and he transformed into sand, becoming one with the Ishmai Desert. Every sand giant proudly traces their lineage back to Azhad al-Hani.

Sand giants use **desert giant** statistics (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 222) and can cast the *fire bolt* cantrip as a 5th-level spellcaster. They wield falchions and javelins made from tempered glass.

causing a deadly disease to spread rapidly through Kadrana, sending the giants into madness and even corrupting Kaima's essence when the tainted water saturated the god's body inside the Vault. As the goddess succumbed to the corruption, the city lost the power of flight and crashed into the Ishmai Desert.

Today, the ruins of Kadrana lie buried, awaiting rediscovery. Adventurers might hear tales of its partly exposed tower in the jinnborn town of Hallampur. Climbing down through the Phoenix Tower allows the characters to gain access to the rest of Kadrana, including its central promenade, magical waterworks, inverted hanging gardens, and the Vault of Rebirth.

Recently, a sand giant warlord named Faez led his troops to Kadrana to lay claim to the city, believing his people are its rightful heirs. Faez has dreamed that Azhad al-Hani, legendary first chieftain of the sand giants, commanded him to establish a new giant kingdom in the sky. Characters who enter the ruins might face the sand giant warlord and his soldiers in the Vault of Rebirth as Faez attempts to reactivate the flying city.

GOLDEN ULTHAR

In the Crescent Desert northwest of Saph-Saph, the choking sands briefly give way to a hidden, ancient miracle: the valley known as Golden Ulthar. In the distant past, the whole Crescent Desert was once green and fertile. Over time, however, desertification gradually overtook the ecosystem everywhere—except for this secluded valley, which for an entire age was home to a magnificent civilization known as Ulthar. Today, Ulthar's influence on the valley persists in strange and powerful ways.

Golden Ulthar is ruled by Sepenret, the last priestess of Ulthar, and inhabited by her loyal human subjects,



numbering around ten thousand. The valley is also home to rival tribes of wererats and other lycanthropes of many different types.

Sepenret, the Desolate Priestess

At the center of the valley's long, verdant scar is a ruined temple complex, called Serbata, that served as the capital of old Ulthar. The structure consists of crumbling stone walls around a looming step pyramid. The temple's outbuildings have long since been ransacked by thieves, and the entire complex blooms with wild plant overgrowth. Within the temple lives Sepenret, the last priestess of Ulthar, a unique sphinx (N **gynosphinx**; prepared spells include *geas*).

Sepenret has the upper body of a female human, the lower body of a lion, and a pair of eagle's wings on her back. Her leonine tail ends in a feathered tuft, and when it fans out, it resembles a brightly colored lotus blossom. Sepenret spends most of her time inside a vast columned hall filled with stonework that still holds part of the eldritch power of lost Ulthar. Once in a while, despite having no living lover, the lonely priestess lays an egg made of stone that also bears the kingdom's magic. The egg's coloration varies, but it is always a combination of gray and some other color that appears on her body.

Sepenret is served by the Wardens of the Sphinx (see below), who safeguard the priestess and her temple from the rival tribes of lycanthropes that inhabit the valley; the Wardens are out to recover any stolen eggs or other lost *Pieces of Ulthar* in the wider world.

Occasionally, adventurers or scholars come to the temple to consult with Sepenret. The sphinx insists that visitors answer a difficult riddle or solve a fiendish conundrum before she deigns to hear their petition. If she is suitably impressed, she sometimes invites visitors to join the Claws of Sepenret (see below) and perform a useful service for her, perhaps recovering a stolen *Piece of Ulthar*. Those that refuse might be subjected to a *geas*.

Pieces of Ulthar

Magical remnants of the long-lost civilization of Ulthar, *Pieces of Ulthar* take one of three forms.

Stonework

The character and legacy of lost Ulthar were etched in stone, and the remains of Ulthar's impressive architecture and statuary hold much of its eldritch energy. Structural integrity is more important than size—if even a small piece of stonework is more or less whole, it's a powerful object.

Magic Items

Any magic item created in Ulthar has the powers of a *Piece of Ulthar* in addition to its standard properties. Almost all such items have been lost to time, but a few were stolen when Ulthar was at its height, and a few more have been looted by adventurers. These pieces are likely hiding in plain sight throughout the Southlands, their owners ignorant of their power.



Sphinx Eggs

The most powerful *Pieces of Ulthar* are the Desolate Priestess's stone eggs. After laying an egg, she passes it to the Wardens for safekeeping. Sepenret views these eggs as her children, and if one is stolen, she expects the Wardens to retrieve it by any means possible.

Pieces of Ulthar possess curious properties; no matter where they are, even far outside the valley, they exude an aura of powerful transmutation magic. The potency of each piece varies, but they all offer some type of natural rejuvenation. Some fertilize nearby soil, however fallow it might be, while others are imbued with a permanent *plant growth* effect. The most powerful *Pieces of Ulthar*, including the sphinx eggs, have other mystical properties. It's said that one egg allows the bearer to use the spells and the Tree Form property of a *staff of the woodlands*. Another replicates the effect of a *bloom* spell (*Deep Magic*, p. 211), creating a large grove of palm trees and lush vegetation that lasts for as long as the egg is buried in the ground. If the egg is dug up and relocated, the trees and plants in the original spot begin to wither and die soon afterward.

Wardens of the Sphinx

The order that serves Sepenret is made up of the valley's natives; many of their ancestors have attended the priestess for generations. The Wardens of the Sphinx are divided into two groups:

The Guardians of Sacred Serbata, led by the devoted Warden-Major Belanya Moone (LN female human **veteran**), remain within the confines of the valley. Most live in the temple and guard its priestess, but a small band strikes out into the valley to serve as Sepenret's personal strike force when ordered to do so.

The Claws of Sepenret, commanded by Warden-Captain Gareth Stonesaw (CN male trollkin **spy**), operate outside the valley, acting as Sepenret's eyes, ears, and occasionally hands in the larger world. These agents are always on the lookout for lost *Pieces of Ulthar*, especially any of Sepenret's eggs.

Denizens of the Valley

Sepenret's temple complex is routinely targeted by attacks and incursions from the other residents of the valley. In almost every case, the intention of these assaults is theft. Although some scattered *Pieces of Ulthar* exist outside the valley, Serbata remains the greatest source of these relics. When a tribal leader acquires a new and powerful piece—especially a sphinx egg, the greatest of prizes—that leader gains both power and prestige. Some groups even take and situate a *Piece of Ulthar* so they might turn back the desert along the valley's fringes—an endeavor that the priestess herself might not have objected to, had they asked her permission first.

Lycanthropy is widespread among the inhabitants of the valley. Werereatures of nearly all varieties make up the overwhelming majority of Ulthar's rival tribes. Right now, the valley's wererats dominate a coalition of tribes led by a wererat sorcerer chieftain named Izeef (NE male wererat **battle mage**, *Creature Codex*, p. 397). For many years, Izeef has been acquiring eggs and other *Pieces of Ulthar* and now controls a large swath of the valley. If Sepenret and her Wardens can't find a way to reduce his influence soon, she risks losing the rest of her domain to the wererats.

MARDAS VHULA-GAI

This ruined city in the Mukupe Sahel is occupied by goblin and gnoll brigands, raiders, and slavers. Ruled by a fearsome warlord, its name means "devouring darkness" in the Goblin tongue. Some say the city's founding dates back to the Ankeshelian expansion—its ruined step pyramids do not resemble the typical architecture of the area and are made from a glassy black stone not found nearby. The glyphs on the oldest surviving pyramids and pillars are well worn and faint, but it can be seen that they bear only a passing resemblance to the glyphs of Nuria Natal. These pre-Nurian magic runes glow faintly at night, even after thousands of years, and are one of two reasons why this location is of interest to explorers, despite its dangerous inhabitants.

MARDAS VHULA-GAI

Ruler: Gar'bori Enkidai the Devourer, Tyrant of Mardas Vhula-Gai (LE male **bouda**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 44)

Important Personages: Gekril Horseslasher, Goblin Chieftain (NE male goblin **veteran**); Yrsa the Inquisitor, Emissary of the Gnoll Nation (LE female **gnoll slaver**, *Creature Codex*, p. 189); Yarza Harfi, War Chieftain (CE male **gnoll slaver**); Yeshila Far-Seer, Matriarch of Bastet (NE female gnoll **apostle** of Bastet; see page 281); Yergu, Servant of the Silent God (NE male gnoll **priest** of Anu-Akma); Gob-Magog, tribal shaman and master of spirits (CE male goblin **mage**); Yangvin Far-Eyed (CE male gnoll **black knight commander**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 418)

Population: 14,400 (7,500 goblins, 3,000 humans, 2,000 gnolls, 1,100 dwarves, 400 giant hyenas, 375 darakhul, 25 bouda)

Great Gods: Anu-Akma (patron), Bastet, The Hunter, Nkishi, Selket

Trade Goods: slaves, vril weapons and artifacts, gems, salt





The other is that Mardas Vhula-gai is one of the few known locations where vril technology and artifacts (*Midgard Worldbook*, p. 258) can be found. The brown-skinned “rust goblins” that inhabit this city are well versed in vril weaponry and use it for both defense and raiding. The Tyrant of Mardas Vhula-gai, Gar’bori Enkidai the Devourer, came to the city over a decade ago, slaughtering and devouring a few dozen goblins and gnolls to cow the rest into submission. He then plundered the onyx pyramid at the center of the ruined city along with his new allies. Many of the large tombs and pyramids that hold vril hoards are guarded by the mighty vril golems of Mardas Vhula-gai and remain intact and unmolested. These shining metallic constructs use the **iron golem** stat block and ruthlessly attack any trespassers.

Following Garbori’s success, scholars of magic and wizardly researchers from Nuria Natal, from the markets of Kush and Lignas, and even from the distant magocracy of Allain took an interest in the ruins. As a result, many zealous archaeologists and mercenaries have tried to plunder Mardas Vhula-gai for its remaining riches, but

they have been frustrated by the growing population of goblins and gnolls. Today, occasional caravans visit the city to trade for vril items and batteries. Usually these expeditions are successful, but there is always a risk the goblins will murder or enslave the merchants instead.

ADVENTURING IN THE CITY

Adventurers who come to the ruined city by day accompanied by a goblin or gnoll guide will be largely left alone to trade or explore, provided they look tough enough. The goblins and gnolls ambush any visitors they deem vulnerable, and it is not advisable to wander the streets at night, when Gar’bori and his bouda companions are on the hunt.

Several notable locations in the ruins are described below.

Great Pyramid. This huge obsidian step pyramid at the center of the ruins is the lair of Gar’bori Enkidai, well guarded by **bouda** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 44) and heavily trapped. Many vril weapons and artifacts can be found in the treasure vaults beneath the pyramid.



Unplundered Step Pyramids. These pyramids are guarded by shining **iron golems** still under orders from the city's original inhabitants to keep intruders away and have not been raided. Even if the golems are defeated, would-be looters must contend with several deadly traps before they can reach the vaults.

Ruined Pyramid. This damaged structure marks the entrance to the underground temple of Anu-Akma, god of death. The place is attended by the Servant of the Silent God, Yergu, and guarded by twenty **gnolls**, twenty **gnoll zombies**, and forty **goblin skeletons**.

Grand Tent of Yarza Harfi. This elaborate, multiroom tent was stolen from a Siwalese sheikh and now is home to War Chieftain Yarza Harfi, his **gnoll** bodyguards, and his entourage, including his six personal prized **giant hyenas**.

Shrine to Bastet. This pyramid houses a bloodstained altar to Bastet and is filled with feral cats of all sizes, kept well fed by Yeshila Far-Seer and the other priestesses through the use of slaughtered slaves and animals. Any creature that enters unaccompanied by a gnoll priestess and not carrying a human-sized carcass to feed the hungry felines is immediately set upon by a roiling swarm of **cats of Ulthar** (*Creature Codex*, p. 58).

Yurt of Yrsa the Inquisitor. This large, weathered, and comfortable yurt houses the emissary of the gnoll nation of Dabu. Yrsa is a gnoll of calm demeanor and fiery combat skills, here to oversee the gnoll brigands and gather treasure to be sent back to the rulers of Dabu. Yrsa and the other gnoll leaders, Yarza and Yeshila, skim a sizable portion from the tribute.

Fountain. This large fountain and its surrounding pillars are adorned with sculptures and bas-reliefs of ancient and obscure gods and are surprisingly intact. The goblins and gnolls avoid the fountain because a powerful nature spirit named Zwila inhabits the water and attacks any nonhuman creature that enters the ring of pillars. If it appears, treat Zwila as a **water elemental** with maximum hit points.

Black Pool. Once the site of an elaborate park and gardens, this water source has devolved into a huge, brackish fen filled with black swamp grasses, broken statuary, and **giant crocodiles**.

Temple to Nkishi. Concealed in the northwest corner of the fens is a small obsidian pyramid, the lair of the local sect of Nkishi. This small but growing band of cultists of the gnoll god of slaughter is led by an evil paladin named Yangvin Far-Eyed. Yeshila and Yarza are trying to decide whether to eliminate this hive of gnoll "heretics," or to try to force them into service as murderous shock troops.

history of the lands of wind and sand

The history of the region begins at the dawn of creation, when the giant Aurgelmir exhaled and his breath split into the four Wind Lords: Boreas, Chergui, Khamsin, and Shemral. Avoiding the Vanir War, these four elemental lords came to Midgard and took up residence in the high deserts and plateaus of the northwestern Southlands. Here, they awakened the spirits of wind, stone, fire, and sea inside every rock, spring, and mountain peak to become their servants.

Around 4,000 years ago, as fertile grasslands gave way to the encroaching Crescent Desert, the still-verdant Kingdom of Golden Ulthar reached its zenith, trading with the great empires of Nuria and Glorious Umbuso. Two centuries later, the city of Mardas Vhula-gai was founded in the Mukupe Sahel.

A thousand years later, following the fall of Ankeshel, a fleet of ships made shore at Jelle-Anda. The nature spirits of the Stone Desert brought these refugees before their masters, the Wind Lords, who allowed the newcomers to settle in the desert. Intermarrying with the local tribes, the Ankeshelians became the Tamasheq, the People of Wind and Sand. They built the city of Kel Azjer to honor the Wind Lords, formed friendships with the insular jinnborn, and began trading with Golden Ulthar, Nuria, and places beyond.

The presence of this "invading mob" had irritated Boreas from the start and, around 2,000 years ago, his anger spilled over into violence. The North Wind wiped out every person in Jelle-Anda as he razed the coastal city to the ground. Covering the Stone Desert in snow and frost, Boreas blasted the Tamasheq with freezing winds. Fortunately for them, the other Wind Lords intervened to save their human subjects. They drove Boreas out of the Southlands, and he fled to the north, swearing an oath of revenge against the Wind Lords for his exile.

The next newcomers to the region were the minotaurs; they arrived 1,500 years ago from the eastern end of the Middle Sea and founded the cities of Cindass and Roshgazi on the coast, as well as Kadralthu and Derrada inland. Two hundred years later, they built a colony and harbor at Capleon so that sea trade could flourish between Roshgazi and Kyprion. The minotaurs also traded with Nuria, although this relationship sometimes became strained, leading to skirmishes between the two nations.

Eight hundred fifty years ago, the giant city of Kadrana took to the skies above what would become the Haunted Lands. Fifty years after that, a civil war began in the Dominion of the Wind Lords between the nature spirits who support Boreas and those siding with the other Wind Lords. The fighting continues on and off today.

current events

The last ten years have been eventful ones in the Lands of Wind and Sand; minotaurs are returning in numbers to their homeland, and the insular Tamasheq are at last allowing foreigners a glimpse of their cities.

RETURN OF THE LOST FLEET

Three hundred years ago, following the devastating attack on Roshgazi by the Dragon Empire, a fleet of ships carrying minotaur refugees left the city for Capleon. It never arrived. Now, centuries after vanishing at sea, four ships from the “Lost Fleet” have recently made landfall at Roshgazi. Their crew and passengers do not appear to have aged, and they have no memory of the intervening three centuries. Among them is Senator Evadne (NG female minotaur **archmage**), a learned scholar of labyrinth magic (*Deep Magic*, p. 304), who believes she knows how to repair the damaged *Heart of Roshgazi*.

Meanwhile, in Cindass, its dynamic ruler, Emir Palana Tellisha, has overseen the rebuilding of much of the city and has restored trade links with Kypriion, Triolo, and Capleon. The city is beginning to thrive, and minotaur families that fled the devastation are returning to their former homes.

VISIONS OF THE SPIDER PROPHET

For centuries, only the Tamasheq and the jinnborn were permitted to travel freely through the Dominion of the Wind Lords, and the existence of the wondrous city of Kel Azjer was a closely guarded secret. Then, five years ago, after the Mharoti Empire suffered a serious defeat at the hands of the Ishadians and Khandirians at the Battle of Wheeling Angels, the inscrutable Spider Prophet had a series of strange dreams. These visions suggested that the threat to the Dominion had subsided for now, and it was time to form new connections with the wider world. The Spider Prophet persuaded the Wind Lords to allow foreign merchants into the city of Inkabut. As a result, the city’s souks are bustling with visitors from the Seven Cities, Barsella, and even the Kingdoms of Salt and Steel.

RISE OF THE SAND GIANTS

Deep in the Ishmai Desert, the disparate sand giant tribes have been flocking to the banner of a war chieftain named Faez. In Faez’s dreams, Azhad al-Hani, the legendary leader who first brought the sand giants to Midgard from the Plane of Fire, has commanded him to gather the tribes for a greater purpose. Faez is ordered to lay claim to the fallen flying city of Kadrana and establish a new giant

The first sand giants arrived in the southwestern desert 750 years ago from the Plane of Fire, and they laid claim to a vast swath of the wastes in the name of their leader, Azhad al-Hani. Thirty years later, Azhad’s power had grown so great that he could no longer contain it and he transformed into sand, becoming part of the Ishmai Desert. Five hundred years ago, the giants of Kadrana lost control of their flying city; it crashed into the same desert.

Four hundred sixty years ago, after nearly 1,000 years of rule by the Queen of Minotaurs in the East, the Golden Pair declared the formation of the independent Moon Kingdom of Tes-Qamar.

Three hundred years ago, less than fifty years after the founding of the Mharoti Empire, the dragons attacked the minotaur cities of the Moon Kingdom. They wiped Kadralthu and Derrada off the map and reduced Cindass and Roshgazi to ruins. Refugees set sail for Capleon and Kypriion, but the famed “Lost Fleet” vanished en route. Some ninety years later, the dragons attacked the northwestern Southlands again. This time, they were driven away by the Wind Lords and forced to turn their attentions toward Nuria.

Then, thirty-seven years ago, the enigmatic Spider Prophet experienced a vision of the Mharoti dragons entering the Dominion of the Wind Lords, disguised as Tamasheq nomads, and tearing it apart from the inside. This vision has not yet come true, but that hasn’t stopped the paranoid prophet from abducting “suspicious” Tamasheq and locking them up in the dungeons.



kingdom in the sky, subjugating all the smaller races as a result. As Faez prepares to mount an expedition to Kadrana, tensions are flaring up between the sand giants and the jinnborn, with giant raids on Hallampor and other desert villages on the rise.

adventure seeds

The Lands of Wind and Sand offer many opportunities for adventure. Here are some options.

DAUGHTER OF SEPENRET

A very rich—but possibly mad—young noble in Kel Azjer named Samita Zhaal has spent most of her life researching her family’s lineage, and she has concluded that she is directly descended from Sepenret, the Desolate Priestess, who rules Ulthar. The details are murky, but Samita believes that an ancestor somehow coupled with the sphinx and absconded with the egg that resulted, keeping it safe until it hatched.

The claim might be insane, but Samita is offering a king’s ransom for anyone who can prove that such parentage is not only possible but, in her case, true. Doing so won’t be easy, though—to understand how this might have happened, the characters must find and examine one of Sepenret’s stone eggs. Trying to steal one from the priestess’s well-guarded temple would be foolish, but tales have circulated that claim the jinnborn of Hallampor have buried an egg at their oasis to enable more plants to grow. Although this egg is a potentially easier target, the characters will still have to keep it hidden from the Wardens of the Sphinx if they obtain it.

THE MOON PERIPLUS

Among the minotaurs of Midgard, rumors have long existed that a true heir to the last queen escaped the fall of Roshgazi and found safety on another plane of existence. The citizens of Cindass and Saph-Saph are abuzz with stories of a copper tablet called the Moon Periplus, recently unearthed beneath the rubble of the Temple of Hecate in Roshgazi by the minotaurs of the New Moon Clan. This tablet is inscribed with glyphs detailing an incantation that can be used to open a Red Portal to another plane. Arous-ok-Hebb (LN female minotaur **moon priestess**, *Creature Codex*, p. 267) is looking for a group of adventurers skilled enough to enter

the portal, find the true heir, and bring her back if she still lives. So far, so good, but the Red Portal leads to the moonlit realm of Hecate, and the goddess is unwilling to let her favorite servant leave.

TEMPLE OF SCORPIONS

Recent skirmishes between Vanhu Owey, a tribe that follows Boreas, and the Tamasheq tribes loyal to the other three Wind Lords have grown more deadly. The unscrupulous servants of the North Wind have purchased lethal venom from the cultists of Aculeus Edge (see “Tirag Ajdir”, page 70), which they are using to coat their javelins and swords. The Hurat of Kel Azjer, Balla ag-Intamalou, summons the characters to the Palace of the Spirits and promises them great riches and honor if they will sneak into Tirag Ajdir (see page 70), lair of the Queen of Scorpions, and steal the recipe for the antidote.



BRYAN SYME

dabu, land of the gnolls



4

From afar, the encampments of the gnoll clans of Dabu all look alike: they are made up of tents of hide or canvas and wagons that have been stolen from caravans, and these fixtures are often arranged so that they surround pens of livestock. The clans, however, differ from one another in ways that only the gnolls themselves can fully appreciate. Each group has its own customs, laws, and practices, depending largely on which god it serves and also on the geographical and political circumstances of its existence.



geography

Dabu consists of two associated realms, separated where the Mukupe Sahel meets the Djibbar Plains.

In the north is Dabu Zavao, which stretches into the southern Mukupe Sahel as well as westward to the Jagged Coast. The Mukupe Sahel is a semiarid transition zone, bordering the Crescent and Stone deserts as well as the Chelamite Mountains and the Djibbar Plains. It is constantly swept by heavy winds, and scrubs and reeds grow intermittently across the region. The Jagged Coast is a rocky region where little grows, but its access to the sea and accessible salt flats are valuable resources for the gnolls that live here. Additionally, the

Blood flows in the river as a gnoll warrior of Dabu prepares to throw his spear at a leering bouda.



DABU

Ruler: Ama Ninshu, leader of Ama's Sight (CN female gnoll **priest**)

Important Personages: Kasa Isha, leader of Zin's Bane (LE female gnoll **veteran**); Kasa Bila, leader of Zhatar (CE male gnoll **priest**); Sa Shiru, leader of Yavet (LN female gnoll **knight**)

Population: 64,500 (53,500 gnolls, 7,000 humans, 2,000 minotaurs, 1,500 jinnborn, 500 dwarves)

Major Cities: Chemeksa (3,700 gnolls, 800 jinnborn)

Great Gods: Laughing Nkishi (patron), Bastet (patron), Anu-Akma, Kwansi

Trade Goods: pelts and skins, monster parts, titan oddities, plunder, ransoms, salt, slaves

hills in the southern coast contain the Pool of the Sky. To its north is the Dominion of the Wind Lords, a perennial adversary for gnoll raiders, while to the east is the Crescent Desert and its inhabitants—a source of prey, competitors, and trade partners for the gnolls.

In the south is Dabu Uhlza, which hugs the Mbazha range and the eastern reaches of the Djibbar Plains. The foothills are lush but infested with monsters. Long grasses hide endless threats, while burrows and lairs are carved into riverbanks and lakesides. Scattered stands of trees and small forests provide the only native lumber in Dabu. To the west is the Bahima Azar hive of the tosculi, while to the southeast is militaristic Narumbeki.

culture and customs

The gnolls of Dabu are always ready to pick up and move with no warning or preparation. While this lifestyle is often seen as unproductive, lazy barbarism by their sedentary, agricultural neighbors, that viewpoint is inaccurate. Though evidence of the fact might be difficult to appreciate from an external perspective, the gnolls have a well-defined society, and all the clans acknowledge their

common history, which informs the cultural mores to which all gnolls subscribe today.

Clans teach their young and remember their histories through oral tradition, often vetted against written records kept by oracles and priestesses at the few stationary sites throughout the kingdoms. Song, dance, and storytelling are important parts of Dabu tradition, and are generally accompanied by props made of clay, reed, and leather. Religious leaders play an important role in education, and much of their daily life is spent instructing the young.

Most clans have deep-seated superstitions concerning the firstborn children of young females. For instance, the Ape-Gnashers hold that each firstborn that survives must be bathed in a human's blood before they reach adulthood, or the youngster will bring a curse upon their mother and their extended family. In Adjib, firstborn that become adults are believed to be chosen by Anu-Akma. In Ama's Sight, firstborn are believed to have a great destiny, and they are raised to serve as guardians for the Pool of the Sky until that destiny reveals itself.

THE BLOOD RAID: A GNOLL TRADITION

Once every five years, at a minimum, every warrior in every gnoll clan must take part in a blood raid. This is an individual mandate, calling for every adult combatant to participate in a raid against another clan or settlement and bring loot home, to be distributed according to the will of the clan's Sa. Typically, those who range farthest afield and bring home the most loot gain the most glory, for it is they who have truly enriched their clan.

In practice, however, no clan can afford to risk significant casualties to their warriors on a regular basis. Nowadays, although some warriors take seriously the opportunity to achieve greater glory, most blood raids are not particularly bloody, and the word "raid" has a wide-ranging definition. If the warriors of a clan do engage in combat, it usually takes the form of a skirmish that rarely results in death or even serious injury. For most gnolls, a blood raid is a time for nonviolent "raiding" involving other gnolls: for example, eloping with a member of another clan, stealing cattle or goats from a neighbor, or reigniting a verbal feud that has festered beneath the surface.

government

The government of Dabu is heavily decentralized. At its smallest level, the gnolls live in groups they refer to as packs, each ruled by a female leader called a Sa. Each pack operates within a roughly defined territory and obeys the dictates of the strongest pack in that territory, whose Sa bears the title of Kasa, followed by the name of

the territory (such as Kasa Zavoa). Nominally, each Kasa obeys the Ama, an oracle who holds sway over the entire confederation of packs.

In practice, however, power in Dabu is rarely exercised by the leaders at the top of the hierarchy. Each Sa has functionally unlimited control over her pack, and superiors step in only to mediate to avoid a disastrous conflict, ensure their own pack's hold on power, or make sure actions are not taken that are disastrous to Dabu as a whole.

The current Ama is Ninshu, a canny old white-furred gnoll whose pelt is marked with scars. She is ancient, by gnoll standards, and has begun to prepare for the inevitability of her death. Her reign has been marked by conservative, conflict-averse policy, giving a free hand to the packs, mediating between the cults, and avoiding conflict with the legions of the Narumbeki whenever tension between the nations flares up. Unfortunately for her, this is a policy that has begun to fall apart in her old age, and her primary concern now is finding an heir who might handle the current crisis.



The current Kasa Zavoa is Ninshu's firstborn daughter, Kasa Isha, who rules the Zin's Bane region. Although she remains loyal to her mother, she secretly harbors greater ambitions, imagining herself as a future ruler of all the gnolls. But she lacks magical or oracular talent, which she compensates for with superior martial skills and a captivating, charismatic personality. For now, she bides her time, ruling Zavoa with a light hand, in honor of her mother's methods. Her caution has allowed her sister, Sa Shiru, to seize the initiative.

The title of Kasa Uhlza for a century has gone to the head of the Ape-Gnasher clan (currently Kasa Bila of the Zhatar pack), whose early adoption of Nkishi, success as mercenaries in Nuria's wars, and long-distance raids into vulnerable human settlements have kept the clan large, rich, and powerful for a long time. However, recent events have unsettled this situation.

The greatest threat to the Dabu government is Ama Ninshu's younger daughter, Sa Shiru, who held the rank of Kasa Uhlza for six years and was a respected leader. But she forsook that position and title and now is known as Sa Shiru of Yavet, a nation of her own founding. She sees herself the empress of a united gnoll kingdom, and she is in the process of trying to make that dream a reality.

the territories of dabu zavoa

The northern portion of the nation of Dabu is made up of nine clan territories, each of which is discussed below.

MUKU-NA

Unofficial capital of the gnoll nation, Muku-Na has historically been the richest of Dabu's territories. Until the founding of the southern kingdom, Muku-Na was the gateway from gnoll civilization to the rest of the world, leveraging this status to extract wealth from trade with the outside world as well as from raiders who had to pass through Muku-Na to attack others.

Muku-Na's gnolls feud regularly with rogue gnolls from the Mukupe Sahel, and the region is a hotbed of conflict between those who follow Laughing Nkishi and the other gnollish gods. Although Ama Ninshu is a firm opponent of Shiru's ambitions, she has so far kept the Muku-Na region out of a potential conflict.

ZIN'S BANE

Zin's Bane is named in commemoration of a war with the jinnborn to the north, during which the oasis of Zin-Sha burned and was depopulated. It is notable for hosting some of the few farms in Dabu Zavoa, which are worked



and overseen by slaves. As long as the harvest remains plentiful, the local gnolls give the slaves a free hand in administering themselves.

The gnolls of Zin's Bane are firm supporters of Kasa Isha, who is openly looking for a successor to Ama Ninshu among the priestesses of Nkishi in the region.

FENU-NA

The Fenu-Na gnolls are rich—not from raiding, or from livestock, but from salt and fish and the river. They traverse the great salt flats near the coast, fishing and harvesting salt, then head inland with their wares. Raiding parties from Fenu-Na sometimes strike out north toward the Dominion of the Wind Lords. Herders live astride the Mukupe River, while priests and mercenaries congregate at the hunting grounds of the Fenu-Na clan to confer with each other.

Nkishi is a rising influence in this region, his adherents turning the gnolls against the humans to the north and convincing them that Nkishi offers a path to further victory that does not threaten their ways.

ZARODA

Zaroda, which translates to “Womb of the Zaro,” takes its name from an ethnic group known as Zaro gnolls. They do not have the pronounced mane or spotted coat of typical gnolls; they are covered with coarse, shaggy fur over their entire bodies that is usually of a single color. That color ranges from hay-like golden brown to dark brown-black, and dull red is occasionally seen.

Zaro gnolls are commonly encountered throughout Dabu Uhlza to the south, greatly outnumbering the population of Zaroda. Foreign historians generally believe that the original Zaro gnolls were almost all forced south by some ancient conflict. But the oral tradition of the gnolls holds that the Zaro were never meant to remain in Zaroda. It is their womb because it was where their original ancestors were birthed centuries ago. Even though much of that population ranged south in search of more plentiful game and personal glory, all Zaro gnolls think of Zaroda as their ancestral home.

Zaroda has a central location and occupies significant territory in the northern part of Dabu, but most of the land is of questionable utility. Wyverns, manticores, **chronamentals** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 57), and **gbahali** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 209) are all known to lurk in the badlands. Much of southern Zaroda is a monster-riddled death trap for anyone who tries to navigate this area without a local guide.

Zaroda pays respect to Bastet above all other gods; Nkishi's worship has found little purchase here. With competing gnoll clans on all sides, combat between Zaro gnolls and humans is rare outside of mercenary work.

ADJIB

“And also, there is Adjib” is a common saying in Dabu, referring to something irrelevant but somehow, inexplicably, still around. Adjib's reputation stems less from some malaise or uninteresting history than it does from geography. A monster-infested coastline, barren wastes, and parched salt flats separate Adjib from its neighbors. As such, the gnolls of Adjib have few options for their raids aside from each other and whatever they can find in the near-destitute expanse of the Djibbar Plains, and opportunities for trade are few and far between, largely linked to yearly mercenary expeditions or the occasional religious pilgrimage that passes through the region.

AMA'S SIGHT

Ama's Sight is an oddity among the clans. Its members do not raid as other gnolls do, and they scarcely bother with the politics of their kin. Instead, Ama's Sight are the stewards of the Pool of the Sky (see page 94) and hold the territory around it for the sole purpose of accomplishing their duty. They have a Kasa by a technicality, for the territory they hold sway over is dangerous, offers little food, and has few other resources.

In normal times, when the Ama and her pack live by the pool, the gnolls serve as custodians and support personnel. They ensure that the Ama may maintain her lifestyle, that her soldiers are armed and fed while they guard the pool, and that those who drink its water are protected and their visions recorded before they are forgotten.

Alone among the Dabu gnolls, they encourage literacy, and those of their number who are not guards or laborers are often clerics and druids. They are expert demon handlers, and often maintain a coterie of demons to secure the pool. **Vrocks**, **barlgura**, and flocks of **quasits** are a common sight when the pack suspects a threat.

For the past 200 years, Ama's Sight has been occasionally visited by the tosculi. They are not a true threat to the pool; the badlands are poor hunting grounds, and the tosculi have made no attempt to occupy the territory. But their raids are dangerous and their thefts a dire insult. Ama Ninshu's absence from the pool has given the current matriarch, Kasa Nanai, a free hand to arrive at her own solution to the tosculi problem.

For the first time, Ama's Sight has expanded its reach south, taking resources from the Djibbar Plains to enrich themselves and improve their soldiers. The pool's guards are better equipped and better trained with each passing month, and caged flying monsters are being put in place, later to be released to drive away tosculi raiders.

Ama Ninshu does not yet know about this new effort, and it's difficult to say what her reaction will be to Nanai's overreach—especially if it does not work.



Ghatazi Salt Pits

Menatayni

Castle Halcyon

SAPH-SAPH

Rayanni

CRESCENT DESERT

KHEPHANI SALT FLATS

ISHMAI DESERT

Hallampur

Kadrana

FASSILI HILLS

MUKUPE SAHEL

GRANITE ROAD
CHELAMITE MOUNTAINS

A MUD MTS

MBAZHA MOUNTAINS

NAR UMBEKU GRASS ROAD

DABU ZAVOA

FENU-NA

Fenu-na

ZARODA

ALMAA

ADJIB

NIMEA
Nimea

SKIN STEALERS

ZHATAR

BAHIMA AZAR

AMA'S SIGHT

DABU UHLZA

DJIBBAR PLAINS

UATA

APE-GNASHERS

HEYAAD

AKANDA CHEGUTU

Whistling Acacia

Kondanamwali

YAVET

ASHLAMBA

NARUMBEKI

TROLLKIN

VIPER'S TONGUE

AKANDA KAROI

DUNFUMADZI

Stone Bird Grove

MADINI KAA

MILES
0 250 500

JAGGED COAST

Pool of the Sky

SALWABARA RIVER

SKIN STEALERS

In years gone by, the gnoll clan known as the A'Yeii, or Skin Stealers, roamed with impunity in the shadows of the western Mbhaza Mountains. Their homes were decorated with the skins of their victims, their magic was brutal and mighty, and they disdained the use of slaves as weak and slovenly. Any creature that might be enslaved, after all, found a far better fate when flayed of its skin and left to die under the unforgiving sun.

In addition to being an insular gnoll clan, the Skin Stealers are an obscure and barbaric splinter cult of Nkishi. They believe that through the taking of skins—particularly those from individuals of great power or wisdom or beauty—they can, while wearing these skins as masks and capes, acquire those qualities. Skins of non-gnolls are even more useful because they offer the possibility of the wearer passing as another race or speaking the tongue of strangers.

Eight years ago, a group of powerful foreign adventurers descended on the foothills of the Mbhaza range and succeeded in flushing out the Skin Stealers where they had congregated in preparation for their next raid. The gnolls fought viciously but were nearly wiped out. The survivors, led by a young female, took refuge in the badlands east of the Pool of the Sky, hiding in the shadow of the Bahima Azar hive, believing—correctly—that the tosculi's presence would keep their pursuers from following. Since then, the Skin Stealers have made this area their base of operations.

The Skin Stealers are guided by a female who bears the title of Sa'taii, meaning “mother of skins.” The current leader's name is Ma'rai.

Sa'taii Ma'rai is a young, badly scarred female. She leads her followers from a rough-hewn cave in the badlands, using the secrets passed down by her predecessor to keep them alive, prepare skins, and search for new victims.



Skin Stealer Magic

Sa'taii Ma'rai is the current keeper of the clan's vital knowledge: how to prepare and wear the skins of a slain creature in such a way as to impart the qualities of that creature to the wearer. The creation process is complicated. It is handed down by word of mouth from one Sa'taii to another, so no written record of the procedure exists.

Preparing a slain creature's skin takes 24 hours, during which time embalming oils and spices worth 500 gp must be applied to it. After this time, the Sa'taii performs a special ritual over the skin. If the effort succeeds, which means that Nkishi has blessed it, the skin becomes magical. Anyone who dons it is subject to the effect of an *alter self* spell of permanent duration, as its appearance changes to match that of the creature when it was alive.

Under just the right circumstances and with the best quality ingredients, the Sa'taii knows how to call upon stronger forms of this enchantment. It's possible, for instance, to create a skin that imparts to its wearer some of the abilities of its previous owner, including physical or mental attributes and spoken languages. Some gnoll tales suggest that ancient A'yeeii in disguised form wander openly in Dabu to this day, spreading the corrupting word of Nkishi and seeking new skins to enjoy.

ALMAA

Almaa and its southern neighbor, Nimea, are closely linked. Both regions are poor and wind-blasted, their occupants relying for survival on the few permanent oases in their respective territories. When times are hard and populations low, the two clans are sometimes consolidated under a single Kasa.

The oasis from which Almaa takes its name is marked by an ancient minotaur watchtower overlooking the site that the gnolls use as an outpost when they're not on the move.

Nkishi was popular in Almaa until recently, when particularly militant priests of that god caused internal strife and bloodshed that the clan could ill afford. The priests and other aggressive followers of the hungry god were disposed of, or they made their way to relative safety in Nimea. This turn of events caused a rift with Nimea that threatens to escalate beyond the border raids that typically take place between the clans.

NIMEA

Nimea is the greatest bastion of Nkishi's faith in Dabu Zavao, a status that derives from the oasis from which it takes its name.

The Nimea oasis is a great, shallow pool fed by an underground river, well stocked with fish and crustaceans that have migrated from subterranean caverns. It was little

but a shared watering hole and a site of battles between feuding packs until 40 years ago, when the priestesses of Nkishi declared it a pilgrimage site devoted to the god.

Pilgrims came, and organized, and through the pilgrimage spread their religion and coordinated their expansion. Now, every gnoll in Nimea pledges allegiance to Nkishi, after those few who disdained his faith were forced to flee or face slaughter.

the territories of dabu uhlza

The southern portion of Dabu extends from the large population of Zaro gnolls in Zhatar that presently rules over all of Uhlza to the gnolls of Yavet in the far south, which are gradually coalescing into a force that could challenge for leadership of the nation.

ZHATAR

Zhatar is a semiarid region where rugged foothills give way to savannah. This area is the heartland of the Zaro as an ethno-cultural group.

Zhatar has usurped control of Uhlza from the Ape-Gnashers in recent times but has also become a literal and spiritual battlefield on its own. Although Kasa Bila's dominion over Dabu Uhlza has been uncontroversial despite his gender, his continued control of his own land is in jeopardy.

He has ordered none in Zhatar to cooperate with or acknowledge Yavet and has threatened to absorb any pack that disobeys his order. This policy swiftly led to a low-intensity civil war involving rivals, Yavet sympathizers, and those who simply see Kasa Bila as a male who has risen above his station and is using the unrest in an attempt to take the throne. The Cult of Nkishi has taken Kasa Bila's side because he sees Yavet as an opposing force, which has in turn pushed the other faiths toward alliances with Yavet.

UATA

The southern branch of Dabu was founded by the Uata. It was Kasa Tarin of the Uata pack who rebelled against the Ama and raised an army so great that Dabu Uhlza was recognized as the southern counterpart of Dabu Zavao. Subsequently, however, the Uata suffered horrible casualties when the tosculi emerged from the Bahima Azar hive and have not been politically relevant since.

The Uata region suffers from significant infighting and a systemic failure to protect its packs and its livestock from being taken by the tosculi. To other gnolls, and to some who live in Uata, this state of affairs is evidence of the failures of Dabu's government. The unrest in Uata has made the area a recruiting ground for Yavet.

APE-GNASHERS

When Nkishi came to Dabu, it was the Ape-Gnashers who championed his cause. They forced the packs near them to convert and grew rich with plunder and forcibly conscripted gnolls.

Now, a century and a half later, adherence to their faith has led to disaster. Ape-Gnasher warriors burned down several Narumbeki towns six years ago, carrying off survivors and treasure, in an assault that intensified tension with Narumbeki—a short-lived conflict in which the Ape-Gnashers took horrendous casualties and lost a large expanse of land before the Narumbeki retreated back into their borders.

The Ape-Gnashers have lost their hold over Dabu Uhlza, are losing their grip over their own region, and are threatened by both Yavet to the south and Narumbeki to the east. They are torn between competing impulses: to rebuild their strength, to wage the war that Nkishi demands against Narumbeki, and to fend off the encroaching threat of Yavet. It is unlikely that they will succeed on all fronts, but who knows what they might take down with them as they collapse?

HEYAAD

Heyaad is a vastly different, and much smaller, territory than it was a mere decade ago. Once it was a thriving part of Dabu Uhlza, its game plentiful, its lands expansive enough that any pack could claim uncontested hunting grounds for itself. Conflict was infrequent and although cross-border raiding against the Ape-Gnashers and Narumbeki was common, Heyaad's borders remained open to trade.

The gnolls of Heyaad suffered devastating losses when they joined the Ape-Gnashers in a brief skirmish against the Narumbeki. Now they are bleeding, their reputation in tatters and their populace fleeing to Yavet to take up life under Sa Shiru's banner. Relations with the Ape-Gnashers and the Uata are more acrimonious than ever before. Of all the clans in Dabu Uhlza, they are the most loyal to Kasa Bila—not due to any affinity for him, but because he seems to be their best hope at recovery.

YAVET

Yavet is an oddity—a growing aberration on the border, threatening to overturn everything in the name of a better future. Founded by Sa Shiru after she forfeited her title, Yavet is not the name of a clan, but a nascent empire—a reaction to the rising dysfunction in Dabu and the flaws that Sa Shiru perceives within its society. As such, it is not recognized as a region and its leader takes the title of Sa, and nominally responds to the Kasa of Heyaad.

Yavet was founded by Sa Shiru four years ago, when she led her army in a guerrilla campaign of raiding and terror that claimed territory previously held by the Ape-Gnashers and Heyaad for itself. Since then, it has continued to grow, taking more territory from surrounding regions and moving westward into the Djibbar Plains.



Yavet is a young region made up of the disaffected, idealistic, and exiled—those who either believe in Sa Shiru's vision of a united, centralized Dabu, or who simply dislike the other gnoll clans enough to view Yavet as their best choice. Its culture is indelibly marked by the many lands gnoll mercenaries have served in. Non-gnolls live here as professional soldiers, traders, and mercenaries.

prominent religions

The principal gods of the gnoll nation are Laughing Nkishi and Bastet, though Anu-Akma sees a growing following in Yavet, and Kwansi has always had faithful among the dispossessed and the free-hearted. Several female masks of gods known as males among humans are also found among the gnoll tribes: Anu-Akma, the Huntress, and Xeviosah are all female gnoll deities. Except for the position of Ama, the gnolls have no centralized churches or religious orthodoxy, and worship of the gods tends to be shaped by local cultures and priestesses. That said, there is currently significant tension between the cults, inflamed by Nkishi's evangelists.

Nkishi is a rising force in Dabu. He has swelled out of the south, stoking tensions and violence with surrounding humans and building his strength in Dabu. Where he is strong, his followers purge and convert the cultists of other gods. Where he is weak, he attempts to become stronger. This strategy has threatened to destabilize life in an already chaotic nation and ignited the current strife between the cults. In response, some of his followers have become even more radicalized, as evidenced by the Skin Stealers clan.

Bastet has long been the queen-deity of the gnolls. As a god of the hunt and life and femininity, she is attractive to many members of the matriarchal race. Some clans dedicate hunts to her, and all but the most dedicated to Nkishi invoke her at every birth.

Anu-Akma is worshiped as a female among the gnolls, a loan-god from centuries of work in Nuria Natal. She is unpopular with many gnolls, venerated primarily by mercenaries and those unlucky few tasked with hunting undead. She is viewed as a pillar of resistance to Nkishi's growth and a patron of Yavet.

The Huntress (Hunter) is a favorite among traditional gnoll hunters and matriarchs, and considered one of the pillars of conservative leaders. Her role in finding, stalking, and taking prey is often used as a model for leading the gnoll nations against their many enemies, and her prayers and sacrifices can be heard in a gnoll encampment or settlement of any size. She is an enemy of Nkishi's foolishness, and frowns on the risks taken by the havoc runners and raiders in his name.

Kwansi is an oddity in Dabu. He is not proscribed by any but Nkishi, but gnolls who worship him are largely males and exiles. He is viewed as a bringer of succor to the dregs of a brutal society, offering hope for freedom or advancement. He is commonly venerated by males who aspire to a better life. Some radicals declare themselves to be his champions or his clergy, an act that inevitably draws the attention of those in power.

Xeviosah (Xevioso) is a loan-goddess from farther south, she who strikes with speed and fury. Her thunderous glory is praised by battle priests, young raiders, and others concerned with success in raids—but also among gnolls giving birth, healers, and even shamans asking for rains to help the herds. Humans call her Xevioso and claims she is a man; the view among the clans is that foolish humans cannot tell male from female gnolls, though the gnolls understand well enough that she takes a male mask among those of other races. Her astonishing speed and daring are praised in song and poetry. Xeviosah is popular among dancers, poets, healers, midwives, raiders, and havoc runners, and just as popular at home as on the battlefield.

commerce

Most gnoll clans rely heavily on herding and hunting to sustain themselves. Goods are made of leather, clay, monster organs, and reeds, supplemented by readily available resources in a clan's traditional grounds. Any resources that require long-term, permanent facilities are either imported or periodically gathered.

Dabu Zavoa is relatively rich in gold veins, but a lack of permanent settlements, established mines, or rigorous prospecting means that most of these veins are untapped. A few shallow mines exist, where workers chip away at surface veins, but only Chemeksa and the Ama's Sight clan know the true worth of Dabu Zavoa's mineral wealth.

Dabu Uhlza has a strong tradition of excellent pottery and ceramic art, many of which are "used" religious objects: ritual items or devotional art meant to be revered at only a single ceremony. The rise of Nkishi and his disdain for nonmartial aspects of society has seen this tradition wane in recent decades.

Metalwork, lumber, and precious metals are all common imports. Heavy armor is particularly prized, though the traveling smiths of the gnolls are more than capable of producing lighter equipment. By far the most common import is lumber, which the gnoll territories are notoriously poor in.



chemeksa

Ninshu rules from the capital of Chemeksa. Traditionally, Chemeksa has been a seasonal meeting place, a small trade camp where the Kasas would meet to discuss matters of state, and where the declaration of blood raids and royal decrees might be communicated. It existed only periodically, and primarily was viewed as a place where gnolls might trade among themselves and have good conduct guaranteed by the Ama. However, Ninshu's age has hindered her mobility for nearly two decades, and Chemeksa has grown to suit her needs as a result.

By human standards, it is a small, filthy, fortified camp, littered with bones and utterly disorganized. By gnoll standards, it is a fitting demonstration of Ninshu's power and will. Through her words and influence, she has engaged the largest clan in Dabu in farming, construction, and the other trappings of civilization. She has irrigated the Sahel, diverted streams to serve her purpose, and erected walls and halls and forges to show her might. It is an achievement that will collapse almost instantly once she dies, making its persistence in her old age all the more impressive.

Although it lies far from any active conflict, Chemeksa is the epicenter of activity between the feuding cults and the ongoing fight over the very nature of the gnoll nation.

The flashpoint came nearly a decade ago when the Cult of Nkishi completed the first permanent shrine in the city, followed soon thereafter by shrines to Bastet and Kwansi. Nkishi's priestesses attacked the shrine of Kwansi, demanding that its priests convert and threatening violence if they resisted. In response, the clerics of Kwansi fled, and Nkishi's faithful burned down the shrine.

Seeing that attack as a threat to themselves, the priestesses of Bastet retaliated, first denouncing Nkishi as an upstart male deity, then burning the shrine to Nkishi in the night and killing its head priestess as revenge for the insult to Kwansi. Fighting intensified after this, until it was halted (and even then, only temporarily) by the intervention of Ama Ninshu. She forbade further killing in her city, ordered that the cultists of Nkishi not evangelize in Muku-Na territory, and decreed that the other cults should leave them alone as long as they abided by that edict.

Naturally, this decision enraged both sides, who addressed their grievances away from Ama Ninshu's sight. Although they no longer kill each other openly in Chemeksa, the feud continues. Each group surreptitiously incites its members to violence against the other and sabotages its rival's plans.

pool of the sky

Just north of the Djibbar Plains, in a hilly badlands area, lies the Pool of the Sky. The pool is a circular body of pure, blue-tinged water. Taking a sip grants a drinker oracular visions, though the accuracy of the images received is often suspect.

Traditionally, the Ama's pack lives near these waters and guards the pool against defilers while having their needs tended to by the Ama's Sight clan and its Kasa. Ama Ninshu has abandoned this tradition in her old age, leaving Ama's Sight in sole custody of the Pool.

Only those among the gnolls who have the Ama's blessing may drink from the Pool of the Sky. The tosculi of the Bahima Azar hive (see page 204) sometimes send raiders to the pool to steal jugs of water for their queen.

Each individual who drinks from the pool's water and then takes a long rest receives a vision while asleep of a future yet to occur, perhaps including key points in time that these events hinge upon. The visions are often unclear; details are sometimes merely hinted at, or a critical fact might escape the drinker's memory once they awaken.

Once a drinker receives their vision and comes awake, the drinker is immediately incapacitated for 2d4 weeks (or 3d4 weeks if the imbiber is not a gnoll).

A creature incapacitated in this way can be freed of that condition for 1 hour through the use of a *lesser restoration* spell, 8 hours with a *greater restoration* spell, or 24 hours with a *wish* spell, but is incapacitated again at the end of that time.

history of dabu

The gnolls of the Southlands roamed and ravaged this region as a collection of disassociated packs until the nation of Dabu came into existence around 500 years ago. A powerful pack leader named Zavoa drank from the Pool of the Sky and slept for four months, wracked by fitful, horrible dreams. She awoke with awareness of her destiny and of the destiny of the gnolls, proclaimed herself the first Ama, and in the name of Djyy and Bastet, fell upon the lowlands at the head of her pack.

Ama Zavoa's pack battered or cowed the other packs in the region until politically the gnolls were of one mind. Together they formed the core of an empire that would terrorize all who dared oppose them until Ama Zavoa's death 40 years later. The government remained centralized under Zavoa's daughter, but she refused to cement the institutions of her mother, and the nation over the next century decentralized into its current state.

Expansion to the south brought about the rise of the Uata clan and the establishment of the nation's southern branch, Dabu Uhlza. That region has slowly expanded since then, its advance checked once with the rise of the Bahima Azar tosculi and the fall of the Uata.

The Cult of Nkishi appeared in Dabu barely over a century ago. It was championed by the Ape-Gnashers and spread north, and though many were uncomfortable with the slaughter of priests and the unchecked aggression it promoted, Dabu was a place where the packs would do as they will.

The scale of the problem was not realized for years, and by then the worship of Nkishi was entrenched in many packs. Some revered him as one of many, in contrast with his clergy's wishes, but many others bought into the monotheistic, genocidal regime of Nkishi, and saw the cult's influence continue to spread.

Raiding is a common activity in the clans, but all-out war is nearly unheard of. Raiding turns opportunity into profit, while wars are high-risk activities, requiring a level of commitment the gnolls generally avoid. As such, each true war is an enormous occasion, and only a handful have occurred in Dabu's history. Though the gnolls have not always won their fights, they were always a far more capable foe than their enemies expected. The gnoll clans include a veritable legion of experienced combatants among their ranks. The armies of Dabu might be disunited, but they have always been mighty.

current events

Over the past six years, tensions in Dabu have heightened. Now, the nation stands at a crossroads. Nkishi rises against the other gods of the gnolls. Narumbeki threatens war in retaliation for centuries of raiding. Sa Shiru demands centralization and reform, while Kasa Isha seeks to uphold the traditions of her ancestors—at least for now.

No outcome is entirely safe for the anarchic clans, but one must come to pass—with or without the interference of outside elements.

THE WAR OF THE CULTS

The ascendance of the Cult of Nkishi threatens to upend life in the gnoll nation. The Laughing God calls for eternal war against humans and the proscription of other deities, though he tolerates deals with fiendish powers. This outlook threatens every aspect of life in Dabu, even the existence of the position of Ama.

For a long while, this edict was not an issue. Individual clans, like the Skin Stealers, might be a problem, but the cult as a whole was not powerful enough to truly disrupt

life in Dabu. Some worshiped Nkishi, and he was a god of violence and glory, so this reverence was allowed.

So, Nkishi's influence spread, taking over the Ape-Gnashers, then moving into Nimea and establishing roots in Muku-Na and the capital of Chemeksa. With a power base established, Nkishi's cult began to push for serious change—to demand more conflict with Narumbeki to the south, and to begin purging the cults of other gods.

Over the last decade, the cults of Nkishi in Dabu have begun to cooperate and coordinate. They have demanded better conduct of his more moderate followers and skirmished with the more fanatical. Chemeksa is the most famous of their settlements, but the cult has been purged almost entirely from the province of Almaa. Still, Nkishi has a stranglehold on several regions that they will not be able to shake without outside help.

The packs and their Kasas, meanwhile, are increasingly aware of the threat that Nkishi's cult poses to their way of life. The fate of the Ape-Gnashers is the clearest example of what can go wrong, and the cult's highest-profile disaster so far. None have issued prohibitions against the cult yet, but opinion has turned against it, and even Ama Ninshu has quietly stopped performing ceremonies and rituals to Nkishi.

Their victory blunted at the last moment, the cultists of Nkishi have not taken this well. They have begun to escalate their fights with the other cults, even where they are weak, and are searching desperately for allies through which to ascend. In the north, the priestesses of the Zin's Bane clan believe that Kasa Isha may be such an ally, though they overestimate the influence that their cat's-paw has over her. In the south, the cult in Zhatar believes that Kasa Bila, vulnerable, embattled, and male, is the perfect ally. They may well be correct, if they can deliver him from his current peril.

THE NARUMBEBI THREAT

The militaristic Narumbeki have lived on Dabu's border since the birth of the gnoll nation. For just as long, conflict has ebbed and flowed between the two states, with border skirmishes not uncommon. After all, Narumbeki's capital, Ashamba, is almost on the border with Dabu Uhlza, as is one of its great fortress-cities, Akanda Karoi, and neither Narumbeki nor the gnolls take kindly to territorial intrusions either real or perceived. Between the regular raiding of the gnolls and the increasing influence of Nkishi, skirmishing threatens to escalate into open warfare.

And yet, overall the treaty between the two states has held, with the occasional flare-up of tension or violence handled according to its ancient scriptures—creating a status quo that none might be comfortable with, but all could live with.



Six years ago, however, tension boiled over into conflict. Kasa Vish'rii, leader of the Ape-Gnashers, unleashed the wrath of the clan against Narumbeki. Several kraals—the walled villages of the Narumbeki—were burned to the ground and their inhabitants eaten. Bouda were unleashed among the survivors, and groups of giant hyenas were let loose into the countryside.

For a year, the Ape-Gnashers and the Heyaad clan clashed intermittently with Narumbeki. They refused direct engagements, technically adhering to the nations' treaty but causing the Legion to slowly wither in hostile territory, and ensuring that foragers, scouts, and work teams were picked off by monsters and gnoll raiders. Then, with the taste of victory in her mouth, Kasa Vish'rii engaged a force half her size at the battle of Vashe'i Gulch.

The gnolls were roundly defeated. Kasa Vish'rii died, and true disaster for Dabu was stopped only by the ambition of Sa Shiru. She took this opportunity to arrive with an army and establish her nascent empire at Yavet. Her supporters were plentiful and supplemented by mercenaries, monsters, and the trollkin of the Djibbar Plains. She drew the legion out, cut them off from resources, and aggressively threatened the border. Facing the prospect of a conflict not worth its potential cost, the Legion eventually pulled back. Narumbeki keeps a careful eye on the gnolls, however, and some watchers claim the nation is building its forces and biding its time until it might unleash a true war on its neighbors.

the future of dabu

Soon, Kasa Isha and Sa Shiru will fight for the soul of Dabu. It is a conflict that has been brewing since they were young, and it has escalated of late.

Shiru dreams of empire, embodied in a united gnoll society, powerful in a way it never has been, and with the gnolls protected under a shared identity. And she dreams of herself, atop it all, ruling with an iron fist until her daughters succeed her in turn.

But her actions to realize that goal have gained her enemies. Eight years ago, when Kasa Shiru demanded a muster of fighters to throw back the tosculi and give Uata room to rebuild, her subordinates refused. They took their grievances to the Ama, and Ama Ninshu made it clear that she supported them.

Kasa Shiru resigned in disgust, becoming simply Shiru. Kasa Bila succeeded her and quickly began to return Dabu Uhlza to its normal, decentralized state. He might even have succeeded, had the Ape-Gnashers not started a conflict with Narumbeki.

That disaster led to Shiru's opportunity. She returned home as Sa Shiru, anointed in the name of Anu Akma and at the head of an army that included her supporters, foreign mercenaries, natives of the Djibbar Plains, and entire groups of trollkin she had pressed into service. Her success allowed her to establish Yavet, carving out a chunk of the plains as well as former Ape-Gnasher and Heyaad territory.

In Uhlza, the Ape-Gnashers and Heyaad are threatened by Yavet's sudden appearance and by their sudden loss of land and prestige, as packs have fled to Yavet territory, while Uata has formally backed the fledgling state and pack after pack rallies to Sa Shiru's banner. In the north, Adjib supports her, if only tacitly, and while the gnolls of many clans purport not to care, their Sas and Kasas discuss Shiru's ambition openly, debating how they might combat this threat and how large her army might be when war finally comes.



Shiru's vision is of a new state, unified and changed, with new winners and new losers in the social order. This society would perhaps be kinder and fairer than the rampant banditry and dark cults that plague modern Dabu, but it would remain at the whim of a monarch, liable to be twisted according to the virtue or vice of its ruler. It is an appealing vision to a people who are fractured, pressured from within by a dark cult and from without by the looming Narumbeki. But there are those who distrust such an arrangement, and they turn to Kasa Isha.

Isha was Ninshu's firstborn, marked as special simply for surviving her birth. Ama Ninshu favored her from a young age, blessing her in the name of Bastet and Nkishi. She was taught the rites and honors of Dabu, of all that her mother stood for, and was groomed to succeed her when the time came.

But, ideally, the Ama is not a warlord, but a high priestess. An Ama must be in contact with the divine to best serve her people. Unfortunately for Isha, magic shuns her and always has. Desperately hoping to compensate for this lack of magical talent, Isha threw herself into learning the martial ways of her people. She has become an imposing warrior and leader, and an overwhelming force of personality, though she forever hides the pangs of inadequacy that strike whenever she witnesses her sister's divine talents.

Kasa Isha has spent her time turning the Cult of Nkishi in Zin's Bane and Zavao to her ends. Her hand is lighter than Shiru's, but no less controlling. Promising seers are vetted for loyalty, controllability, and strength. Kasas who are supportive of her are tacitly favored whenever Isha serves as mediator between her subordinates, while those who don't are left to wither.

There is no civil war—yet. Ama Ninshu is well respected enough to keep her daughters from each other's throats. But she is old and decrepit, and she knows that her end is coming. One day, soon, she will die. And when she does, war *will* come to Dabu.

adventure seeds

Dabu is not a safe place. However, adventurers rarely seek safety. Discussed below are a few of the myriad ways in which adventurers might find glory in the gnoll territories.

THE RAID

Mantatere, a merchant in a Narumbeki border town, has approached the characters for help. A recent raid by unmarked gnolls hit a herd of her livestock. The herd itself isn't too much of a loss, the cost of doing business near

the border, but one of her herders was taken alive. She would like him back and is willing to pay well and cover the ransom if he is found and returned. She wants the response to be small enough not to restart the conflict.

An investigation swiftly reveals that the gnolls responsible were from Ape-Gnasher territory. They are aiming to sacrifice dozens of captives in a ritual to Nkishi that they hope will bring them demonic support so they might resume the war themselves. The characters must save the herder before he, and the others, are sacrificed and contend with the angry gnolls and their bouda servitors.

HONEST WORK

Sa Shiru is looking for trustworthy, foreign mercenaries. A group of six adolescent gnolls has run off. She believes they're heading to the Whistling Acacia (see page 144), a world tree in the Djibbar Plains, to complete an old initiation rite of their pack, which requires them to hunt one of the creatures there and bring back its head.

Although she doesn't disapprove of the activity, the rite has a significant casualty rate, and Sa Shiru wants the young gnolls alive more than she wants them proud. As such, she's willing to pay for adventurers to find the kids and get them home alive.

When the characters arrive at the Whistling Acacia (a journey of several days, featuring tosculi raiders, territorial locals, and hungry monsters galore), they find problems. First, several of the adolescents have been wounded and require medical or magical treatment to survive the journey home. Second, the gnolls have rescued a trio of lost humans from the boughs of the tree and are unsure what to do with them. Third, the youngsters have attracted the attention of a group of monsters, as eager to eat the characters as they are the adventuresome gnolls.

A SINGLE SIP

Atrub bin Nar, a jinnborn from the Dominion of the Wind Lords, has won a great favor from Ama Ninshu: permission to take a single sip from the Pool of the Sky, to confirm a prophecy he fears might affect all the Southlands. But she did not grant him safe passage along the route to the pool.

Atrub approaches the characters to serve as guardians on the trek to the pool. It is a journey filled with dangerous terrain, wild monsters, and cultists of Nkishi. To make matters worse, the Skin Stealers have received word of Atrub's approach and fear what he might learn. They have sent a contingent to the pool, and they plan to kill the jinnborn before he receives his gift.

the high jungles



The High Jungles of the Southlands are rich emerald forests of great power and great mysteries, as well as soul-shredding danger. To fully appreciate the High Jungles and their inhabitants, one must consider more than the usual physical features of a jungle environment. On the northern fringe of the High Jungles, the Celestial Waterfall pours onto Black Lotus Mesa through a planar rift from the legendary Well of Urd and eventually flows out to nourish much of the northern reaches of the continent. The water that pools in various places on the mesa is charged with mystical energy that sometimes warps or otherwise transforms the creatures that live in this habitat.

Even regions that are not directly affected by the Well's mystical waters are under the influence of Yawchaka, the Living Jungle of Kush—and the enormous and sentient Green Walker that controls it. Amid all the perils in the jungles,



hardy pockets of civilization thrive, including Kush and its capital, Nangui. But turning more than a cursory glance on these settlements reveals darker influences at work there, too.

black lotus mesa

Mile-high cliffs surround Black Lotus Mesa and isolate the plateau, which contains some of the strangest terrain in the Southlands. A fetid marsh more than eighty miles across blankets the region, fed by the Celestial Waterfall that cascades down from the Well of Urd.

High above Black Lotus Mesa, the islands of the wondrous sky city of Aerdravall float around the Celestial Waterfall.



Dotting the wasteland atop the mesa are islands of thick jungle, which are occupied by white apes, human tribes, and a handful of ramag refugees. In the last decade, many of these islands have fallen under the rulership of a northern interloper calling himself the New Father of the white apes. Floating high above the plateau is the incredible Sky Nation of Aerdvall (see page 104).

GEOGRAPHY OF THE MESA

Black Lotus Mesa is constantly bathed in the mystic waters that pour out from the jagged tear in the sky. Its wide, hilly top is covered in lush, verdant jungle. The constant output of the Celestial Waterfall feeds the swamp and river system across its broad summit. The altitude combined with the moisture in the atmosphere keep the mesa shrouded in clouds most of the year.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Black Lotus Mesa is notable as the source of unique lotus blooms that grow here. Much sought after by spellcasters across the northern deserts, these flowers provide benefits for arcane and divine practitioners alike, but each also has addictive qualities and occasionally dangerous side effects. For more information about lotus magic and the different types of lotus blooms, see *Southlands Player's Guide*.

Creatures that live on the mesa are sometimes changed by its magical effects. Animals such as monkeys, antelopes, leopards, crocodiles, and snakes can become corrupted and twisted by the magic of the water. **Dipsa** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 118) and other oozes are common, as are **mbielu** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 114), **shambling mounds**, and **serpopards** (*Tome*

of Beasts, p. 342). Portals connecting to other planes have brought celestials, elementals, fiends, and aberrations to the plateau.

Some aspect of the mesa seems to be responsible for the magic that modifies many of the animals here, because the water from the Celestial Waterfall becomes ordinary when it flows off the sides of the plateau. The same applies to the creatures themselves. A few years ago, the Nurian adventurer Iesousi Mamel transported several warped animals off the mesa with the intention of adding them to the Sultan of Siwal's menagerie. After delivering the beasts and receiving his fee, Mamel discovered that they reverted to their normal forms after several weeks—and the disappointed sultan demanded a refund.

Warped by the Waterfall

Not all creatures are changed by the magical waters, but roughly one in ten are. To determine how the marshes of the mesa have corrupted a standard monster or animal, roll a d10 on the table below (rerolling any result that seems unsuitable) or choose from among the entries.

NOTABLE INHABITANTS

Three groups make up the bulk of the mesa's inhabitants. Details on each are given below.

White Ape Tribes

Beyond the warped wildlife of the mesa, the great **white apes** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 408) dominate the jungle-covered islands of the swamp. There are thousands of small tribes, with anything from a dozen to two hundred members, each claiming a portion of dry ground for itself. The white

WARPED BY THE WATERFALL

d10 Change

1	Eyeless. The creature gains the blinded condition and blindsight with a range of 30 feet.
2	Buoyant. The creature floats 6 inches above the ground. Tracking the creature by nonmagical means is impossible.
3	Flatulent. The creature emits foul-smelling swamp gas. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the creature must make a successful DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is also immune to the odor for 24 hours.
4	Luminescent. The creature glows with a sickly yellow, green, or violet light. Attacks against the creature are made with advantage, and it cannot become invisible.
5	Translucent Skin. The creature's internal organs are visible beneath its skin. Its AC is reduced by 2.
6	Amphibious. The creature can breathe air and water, and it gains a swimming speed of 20 feet.
7	Tentacles. The creature gains 1d3 writhing tentacles, each up to 10 feet long. These tentacles can be used to grab or manipulate small objects, but they are ineffectual in combat.
8	Compound Eyes. The creature has compound eyes like those of an insect. It gains advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight, and the range of its darkvision (if any) is doubled.
9	Scaly. The creature has thick, scaly skin. Its AC is increased by 2.
10	Aberrant Babbling. The creature gains the Gibbering trait of a gibbering moulder .

apes are infected with the same magical disease seen among those that occupy the Palace of the Heirs (see page 144). No one is certain how they became infected, or if these apes are related to the ones in the Abandoned Lands, although the fact that both groups revere a “Last Father” is probably not a coincidence.

In the last few years, many of the tribes have fallen under the sway of a northern merchant-explorer from Dornig named Josef Kranz, who has established residence in a ruined temple known as the Sanctuary of the Last Father (see below). Dubbed the New Father by the white apes, Kranz and his summoned companion, the avatar of the Great White Ape, have won over or conquered dozens of tribes, both ape and human. See “Servants of the White Ape,” page 120.

Bangweulu Tribes

A few human tribes live in the jungle swamp of the mesa. They call it and themselves “Bangweulu,” or “where the water meets the sky.” These simple tribes tell no stories of a time before the mesa and speak of no other place. A tribe can be hostile or friendly, depending on its recent interactions with merchants, explorers, or slavers. Kranz has stationed a white ape in each tribal settlement that has pledged its allegiance to him, to act as his proxy and to ensure that no spellcasters among the tribesfolk rise up to challenge his rule.

Lost Ramag

A group of refugee **ramag** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 317) live on the plateau, scratching out a miserable existence on a small island. The lost ramag have created an army of animated corpses and crude, muddy constructs, and have spent years building a dam that they hoped would protect them from the mesa’s predators. Meanwhile, their leaders tried to piece together a plan that might let them rejoin the parts of their scattered city of Ramagani and return to their kin elsewhere in the Southlands, before their home falls to the New Father and his white apes. With their numbers dwindling, the ramag leaders appear to have achieved a breakthrough following the death of their most powerful spellcaster. See “The Pillared Stair,” page 102, and “Ramag Reunification,” page 120.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Black Lotus Mesa has relatively few inhabitants, but natural wonders are everywhere, and past inhabitants have left signs of their presence behind.

Nurian Falls and Black Cascades

Two great veils of water pour over the sides of Black Lotus Mesa and plunge into pools and riverbeds below. The northern spillway, Nurian Falls, forms the source of the



Black Nuria River, and it surges every year with the spring melt that comes down from the nearby mountains. The waterfall known as the Black Cascades occupies the end of a narrow box canyon, where the steep walls keep all but the top of the falls in shadow.

Lotus Hunters’ Passage

Corkscrewing up the side of the mesa, 200 yards from the base of the Nurian Falls, a hand-carved tunnel extends into and through the sheer stone face, occasionally opening into a cavern before emerging at the top of the mesa. Several groups of explorers have tried to claim the passage, but the rampaging creatures of the mesa find their way into this tunnel, keeping the Lotus Hunters’ Passage wild and untamed.

Sanctuary of the Last Father

Not far from the outlet of the Lotus Hunters’ Passage atop the mesa, a large island holds the remains of an ancient ruined city in the depths of its jungles. Overgrown with vines and other foliage, its crumbling buildings and rubble-strewn streets conceal a network of subterranean tunnels. In a large plaza at the center of the ruin stands the Sanctuary of the Last Father, a building that serves as both a temple to the Great White Ape and the final resting place of the first patriarch of the mesa’s white apes.



Guarded by at least a dozen white apes at all times, the sanctuary is an imposing place despite its ruined condition. Stone steps flanked by headless ape statues lead up to a fractured archway. Beyond lies a great chamber dominated by a huge idol of a four-armed gorilla fashioned from white onyx—the Great White Ape. The inhabitants of the ruins come here to pay tribute to their god, leaving offerings of fruit and other food at the statue’s feet.

A hidden stairway leads down under the chamber to the subterranean tomb of the Last Father, its entrance marked by a pyramid of skulls collected from the cult’s vanquished enemies. It was in these vaults that Josef Kranz, the New Father, learned much of the white apes’ ancient lore and summoned the Great White Ape’s avatar. Today, when they are not abroad elsewhere on the mesa, Kranz and the avatar hold court in the sanctuary beneath the god’s white onyx effigy.

The Pillared Stair

The legacy of Glorious Umbuso, this immense series of hexagonal ledges and rock pillars forms a stairway sized for titans that climbs up to the southwestern rim of the plateau. At the top is a ruined two-story watchtower that overlooks the wide marshes. The Pillared Stair and the crumbling stone building are the only commonly known landmarks of titan origin on the mesa.

A few months ago, the wisest and most magically gifted member of the mesa’s lost ramag died and was entombed in one of the rock pillars by the rest of her tribe. This ceremony served to complete the incantation she had begun when she passed into adulthood, allowing her surviving compatriots to use the monolith where she was buried to reconnect the Pillared Stair to the city of Ramagani by way of the web of ley lines crisscrossing Glorious Umbuso. This connection is only partial; to get the portal to the neighboring district to function requires the ramag to reactivate the monolith in the destination node. See “Ramag Reunification,” page 120.

Broken Circles

These ruined towers lie scattered across the mesa. Some are clearly Nurian, built by wizards intending to study the magical water, but others are clearly older. Their architecture bears no resemblance to the titans’ handiwork seen at the Pillared Stair, suggesting that an unknown civilization built and later abandoned these structures. Occasionally, explorers find tunnel systems beneath them that lead to underground caverns adorned with even older cave paintings.

Shimmering Rocks

Rising above the marsh on a hilly island on the Demon’s Walk ley line is a rock formation composed of six huge slab-like boulders, unevenly stacked. It glows intermittently in the colors of the rainbow. While the rock formation is glowing, anyone who climbs to the top of the boulders is teleported to a remote location elsewhere in the Southlands. It is thought that the color of the glow might indicate the destination of the portal, and that the gateway works in both directions, which would explain the occasional appearance of a confused camel or giraffe on the mesa.

Tomb of Xulthas-Ka

Cut into the western face of the cliffs that surround the mesa is the hidden tomb of the serpentfolk sorcerer king, Xulthas-Ka. He is a legend among scholars and grave robbers alike, who whisper tales about items of unfathomable power that rest in a black sarcophagus in the depths of his profane vault.

sky nation of aerdvall

Founded over 2,000 years ago by refugees from far-off Sikkim, the city-nation of Aerdvall consists of seven hovering islands that slowly orbit the Celestial Waterfall. The islands were once part of the flying fortress that brought Aerdvall’s inhabitants here from Sikkim but then crashed into the mesa when its mages failed to keep it aloft. Restored to the sky by the power of aeromancy, each island houses a different district of open-air towers and vast domes and is connected to the others by bridges and covered walkways.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

Life in Aerdvall has an air of stateliness and majesty about it; the floating islands’ gleaming white buildings and magnificent vistas give visitors an impression of perfection. Beneath this facade, though, Aerdvall languishes and slowly rots.

As members of a stagnant society entirely devoted to the glories of its past, the aeromancers have become jaded in recent decades. Some maintain their attitudes of lofty indifference, while others follow darker paths, but most merely surround themselves with comforts and petty pleasures. Innovation and experimentation are rigidly controlled by the laws of the Dakhma Council and the members of the Dvatara Guard who enforce them. Aeromancers are prohibited from engaging in new research; only refinements of existing theories, items, and spells are allowed.



MHALMET

God King's Mirror

MAKURIA

LION ROAD

FASILL HILLS

MBAZHA MOUNTAINS

Zoroni-Tet

AERDVALL

Sanctuary of the Last Father
Tomb of Xulthas-Ka
Pillared Stair

BLACK LOTUS MESA

Shimmering Rocks

GREEN NUBLA

GREAT SINKHOLE

YAWCHAKA JUNGLE

Verdant Falls

Lutonge

KANIAR

SUADU

KUSH

BURNING FIELDS

Bulette Graveyard

AKANDA CHEGUTU

AKANDA GWERU

NARUMBEKI

ASHAMBA

KRAAL MARI

Stone Bird Grove

GREAT HIVE OF ARBEYACHI

Greerretellock

NANGUI CITY OF SORCERERS

Green Walker

PERNORO

Ramagani

RAMAGI'S BOND

Ramagani

VIPER'S TONGUE

Corpschive

KORPSEHIVE

SEBBEK SOBOR

DHAHABU

ARDHI MLANGO

SEBBEK SOBOR

VIPER'S TONGUE

Ylla-Maurefan

Ylla-Maurefan

YAWCHAKA FOREST

Primordial Portal

Kimona Proving Ground

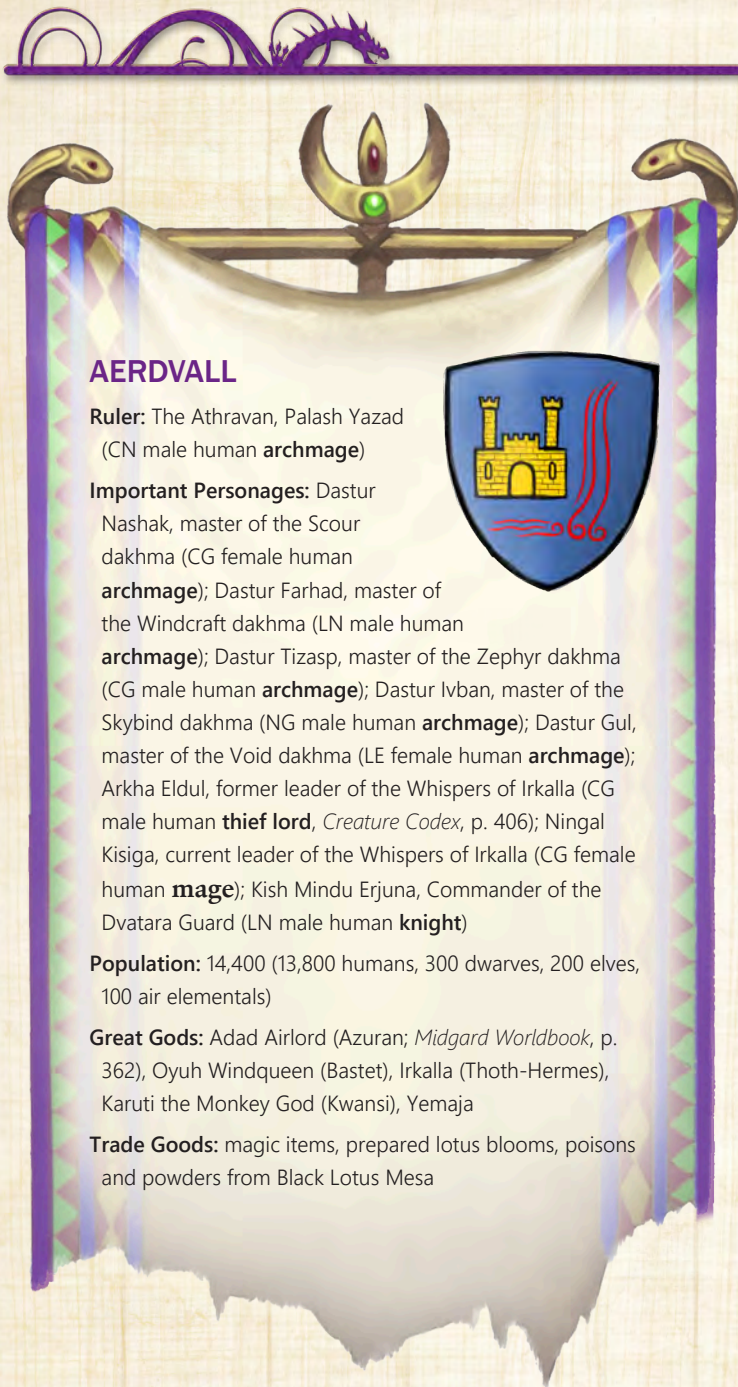
GORGONKIN RANGE

BAKUBA

MILES

250

500



AERDVALL

Ruler: The Athravan, Palash Yazad (CN male human **archmage**)

Important Personages: Dastur Nashak, master of the Scour dakhma (CG female human **archmage**); Dastur Farhad, master of the Windcraft dakhma (LN male human **archmage**); Dastur Tizasp, master of the Zephyr dakhma (CG male human **archmage**); Dastur Ivban, master of the Skybind dakhma (NG male human **archmage**); Dastur Gul, master of the Void dakhma (LE female human **archmage**); Arkha Eldul, former leader of the Whispers of Irkalla (CG male human **thief lord**, *Creature Codex*, p. 406); Ningal Kisiga, current leader of the Whispers of Irkalla (CG female human **mage**); Kish Mindu Erjuna, Commander of the Dvatara Guard (LN male human **knight**)

Population: 14,400 (13,800 humans, 300 dwarves, 200 elves, 100 air elementals)

Great Gods: Adad Airlord (Azuran; *Midgard Worldbook*, p. 362), Oyuh Windqueen (Bastet), Irkalla (Thoth-Hermes), Karuti the Monkey God (Kwansi), Yemaja

Trade Goods: magic items, prepared lotus blooms, poisons and powders from Black Lotus Mesa

THE AEROMANCERS

After hauling themselves out from the wreckage of their crashed flying citadel, the rebel mages of Sikkim soon identified the magical properties of the water that poured down onto the mesa. They discovered they could sacrifice spells they had prepared to power aerospheres—magic devices filled with the enchanted waters of the Celestial Waterfall that could be used as an arcane focus to fuel spontaneous air magic.

Having created this newfound arcane tradition, the mages worked together to raise seven huge sections of their fortress into the air to float in orbit around the waterfall. Calling themselves aeromancers, they returned to live in the sky and named their new home Aerdvall.

Today, the aeromancers are regarded as some of the greatest wizards of the Southlands, masters of using the waters of the Well of Urd to control and create elemental air. Practitioners of aeromancy magic are divided into five groups, known as dakhmas: Scour, Windcraft, Zephyr, Skybind, and Void. Each dakhma focuses on a different aspect of aeromancy and is based on one of the floating islands of Aerdvall.

For more information, see the aeromancer class option in *Southlands Player's Guide*.

GOVERNMENT

The Athravan, Palash Yazad, heads the Dakhma Council, which is a ruling body of mages. As the eldest mage in the city, he has great personal power and dignity. The Dakhma Council controls the education system and determines who gains access to higher-level magics. As such, it has effective control over who can rise in the ranks. Fearful of change, the Athravan tries to suppress any hint of independent activity that might threaten the balance of power in the city. He reacted to the unrest caused by the Whispers of Irkalla (see below) by giving more extensive disciplinary powers to Kish Mindu Erjuna and his Dvatara Guard. These strongarm tactics produced results for a while, but in recent times more and more voices are joining the call for change.

WHISPERS OF IRKALLA

The Whispers of Irkalla began life as a poorly organized gang led by the young and dashing Arkha Eldul. Several years ago, it took up arms against the Dakhma Council in an attempt to free the city from its stagnation. That rebellion prompted a swift and brutal crackdown by the Dvatara Guard, resulting in Arkha Eldul's capture and the violent death of several of the group's most passionate advocates.

Forced to take a different tack, the surviving members of the Whispers of Irkalla are playing a slower, more considered game, and are beginning to win over younger people, including some of the brightest students of the five dakhmas. These young aeromancers are eager to develop spells of their own devising, and are not afraid to challenge the unimaginative, orthodox thinking of their masters.

Arkha Eldul is being held in the Vortex Tower on Sunrise (see page 105). The current leader of the Whispers, Ningal Kisiga, is planning a rescue attempt.

RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

The gods worshiped in Aerdvall represent a mix of deities. Some believe that the wedded couple, Adad and Oyuh, could be masks for Azuran and Bastet. Karuti the Monkey

God is a god from Sikkim worshiped as a trickster. The Whispers of Irkalla are followers of Irkalla, the bird-headed Sikkim god of learning, which is a mask of Thoth-Hermes.

COMMERCE

Aerdvall conducts a lucrative trade in prepared lotus blooms, poisons, powders and other plant products from the marshes and jungles of Black Lotus Mesa. These exotic goods, as well as magic items, are traded to visiting merchants in return for essential supplies. When a deal is consummated, air elementals are used to transport well-equipped soldiers down to the ground to claim the merchants' wares. The aeromancers avoid visiting the mesa, wary of becoming exposed to the arcane wasting disease (see page 24).

AERDVALL'S ISLANDS

Aerdvall is composed of seven districts, each located on a floating rock the size of a small town, and having its own marketplaces, residences, and parks. The islands are connected to each other by arched bridges of white stone and elegant covered walkways that offer stunning, if vertigo-inducing, views of the jungle below.

Sunrise

Sunrise is the highest of the districts, both in elevation and in status. It holds the soaring towers of the Athravan Palace and the domed Dakhma Council chambers. The city's wealthiest nobles live here—nearly all can trace their lineage back to the original families that fled here from Sikkim. Sunrise is also the location of the Vortex Tower, a 200-foot-tall minaret topped with an onion-shaped dome of glass magically reinforced to be as strong as steel. Arkha Eldul, one-time leader of the Whispers of Irkalla, is imprisoned inside the dome where he is held aloft, buffeted by a constant whirlwind—a clear warning to those on the lower islands who harbor rebellious thoughts.

Sunset

Workers, servants, common craftsmen, guardsmen, and visitors live in Sunset, lowest of the districts. The Foreigner's Quarter features comfortable inns that cater to visiting merchants. Since the Flying Cities of Sikkim are not welcome in Aerdvall, merchants tend to arrive through teleportation. Ninsun the Unconventional, an honest Ishadian trader, always travels here on Sangasu, a **buraq** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 48), transporting her wares in a *portable hole*. A teleportation circle is inscribed on a large plinth in the center of Sunset's marketplace; its sigil sequence is known to a handful of well-connected merchants from Nuria and other large Southlands cities, including Lignas Proper and Nangu. For those in the know, an unobtrusive

wooden door behind a leatherworker's shop leads to a Red Portal that connects to the city of Kel Azjer in the Dominion of the Wind Lords (see page 66).

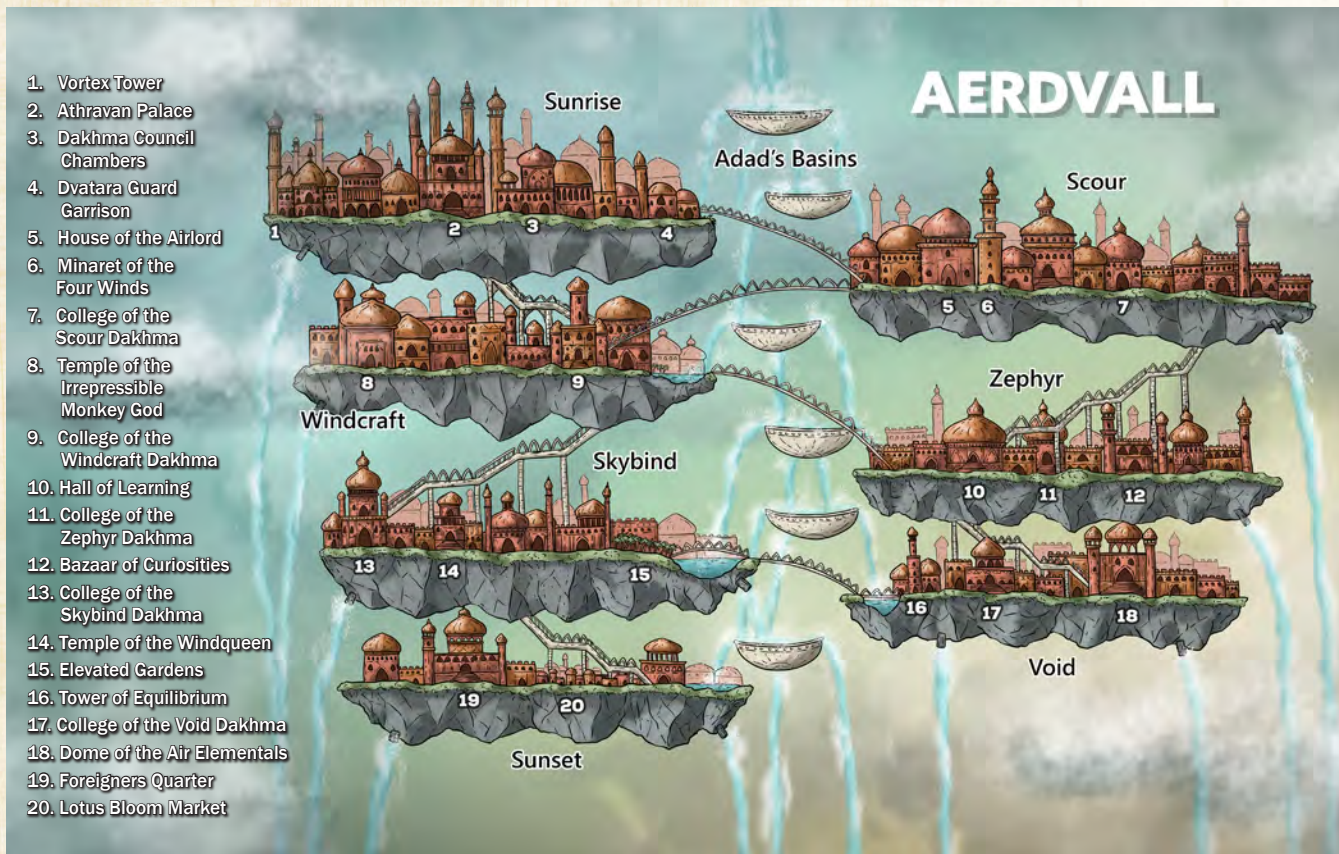
The Five Dakhmas

Situated vertically in the space between Sunrise and Sunset, each of the other islands is a district controlled by one of the dakhmas, the five types of aeromancy.

The Scour dakhma teaches its students to use air magic to physically change the world. This includes lifting, pushing, and even blasting targets with controlled winds, clouds, air, and lightning. At Windcraft, teachers and pupils create air-formed constructs and objects. Students at Zephyr learn to use air magic for transportation and improved speed. At Skybind, the curriculum focuses on summoning and controlling air elementals. The Void dakhma teaches how to dispel and block air magic. The most accomplished Void aeromancers can even pull the air out of their enemy's lungs.

Dastur Tizasp, master of the Zephyr dakhma, has visited the Well of Urd and has been known to share the secret of reaching the Well safely with visiting scholars who impress him. A bottle of red from a fine vineyard can help loosen his tongue.





1. Vortex Tower
2. Athravan Palace
3. Dakhma Council Chambers
4. Dvatara Guard Garrison
5. House of the Airlord
6. Minaret of the Four Winds
7. College of the Scour Dakhma
8. Temple of the Irrepressible Monkey God
9. College of the Windcraft Dakhma
10. Hall of Learning
11. College of the Zephyr Dakhma
12. Bazaar of Curiosities
13. College of the Skybind Dakhma
14. Temple of the Windqueen
15. Elevated Gardens
16. Tower of Equilibrium
17. College of the Void Dakhma
18. Dome of the Air Elementals
19. Foreigners Quarter
20. Lotus Bloom Market

Adad's Basins

At the center of Aerdvall, directly beneath the Celestial Waterfall, are Adad's Basins, a series of giant floating pools, each one higher than the next. Each basin catches a portion of the water and diverts its flow onto Aerdvall's districts where it is channeled through pipes and cisterns into the academies and residences throughout the city. After being used for magical crafting and experimenting as well as drinking and bathing—once it has been purified—the leftover water pours through downpipes beneath each district onto the mesa.

Well of Urd

The Well of Urd is both a location within the High Jungles and a separate demiplane, a nexus of planar power. Its waters pouring out over the jungles through a fist-sized planar hole called the Celestial Waterfall, the Well of Urd is positioned roughly above Black Lotus Mesa and the Sky Nation of Aerdvall, but it is wholly separate from them.

Some scholars say the Well of Urd lies within Asgard, but most of them agree that it is situated at the base of one of the three great roots of Yggdrasil the World Ash, the first World Tree, which stretches from Midgard to the farthest planes.

Yggdrasil has three great roots, each ending at the location of a well: Hvergelmir, Source of the Ever River; Mimirbrunnr, the Well of Wisdom; and Urd, the White Well of Fate. These three wells nourish Yggdrasil and its many offshoots, and each of the wells plays a pivotal role in the inner workings of the universe.

THE THREE SISTERS

The Well of Urd is the domain of the Three Sisters, known as the Norns in the Northlands, who oversee the destinies of gods and men. The Three Sisters appreciate the refuge the Well provides them, as they take turns each day carving runes upon Yggdrasil's root. Each rune represents the fate of an individual, and each of the Three Sisters represents a key point in the cyclical flow of time.

To those who find their way here, the Three Sisters can offer profound wisdom and answers about the fabric of fate. They might even accept the presence of mortals in their cottage, or at the Table of the Gods, where deities sometimes gather to barter, bicker, or debate their inexplicable schemes. Then again, fate is fickle, and the Norns are just as likely to strike down mortals on sight as they are to accept them in their realm.

Kadara, whose name means "what shall be," is the youngest and represents the future. She is a warrior who exudes a bright outlook and is known for her gracefully

carved runes and for elegantly weaving the beginning of each individual's strand of fate. In the East, she is known as Al-Uzza, and in the Northlands she is known as Skuld.

The mother-figure Ayanmo, whose name means "what comes into being," represents the present. She is a plump woman who carries a basket holding a spindle of thread for stitching each person's fate. Calm and stoic, each day she unwinds more thread from each spindle and hangs it from the root. She uses a silver carving knife to embellish the runes that Kadara carves. Ayanmo is called Allat in the East and Verdandi in the North.

The crone-figure Oya, whose name means "what once was," represents the past. An ancient figure in a hooded cloak, Oya is a cunning deceiver. She delights in leading mortals to their eventual doom, and relishes scratching out their runes or cutting the strands of their fates. She is called Manat in Siwal and the East and Urur in the Northlands.

Although the Three Sisters are not deities, oracles and sages who hope to gain insight into the future sometimes whisper prayers to them. The Kingdom of Morreg particularly reveres them as servants to the gods.

VISITING THE WELL

At the bottom of the Well of Urd is a small hole leading to the sky above Aerdvall and Black Lotus Mesa, known as the Celestial Tap. Though only the size of a fist on the Midgard side, the tap is 20 feet in diameter on the other end. Since the contents of the Well of Urd are infinitely large, the water level of the Well never changes.

With the appropriate flying and swimming spells or abilities, creatures can travel from Midgard to the Well through the Celestial Tap, which acts as a one-way portal, enlarging to allow them to pass through. Entering the waters of the Well is not without risk, and characters must be able to breathe underwater for the 15 minutes it takes to navigate the Celestial Tap. Alternatively, a character can reach the Well of Urd by means of the planar pathways of Yggdrasil (*Midgard Worldbook*, p. 47).

GEOGRAPHY

At the center of the demiplane is a shallow, circular pond about 200 feet across; this is the White Well of Fate. Towering above the water is the great World Tree, one root of which curves around two-thirds of the Well. A sand- and shrub-covered expanse stretches between the shore and the root. At one end of the pond stands a three-story house of ancient black timbers with a roof of stone and moss.

Around the Well and throughout the demiplane, the air is still and sounds are muffled by the fog that shrouds the entire place. The atmosphere here invites contemplation and thought, but the longer one remains, the greater the

MIDGARD'S CONCEPT OF FATE

Much like the masks worn by the gods, fate in Midgard takes on different forms depending on the culture considering it. In the Northlands, people believe that destiny is written by the moment; every choice, they believe, changes a person's fate. In the Midlands, fate is thought to be unalterable but secret, and everyone must uncover their own destiny.

In the Southlands, most people view fate as something between those two extremes. They believe that certain events are predetermined, but that choices and decisions can change the outcome of those events. One's fate is often compared to a carved rune, a long thread, or even a complicated tapestry, depending on which theologian is talking. An individual's fate is never truly revealed until after their life is spent.

No matter which concept of fate a culture adheres to, one aspect remains a constant: the Three Sisters are believed to be the guardians of it all. Most individuals revere or even fear their work, even if they do not understand all the details.

stillness seems to weigh upon the soul; few mortals can endure the environment for more than a handful of hours before fleeing—or simply winking out of existence.

Planar Features

If characters visit the demiplane, they might become subject to some unusual effects:

- Mist fills the demiplane, limiting visibility to 60 feet. Sounds, smells, and even tastes are suppressed. Wisdom (Perception) checks are made with disadvantage.
- Each hour a character is on the demiplane, they must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute and try to flee.
- Every 3 hours, there is a 5 percent chance that a character vanishes from the demiplane and is *reincarnated* (as the spell) 24 hours later in a random location on Midgard.
- Time works differently. When visitors who leave the demiplane appear at their destination, they realize no time has passed. Creatures on the demiplane do not experience hunger, thirst, or aging.
- Those who visit the Well sometimes lose all memory of the demiplane when they return to Midgard.

THE WATER

The liquid in the well is not just water: it is liquefied, unformed potential. It is the energy from which all reality springs, and it is flavored with all the dreams, faiths, hopes, fears, and hatreds that make up existence. It is this water that nourishes Yggdrasil and, through it, everything else.



A character who purposely becomes fully submerged in the Well of Urd for the briefest of moments can change one or more of their previous life choices. The water enables the character to exchange a background, subclass, feat, class feature, or known spell for a reasonable alternative (as approved by the GM). Race and class (or classes) cannot be altered, and neither can a creature's outward appearance. There is no limit to the number of exchanges that can be attempted, and the result is immediate. The mental and spiritual shock of this transformation requires the mortal to succeed on a Constitution saving throw with a DC equal to $15 + 2$ for each exchange (DC 17 for one exchange, DC 19 for two, and so on). On a failed save, the character rolls on the Warped by the Waterfall table (see page 100). If the character undergoes a physical change, the effect lasts for 2d4 weeks.

A character who is submerged in the well accidentally or unwillingly must make a successful DC 10 Constitution saving throw to avoid having one of their character's aspects randomly changed (as determined by the GM). A character who carries a *stone of good luck* cannot be changed by immersion in the water, nor can they use the water as a material component (see below).

Using the Water

Any creature can gather water from the Well of Urd without risking immersion; all that's required is a suitable container. The water has two important uses: it can be drunk, or it can be used as a special material component for improved spellcasting. If a vial of the water is used in place of a spell's normal material component, the spell can be cast at one level higher without using a higher-level spell slot. Alternatively, a sorcerer can use Urd water to power their metamagic, in lieu of spending 1 sorcery point.

In either case, the water remains potent for only $1d6 + 1$ hours after it is harvested. If it is ingested after its potency has expired, the drinker must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 4d6 hours. If it is used in spellcasting after its potency has expired, the casting is ruined and the spell slot is expended.

Under normal circumstances (unless overruled by the GM), no creature can benefit from immersion in the water more than once. If a creature takes water away from the well on more than one occasion within a year, the water loses its potency (and becomes poisonous) immediately.

COTTAGE OF THE THREE SISTERS

This three-story cottage close to the Well is where the Three Sisters live. The cottage is a simple house much like any found in the Southlands, although it's sized for giants.

Venturing into the attic of the cottage reveals a hoard of accumulated "trophies." Among the chests of dulled

scissors, discarded tools, and broken distaffs, the Three Sisters store the bundled spindles from the lives that have changed history. These record the lives of fallen gods, perished heroes, and vanquished villains. These spindles contain all the memories and experiences of those lives; a character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the person whose life is recorded on a spindle, although a *legend lore* spell is required to discern detailed information. The threads cannot be copied or destroyed in any way.

ROOT OF THE WORLD TREE

This 100-foot-tall root encircles part of the Well of Urd and stretches up toward the World Tree, which towers above the entire plane. Along the inside edge that faces the well, the surface of the root is covered with carved runes (or hanging spindles of thread, depending upon your outlook on fate). The Three Sisters are most often found here, either working on the runes/threads or bathing the root's bark in the water from the Well of Urd.

A character searching for their own rune here has only a 10 percent chance per hour of finding the correct one. The Three Sisters dislike mortals meddling in their work, and conventional wisdom states that they tolerate no one here except those on missions of the utmost importance.

TABLE OF THE GODS

Where the root of the World Tree curves down to bury itself in the sandy ground beside the Well, a wide stone dais holds a golden table. Over the millennia, this table has been used on occasion as a meeting place for the gods. They gather here to negotiate treaties, work out their differences, or simply trade divine outlooks on mortal life. An infinite number of thrones can surround the table; it grows or shrinks depending on how many deities are in attendance. Food and drink always cover the tabletop, and each delicacy has the properties of a *heroes' feast* spell.

The gods avoid the table when mortals are trespassing on the demiplane, since they don't relish intrusions. The gods are nothing if not inscrutable, however, and heroes on a mission of interest to a deity might encounter an avatar or herald of that god when they venture here. If the straits are dire enough, the deities themselves might appear.

yawchaka, the living jungle of kush

The Living Jungle of Kush is almost as much of a living, breathing creature as the beings who inhabit it. Animated by the presence of the Green Walker—an enormous, sentient beast that towers high above the treetops—the jungle spawns new plant and animal life. Here, trees

and vines grow to immense size, and many plants are intelligent, like much smaller versions of the monstrosity that animates them. Some creatures born in the jungle go through several transformations; each time they transform, they take on new forms or new powers. It is rare indeed to find a “normal” animal in Yawchaka.

Besides the Green Walker, the most feared creatures in the jungle are the vine lords, which are living constructs of vines and moss. At the Green Walker’s behest, these sentient plants deposit spores throughout the jungle that grow into seed-filled pods. When triggered by passing creatures, these explosive pods infect their victims with seeds that allow the vine lords to control them. In turn, the Green Walker can manipulate them all. For more information about the Green Walker, the vine lords, and the tendril puppets they create, see page III.

Despite Yawchaka’s hazards, where there is risk here there is also reward. For every plant that can poison and impale, and for every animal that maims and explodes, there are others that can heal, restore, and enhance. Within an endless cycle of creation and destruction, the Living Jungle of Yawchaka weeds out the weak or inattentive. Within every plant and behind every pair of eyes in the jungle, the Green Walker waits.

GEOGRAPHY

A verdant chaos is what explorers often call Yawchaka, and it is an apt description. Gigantic trees form a thick canopy. That canopy, often more than 100 feet above the ground, casts everything below into humid darkness, even at noon. On the mossy ground or between the trees, vines stretch virtually everywhere. Despite the weakened sunlight that filters down through the overgrowth, fast-growing plants and blooming flowers flourish. Heavy with a thousand perfumes, the moisture and heat sap any visitors’ strength and will.

The most obvious feature of Yawchaka is its changeability. Nothing is static here. Trees grow from seedlings to 5-foot-tall saplings overnight. Paths or trails never remain clear for more than a fortnight before vines swallow them. As a result, just a few areas are known and understood, even by those who have dedicated their lives to studying this place.

FLORA

It would require an entire book to detail all the strange and dangerous plants in the Living Jungle. You can use botanical hazards from the core rules and other sources, as well as the new examples below. The Green Walker’s seed pods are described on page III.

Qaadasho, Carnivorous Fern

The fronds of this overgrown fern lurch forth to wrap themselves around prey that comes close enough.

Identifying a carnivorous fern before blundering into it requires a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check. When a living creature moves within 10 feet of this large plant, the fronds try to grab it, making an attack roll with a +3 bonus. A grabbed creature takes 3 (1d6) acid damage at the start of each of its turns until it escapes or is consumed. A grabbed creature can escape with a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, or by dealing 20 damage to the plant (AC 10).

Ihlamvu, Siphon Bells

Siphon bells are the lantern-shaped flowers of a 3-foot-tall plant that seem to glow with an inner light.

Any spell with a range expressed in feet that is cast within range of a siphon bell plant is drawn to the plant instead of the intended target. A typical specimen has 1d10 + 2 flowers, each one capable of storing one spell level of magical energy. A flower imbued with energy glows more brightly. When the ihlamvu absorbs more energy than it can contain, it explodes in a flash of bright light, releasing its stored energy in a 60-foot-radius burst. Creatures caught in an ihlamvu explosion must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 3 (1d6) force damage for each of the plant’s flowers on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Identifying a siphon bell requires a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) check.

Sibvura, Clustershot Fig

The branches of this tall tree whip back and forth when it is agitated, flinging clusters of small dark fruit in all directions.

The sibvura’s defense mechanism erupts when a creature moves to within 10 feet of the tree. Its branches come to life and lash out, hurling 1d4 + 2 figs at each creature within 30 feet. The plant makes ranged attacks with a +3 bonus, dealing 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage on a hit. After launching figs, the tree must make a successful recharge roll (4–6 on a d6) before attacking again.

Identifying a sibvura before blundering into its reach requires a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check. The figs are edible but taste terrible, and they are no more nourishing than normal figs.

Akataan, Weather Melon

This thick green vine is studded with head-sized, pale blue melons that seem to twitch or shiver every so often.

When ripe, the melons of the akataan burst, releasing a cyclone of winds and seeds 10 feet wide at the base, 30 feet wide at the top, and 30 feet tall. The whirlwind moves 60



feet in a random direction each round for $1d4 + 2$ rounds before subsiding. Any Large or smaller creature that comes into contact with the whirlwind must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take $10 (3d6)$ bludgeoning damage. A Medium or smaller creature that fails the saving throw takes $10 (3d6)$ bludgeoning damage and is picked up and restrained by the winds. It takes an additional $(3) 1d6$ bludgeoning damage at the start of each of its turns until the effect ends or the whirlwind subsides. A restrained creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a successful save.

FAUNA

None of the creatures that inhabit the Living Jungle of Yawchaka are free of the manipulations of the Green Walker. Below is an encounter table featuring some of the creatures commonly found within the Living Jungle. A creature for which no source is given can be found in the core rules.

DISEASES

The Living Jungle has a number of organisms that carry disease, including the two afflictions described below.

Bloodworm Infestation

Bloodworms are tiny, hair-like worms that live in swamps, marshes, and other pools of salty or stagnant water. A creature that succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check can recognize an infected body of water for what it is.

When a creature's skin comes into contact with a body of water infected by bloodworms, it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become infected as the bloodworms enter the creature's body. A creature that has natural armor makes the saving throw with advantage.

Once inside, the bloodworms feed and multiply. It takes $1d10$ days for the infestation's effects to manifest. As the bloodworms consume the infected creature from the inside out, the victim loses blood and vitality. The infected creature's hit point maximum is reduced by $3 (1d6)$, it gains 1 level of exhaustion, and it regains only half the normal number of hit points from spending Hit Dice and no hit points from finishing a long rest.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature's hit point maximum drops by another $3 (1d6)$ hit points, and it gains 1 level of exhaustion. On a successful saving throw, the creature's hit point maximum increases by $3 (1d6)$, and its level of exhaustion decreases by 1. If a successful saving throw brings the creature's hit point maximum back to its normal level, the creature recovers from the disease.

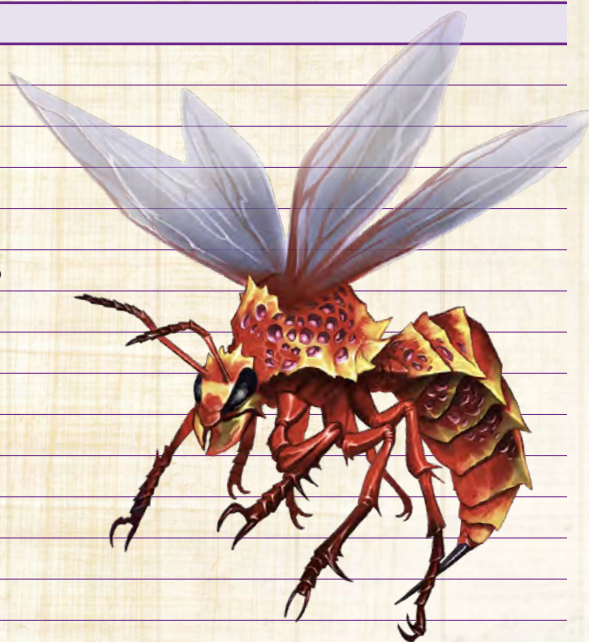
A *lesser restoration* spell cures a bloodworm infestation, but having immunity to disease does not prevent a creature from becoming infected.

Black Fly Eye Rot

Large black flies the size of a human's thumb live in the High Jungles and carry the affliction known as black fly eye rot. This disease, which affects only humanoids, causes an infected creature to gradually become blind, and to lose the ability to walk as its toes blacken and eventually drop off.

LIVING JUNGLE ENCOUNTERS

d20	Creature	CR	Source
1	Arborcyte	8	<i>Creature Codex</i> , p. 40
2–3	$1d6$ arboreal grapplers	3	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 25
4	$1d3$ asanbosams	5	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 27
5	Bulette	5	—
6	$1d3$ fleshpot hornets	6	<i>Creature Codex</i> , p. 161
7	Goliath longlegs	7	<i>Creature Codex</i> , p. 206
8	$1d6$ jaculi	3	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 258
9	$1d6$ j'ba fofi spiders	3	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 362
10	$1d4$ monkey's bane vines	4	See page 271
11	$1d6$ prismatic beetle swarms	3	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 375
12	Ravenala	5	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 321
13–14	Shambling mound	5	—
15–17	$2d4$ tendril puppets	2	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 403
18	Titanoboa	12	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 382
19–20	$1d3$ vine lords	7	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 403



A creature bitten by jungle flies must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become infected. It takes 1d10 days for the disease's effects to manifest. First, the creature's vision starts to become blurry, and it loses some mobility. The creature takes a -1 penalty on attack rolls and ability checks that rely on sight, and its speed is reduced by 5 feet.

At the end of each long rest after the symptoms appear, the creature must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the penalty worsens by 1, and the creature's speed is reduced by another 5 feet. If the creature succeeds on two consecutive saving throws, it recovers from the disease.

If the penalty reaches -5, the victim is blinded. If its speed is reduced to 0, it can no longer move. Lost sight and missing toes can be restored by magic such as *lesser restoration* or *heal*.

NOTABLE INHABITANTS

The Green Walker and its vine lord servants are Yawchaka's best known inhabitants. Few humanoid live in the jungle beyond the walls of the great cities of Kush, but the orcs of the Green Abyss are a notable exception, and, for the first time in centuries, druids have returned to Yawchaka with aspirations of banishing the Green Walker.

The Green Walker

Towering above the huge jungle trees, the Green Walker is a six-legged monstrosity of writhing vines, plants, and moss. Great tendrils of green vines, each one wider than a barn, pierce the forest canopy below. Bulbous seed pods on the Walker's back swell and burst daily, launching emerald spores in all directions. The Walker's presence acts as a catalyst for the jungle's growth. Below the immense being, the jungle ripples with bizarre plants and animals.

The Green Walker was summoned 400 years ago by elder druids, who were tricked by a cabal of demons masquerading as "nature spirits" into believing that calling forth the entity would bring balance to the world. Instead, the Walker's presence animated and warped the flora and fauna of the jungle, causing its living vines to spread in all directions, swallowing up savannah and scrubland in a never-ending quest to grow.

Appalled at what they had done, the druids sacrificed their entire sect and the divine spark of Alkush, their titan patron, in a ritual in an effort to contain the Green Walker. They succeeded in physically slowing the entity, weakening the Walker but not destroying it. Awake and aware, the Green Walker appears unfazed by its current state. Most scholars believe that it is interested only in continuing to expand the jungle around it. The Walker will even tell intrepid visitors as much, for it can communicate

telepathically with those who are brave enough to try. Of those who do hear the Green Walker's echoing inner voice, only a few survive the experience with all their wits and their spirit intact.

Moving within 50 feet of the Walker requires a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw as the monstrosity projects its thoughts into the minds of any creature that approaches. On a failed save, a creature is affected by short-term madness for 1d10 minutes. On a successful save, a creature is unaffected, and can understand what the Walker is telling them: "Grow," it says. "I must continue to grow."

Servants of the Green Walker

Vine lords (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 402) are the direct servitors of the Green Walker, acting as physical extensions of the Green Walker's will. Identical and imposing, they send waves of animated vines, twisted animals, and fell creatures against the Fire Legions of Narumbeki. They are the spy masters that manage hundreds of mind-controlled thralls worming their way into the deepest halls of Kush and Sebbek Sobor.

Vine lords are remarkable for their ability to plant green seed pods that produce the spores that turn living creatures into **tendril puppets** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 403). These pods can be found throughout the Living Jungle of Yawchaka. Disturbing a pod triggers the first stage of transforming a creature into a servant of the Green Walker.

Green Seed Pods

A single green pod is slightly smaller than a human hand and consists of a mottled green, bulbous head with tendrils that can attach it to any available surface. Spotting one before blundering into it requires a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) or DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.

The pods contain noxious green spores that are released in a 30-foot-radius cloud when the pod is stepped on, picked, or otherwise tampered with. Sometimes a pod

THE EMERALD WALKER

Far to the north in the jungles of Carnessa (*Midgard Worldbook*, p. 262), a similar entity to the Green Walker has appeared in the last year or so. Named Veth-Shoon, also called the Emerald Walker, this enormous plant creature could be the Green Walker's twin, but unlike its Southlands counterpart, its growth is as yet unchecked. The Emerald Walker has caused the jungle to expand rapidly and has created dozens of vine lords that are gradually transforming the humanoid inhabitants of Carnessa into tendril puppets.



spontaneously explodes when a living creature comes close, dealing 3 (1d6) piercing damage to each creature in a 10-foot radius. The damage from multiple exploding pods with overlapping areas of effect is cumulative.

A humanoid or beast that inhales the spores must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become infected with tendrils that start growing inside the creature's body. The saving throw DC increases by 1 for every pod in the area beyond the first.

A creature can use its action to set fire to all the spores within 5 feet, which destroys them but also deals 3 (1d6) fire damage to the creature. Acid, cold, or fire damage from an area spell automatically destroys any spores within the spell's area.

Stages of Infestation

A victim of the spores goes through three stages of infection. Infected creatures typically progress to the next stage in 1d4 weeks, although the Green Walker sometimes slows the growth of the tendrils within an infected creature to allow it to remain a "sleeper agent" for a longer period. This is how Ebo Adashe, former High Warlord of Narumbeki, remained undetected as an agent of the Green Walker for so long, and how other agents have infiltrated human society since.

Stage 1: Unwitting Thrall. During this stage, the infected creature exhibits no external signs of the plant life that is taking over its body. Though most victims at stage 1 never realize that they are affected, they are already being controlled. The creature automatically and unknowingly shares what it sees, hears, and thinks with the Walker. In addition, the creature often becomes an unwitting servant of the Green Walker, altering its actions and decisions to fit the Green Walker's needs and whims. Treat this effect as if the Green Walker casts a *suggestion* spell without needing components once per day; a creature that makes a successful DC 20 Wisdom saving throw resists the effect (but the Green Walker can try again the following day).

Spells of 2nd level or higher that treat disease, such as *lesser restoration*, can cure an infected creature, although the infected creature's companions must realize what's happening to the victim before they can act.

Stage 2: Hungering Pawn. During this stage, the infected creature is sustained by sunlight and water and thus no longer requires food. Vein-like bulges appear beneath the infected creature's skin as tendrils extend throughout its body, and the creature gains the following traits:

- **Green Strider.** The creature ignores movement restrictions and damage caused by natural undergrowth.
- **Regeneration.** The creature regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point and is in jungle terrain.

A hungering pawn suffers blackouts, episodes of lost time, and vivid nightmares while the creature's mind fights a losing battle against the Green Walker's influence. During combat, a hungering pawn no longer controls all its own actions. In any episode of combat, there is a 25 percent chance each round that a pawn will act as if affected by a *confusion* spell for the next 1d10 rounds. This chance increases by 5 percent in each round after the first, to a maximum of 50 percent.

Spells of 6th level or higher that remove disease, such as *heal* and *heroes' feast*, can cure a hungering pawn.

Stage 3: Tendril Puppet. In the final stage of the infection, the tendril completely takes over the body, absorbing the eyes so that now thin green vines reach out from the empty eye sockets, the mouth, and the ears to twine around the head, chest, and arms. The Green Walker and the vine lords completely control the victim, which is now a zombie-like extension of the Green Walker's will. There is no cure at this level of infestation. A player character who reaches this stage becomes a nonplayer character with the statistics of a tendril puppet.

When new vine lords are needed, the Green Walker summons tendril puppets into its presence. The transformation process melds the puppet with force-grown descendants of the kijani, the original inhabitants of Kush, to produce new vine lords. The Green Walker causes both creatures to grow hundreds of tendrils that intertwine, merging the tendril puppet and the kijani into a single cocoon-like mass of writhing plant life. A few hours later there's a shudder, and then the outer vegetation wilts and falls away, revealing a new vine lord.

ORCS OF THE GREEN ABYSS

The **orcs of the Green Abyss** (*Creature Codex*, p. 291) are mostly subterranean, dwelling beyond the reach of the vegetation that blights the daylight above. The nighttime is much cooler, and therefore it is safer for those who crawl out from the Great Sinkhole (see page 114) into the jungle. The Ashen Bats are one such group, orcs from an ancient line who have survived the horrors of the jungle and learned to thrive within its edges. Erstwhile allies of the vine lords, the Ashen Bats are the largest orc tribe of the Green Abyss. Like all Green Abyss orcs, they are immune to a vine lord's spore sacs and can't be transformed into tendril puppets.

The Ashen Bats live on the outer fringes of the Great Sinkhole, and yet they still honor those tribes that have clawed out an existence in the great deep. Indeed, one of the deepest parts of the Great Sinkhole is called the Ravenous Craw (see page 114), which descends more than two miles into the earth and ends in the lair of a terrible monster. The pale orcs that live here move like

albino spiders from deep within the Craw each night to feed and to gather in the forest above them.

There are many motley tribes within the Craw. The largest, called the Milk-Eye Scrugs, is led by the violent G'mruul, a master poisoner. Like all the chiefs of his tribe and most of his followers, G'mruul has scarred his body with poison thorns, creating horrible growths and gouges on his flesh to prove his strength.

Seconding G'mruul are a pair of female runners, K'skrull and Nah. They slip into the forest by night, investigating hunting grounds, robbing carnivorous plants of their prey, and gathering poisons. Beyond this, the tribe also lays simple traps, mostly covered pits filled with poison vines and brambles. These they check for prey each night.

Poisons of the Green Abyss

The industrious orcs of the Green Abyss know much about making poisons from the jungle's plant life. Below are three examples.

Bloated Sickfruit (Injury). The size and shape of a bloated head, sickfruit grows only in the higher boughs of its host trees where sunlight can penetrate. A weapon plunged into the fruit is covered in a fleshy-smelling ochre goo that quickly hardens, retaining its poison qualities for up to a week. A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 9 (2d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If the poison damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

Burnvines (Contact). Readily but riskily harvested from branches that stretch out over sinkholes, these vines are frequently gathered by orcs wearing thick gloves. Burnvines are used to torment prisoners. A creature bound with burnvines must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 1 fire damage per minute. A character can repeat the saving throw each time it is burned by the vines, avoiding the damage to itself on a success. A character can use its action to escape the vines with a successful DC 15 Strength or Dexterity check, taking 1 fire damage whenever it attempts such a check. A character can free a bound comrade by cutting the burnvines with a weapon that deals slashing damage or with a successful DC 15 Strength check; in the latter case, both the rescuer and the bound character take 1 fire damage.

Breathing Stinkhorn (Injury). The enormous stinkhorn can grow as large as a human, and the strange wheezing sounds it emits from its single yellow trumpet-shaped flower have led the orcs to believe that it can speak. The flower contains enough toxin to cover a single one-handed weapon, but it is short-lived: the

THE CHOSEN OF MOT

Orcs of the Green Abyss that become undead are said to be the "Chosen of Mot," who is Lord of the Undead and a close friend or even husband to the White Goddess. These orc-ghouls, wraiths, and others thrive in the lightless depths and are viewed with a certain degree of terror and awe by living orcs. They sometimes deign to assist the orcs in raids, or take prisoners from the surface. A vampire-orc named Khafash is said to be the high priest of Mot in the Green Abyss.

poison loses its potency after 1 hour. A creature subjected to this poison must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

THE CIRCLE OF ORCHIDS

Four hundred years ago, the circle of druids responsible for summoning the Green Walker performed a ritual to slow down the entity and curtail its powers, sacrificing themselves in the process. Although every druid perished, their children survived. Most remained in Kush as it fell under the influence of its new demonic allies, but a small group fled south to the Abandoned Lands.

Now, a group of druids calling themselves the Circle of Orchids has arrived in the Living Jungle and established a sacred grove at Verdant Falls (see page 115). They are led by the arch-druid Ufuoma Malangu, a direct descendant of the original Kushite druids, who came to Yawchaka after she shared the dreams of the sleeping titan Alkush. There are around twenty circle members in all, including several humans who can trace their lineage back to Kush, as well as three kijani, a heru named Fumu, and a nkosi named Kasamba.

Guided by Ufuoma's visions, the druids believe they might be able to perform a new ritual to reverse the original summons and banish the Green Walker back to its place of origin. Unfortunately for them, there are spies for the Walker lurking in their midst. Fumu and two of the other druids inadvertently triggered a green seed pod in the jungle a week ago and have fallen under the Green Walker's influence. As its tendrils grow inside them, the trio are unwittingly sharing the circle's plans with their master, and they have been unconsciously sabotaging the work of the other druids.

The druids of the Circle of Orchids decorate their faces with painted geometric patterns, and they carry wooden staffs wrapped with living vines and flowers. They eat only



plants, drink only water, and eschew leather and animal skins, as well as metal.

See “Verdant Falls,” page 115, and “Return of the Druids” on page 120 for more information.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

The Great Sinkhole is Yawchaka’s biggest landmark, but other fantastic locations await intrepid jungle explorers.

Great Sinkhole, Haldaheim, and the Green Abyss

When the Green Walker tore itself out of the earth, its emergence created an enormous sinkhole that consumed the nearby dwarven capital of Haldaheim. Thousands of dwarves were slain, and the rest fled to the west to rebuild their shattered lives in Sebbek Sobor. Bands of orcs now live in the sinkhole and the surrounding areas, known as the Green Abyss. They thrive in the shadows and in the many tunnels and caverns that connect it to the surface and to deeper territories.

The deep mysteries of the Great Sinkhole remain to be plumbed; it is a miles-deep shaft, 500 feet in diameter, its sides pockmarked by caverns and the space between them spanned by a cobweb of natural bridges. The ruins of Haldaheim are spread throughout the sinkhole, broken up and strewn haphazardly along the sunken ground. Tribes of albino orcs and other subterranean creatures, as well as demons and aberrations, scurry up and down inside the shaft. Deep inside, ancient dwarven golems still guard forgotten tombs, and the ghosts of those lost in the cataclysm haunt the ruins.

What lies at the bottom is mere speculation. The last known attempt to find out was undertaken 17 years ago by the famed explorer Vran Gorovik, who led an expedition from Capleon into the Great Sinkhole to map the remnants of Haldaheim. The group made it past several orc tribes, but only one of their number survived a run-in with a hideous tentacled aberration and returned to tell of it.

The Ravenous Craw

One of the most infamous entrances to the Great Sinkhole is known as the Ravenous Craw, which houses several orc tribes. Those willing—or foolish—enough to brave the Craw find that it’s a rather inhospitable place, geographically speaking. All along its two-mile depth, its walls are infested with slimy growths originating from the Green Walker. Some of these are green slime, and others are less harmful; the orcs are talented at spotting the dangerous growths. Less familiar eyes require a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to distinguish between the two types.

For the first 200 feet below the surface, the Craw is composed of a series of narrow natural chimneys, each

requiring a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to descend. On a failed check, a creature takes 5d6 damage from a fall that deposits it on top of the next lower chimney. From the surface, the pit-like entrances to these shafts are concealed by jungle foliage. The orcs know the layout of these entrances well, but others must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to find one of them.

Beyond this portion of the Craw, the shafts converge into one passage, which narrows and enters an overhang soon afterward. The overhang is impossible to climb, but the orcs have driven iron spikes into this short section, allowing easy access to the terrain below for a creature that makes a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

Past the iron spikes, the Craw’s walls are smooth, but the walls and shaft are punctured with dwarven relics and constructions. The remains of fine bridges are linked by slender vine ropes. Some ropes are only lightly knotted in places where the orcs have set traps to harm the unwary.

At the foot of the shaft lies the Hunger: a creature to whom the orcs toss meat and their unwanted young to appease her appetite. The Hunger, a huge **shambling mound** with maximum hit points, has learned to mimic the words and songs of the orcs. As she grows, her vines are extending perilously close to the edges of the orcs’ lowest-lying lair.

The Bulette Graveyard

Deep in the western part of the jungle lies the legendary Bulette Graveyard, where bulettes go to die, leaving their valuable, armor-plated carcasses behind. Occasionally expeditions set off from Pernoro or Kanjar looking for the graveyard, but those few who have found it have been wiped out by the enormous bulette that guards it, an ancient moss-covered specimen with 135 hit points.

Lutonge

This small ruined town is located on the banks of the Green Nuria near Kush’s northern border. Once a thriving community, it was almost completely flattened when the Green Walker began its advance. Only a handful of damaged stone buildings and a few walls remain, and these have been largely reclaimed by the jungle.

Rumors persist that great treasure is to be found under the rubble in the temple of Yemaja of the Waters, Lutonge’s patron goddess. Unfortunately for would-be looters, a **titanoboa** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 382) has taken up residence in the temple. Worse still, Lutonge seems to act as a gathering point for vine lords and their tendril puppets. At times, over a dozen vine lords and nearly a hundred tendril puppets can be seen standing silently among the ruins, joined together by vines to form a series of concentric rings.

Verdant Falls

Located on the Demon's Walk ley line to the north of the Kushite city of Kanjar, Verdant Falls is the sacred grove of the Circle of Orchids, the group of Living Jungle druids (see page 284) who have come to Yawchaka with the intention of banishing the Green Walker.

Here, a waterfall tumbles 100 feet down a rocky outcrop into a deep pool surrounded by lush ferns, vines, and hundreds of magnificent orchids. Small gaps in the forest canopy let just enough sunlight through to make the water sparkle. Great mahogany trees, each more than 150 feet tall, surround the clearing, buttressed by the great roots that run down their sides and crisscross the grove. The druids have built a dozen or so small huts in their shadow. Other trees growing nearby provide fruit and nuts to eat, as well as oil for the druids to cook with. Two friendly forest **elephants** keep the grove clear of excess vegetation, and a **ravenala** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 321) named Yala acts as the village's guardian, challenging visitors before they reach the falls.

Ufuoma Malangu (NG female human **Living Jungle druid**; see page 284) is the arch-druid of the Circle of Orchids. She spends much of her time in her hut studying ancient scrolls written on bark by the original druids of Kush, assisted by her wife Lukoji (NG female human **Living Jungle druid**), as they piece together the ritual to banish the Green Walker. Every morning at dawn, she takes the shape of a tiger and swims in the pool beneath the waterfall, hoping to commune with the titan Alkush. The other members of the circle (N and NG human **Living Jungle druids**) assist Ufuoma in her research and tend to the grove and the surrounding jungle, keeping its flora and fauna free from the corrupting effects of the Walker.

kush

Once praised for their kindness and sense of honor, today the people of Kush are morally ambivalent at best. Considering the circumstances, it's hard to fault them. With their towns and cities flattened by the Green Walker and their verdant forest changed into a semisentient jungle crawling with killing vines, poisonous creatures, and gigantic monsters, the Kushites feel betrayed by their former druidic leaders. To survive and rebuild their kingdom, the people made soul-binding pacts with demons, mingling their bloodlines with foul aberrations and other dark entities.

Ever since, Kush society has been dominated by demonic influences. Despite occasional raids north to Makuria and into Nuria Natal, much of the Kushites' efforts are spent holding back the advance of Yawchaka. Still, the natural bounty of a constantly shifting magical jungle provides the Kushites with a range of exotic goods to trade with merchants from other planes.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

Life in the jungles of Kush is not easy. The flora and fauna are actively hostile; the vines grow huge and attack any creatures that approach them, and other hazards abound. Even given their familiarity with the dangers, each day a few Kushites fall prey to wild animals and magical beasts while they tend jungle orchards and farms or harvest blackwood timber.

Despite these hardships, civilization endures. The people of Kush are known for their selfish independence. In Kushite culture, anyone who has sufficient strength

SURPRISING JUNGLE DISCOVERIES

Oddities and ominous scenes abound in the High Jungles. Below are some examples of flavorful jungle dressing for your game.

1. A large shrub with white flowers in the shape of a hippopotamus stands by the bank of a small jungle stream. A creature that drinks from the stream is transformed into a shrub if it fails a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. The transformation lasts for 2d6 hours.
2. An ancient lost city seems to have been built for creatures just 3 inches tall.
3. A vine-covered, 30-foot-tall stone chimpanzee head, built as an idol to a long-forgotten deity.
4. A feline skull that is 20 feet long. Someone has carved a magic circle into the top of it.
5. Kobold miners have dug a shaft up into the jungle, to "mine" wood and fresh fruits, and they don't appreciate you barging into their most profitable mine!
6. A human skeleton is tangled in the vines near the top of a great mahogany tree. The *carpet of flying* she was using when she crashed hangs from a low branch. Although filthy, it still functions.
7. A waterfall plunges 50 feet into a 15-foot-deep pool that is home to a giant crocodile. A small cave behind the falls is decorated with ancient paintings of humans making offerings to a crocodile god.
8. An abandoned treehouse is built into the branches of a mighty ironwood tree. There are signs that the occupant left in a hurry.

and guile can try to do anything they like. This is not a system of anarchy, however. The politically powerful make the rules in Kush, and their laws about crimes and punishments are strictly enforced. Thus, it is not really fear of the law that prevents crime; it is fear of the consequences of getting caught.

With virtually nothing prohibited, Kushite society is full of activity that would be outlawed elsewhere. Access to the forbidden draws many visitors to the cities of Kush, as do the marketplaces, which teem with items from other planes. The ultimate authority, of course, rests with Nulu Nagoa and his constabulary, known as the Shining Guard of the Lich's Eye. These soldiers maintain order as they see fit; they wear glowing metal lenses over their eyes in imitation of their undead overlord's unnerving gaze.

GOVERNMENT: COURT OF THE ETERNAL LORD

The lich Nulu Nagoa has ruled Kush for more than 300 years. Once a living ancestor of Morreg, Nagoa was forced into exile after his vile experiments came to light; these heinous experiments involved forcing citizens to serve as hosts for the tosculi that Nagoa had modified. Now that he is the leader of Kush, the Eternal Lord leaves the day-to-day details of ruling to a hierarchy of tiefling and human sorcerers. That group holds the true power in Kush: these one hundred depraved and cruel spellcasters are called the Court of the Eternal Lord. This arrangement frees up Nulu Nagoa to concentrate on creating an incantation to control the Green Walker rather than simply holding it in check. It is a difficult task, and a challenge even for a lich's talents.

Nulu Nagoa oversees the city from a white marble palace called the Necrotarium, a collection of gleaming towers, bizarre gardens, and great domes. The palace also houses the Eternal Lord's personal residence as well as laboratories for his circle of sorcerers, the barracks of the Shining Guard, the royal mint, and the various governmental halls where magical and mundane affairs are conducted.

Behind the polished facade of the Necrotarium, the Eternal Lord dissects the nature of life, divinity, and death. The citizens of Nangui ignore the screams coming from the Necrotarium, preferring ignorance to knowing what truly takes place behind those marble walls.

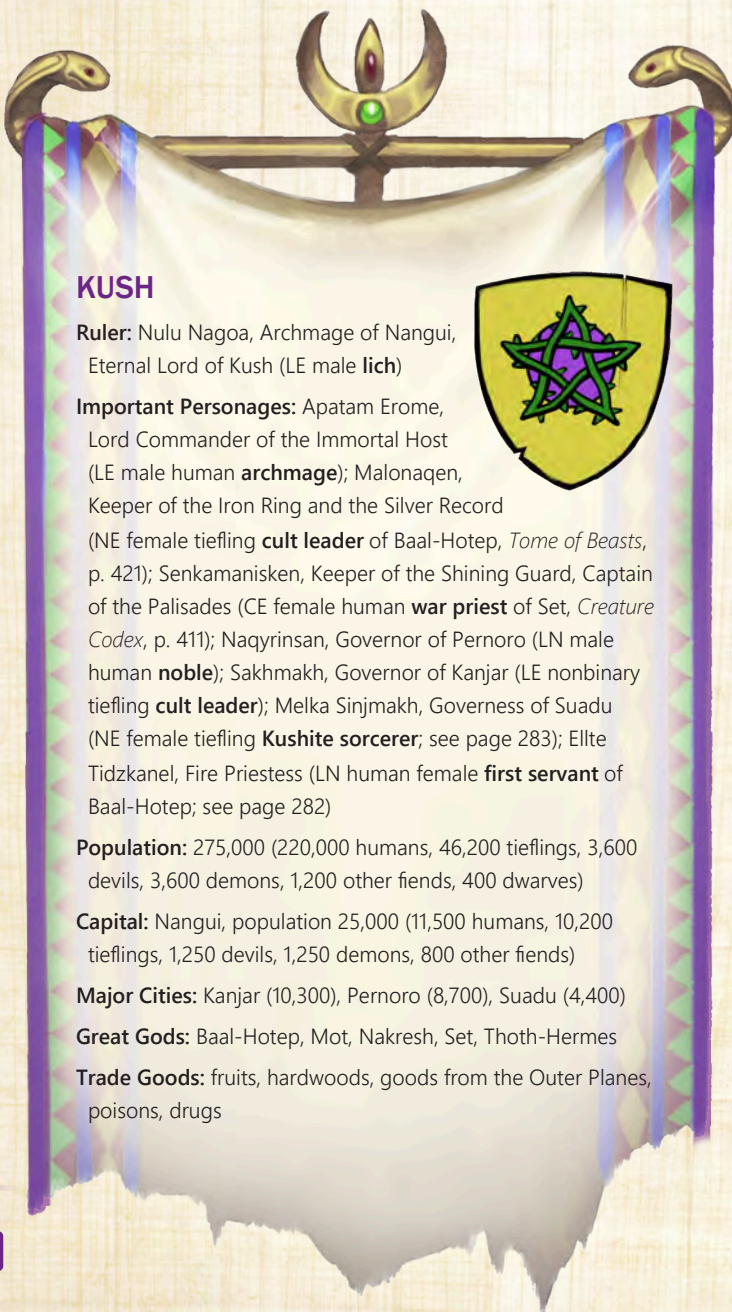
RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

Following the deaths of Kush's entire druid sect in the ritual to slow the Green Walker, Kushites have turned from honoring nature spirits and the titan Alkush to the worship of darker gods. Baal-Hotep, Mot, Nakresh, and Set are the most widely followed, but there are dozens of smaller cults dedicated to demon princes and arch-devils. The more scholarly Kushite mages pay homage to Thoth-Hermes: the impressive Library of Esoterics, dedicated to the god of knowledge, stands in Nangui's Branches District.

There are still a handful of druids living in Kush; some are distant descendants of the original sect. They keep a low profile, tending the orchards and gardens in Nangui and avoiding the city's fiendish residents. So far, the Circle of Orchids at Verdant Falls has not made contact with these druids.

COMMERCE

The Kushites harvest edible fruits and tropical hardwoods from the Living Jungle, but their most sought-after exports are the poisons, drugs, and other less savory goods distilled from jungle flowers and plants, which they trade



KUSH

Ruler: Nulu Nagoa, Archmage of Nangui, Eternal Lord of Kush (LE male lich)

Important Personages: Apatam Erome, Lord Commander of the Immortal Host (LE male human **archmage**); Malonaqen, Keeper of the Iron Ring and the Silver Record (NE female tiefling **cult leader** of Baal-Hotep, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 421); Senkamanisken, Keeper of the Shining Guard, Captain of the Palisades (CE female human **war priest** of Set, *Creature Codex*, p. 411); Naqyrinsan, Governor of Pernoro (LN male human **noble**); Sakhmakh, Governor of Kanjar (LE nonbinary tiefling **cult leader**); Melka Sinjmakh, Governess of Suadu (NE female tiefling **Kushite sorcerer**; see page 283); Ellte Tidzkanel, Fire Priestess (LN human female **first servant** of Baal-Hotep; see page 282)

Population: 275,000 (220,000 humans, 46,200 tieflings, 3,600 devils, 3,600 demons, 1,200 other fiends, 400 dwarves)

Capital: Nangui, population 25,000 (11,500 humans, 10,200 tieflings, 1,250 devils, 1,250 demons, 800 other fiends)

Major Cities: Kanjar (10,300), Pernoro (8,700), Suadu (4,400)

Great Gods: Baal-Hotep, Mot, Nakresh, Set, Thoth-Hermes

Trade Goods: fruits, hardwoods, goods from the Outer Planes, poisons, drugs

with merchants from other planes for magical aid and equipment. Most of these wondrous items end up for sale in the Market of Found Wisdom in Nangui.

NANGUI, THE CITY OF SORCERERS

The capital of Kush is a dark, wondrous city built on and around the Stone Heart, the petrified stump of a World Tree. Nangui provides a meeting place for the Kushites and their outsider patrons, their allies, and sometimes their forbidden lovers. In the aftermath of the fall of the druids, Nulu Nagoa made the first pact here. As part of the pact, he gave 100 young men and women of Nangui to a group of barbed devils and incubi in return for magical aid and lore. Building on this tradition, Nangui's citizens continue to court alliances with the darker realms, using what they gain to enhance their own power and arcane understanding.

Visitors to Nangui are often shocked to see demons, devils, and other fiends strolling along the streets. Indeed, these creatures are as much citizens of the city as are humans and tieflings. Certain societal norms that were once cornerstones of Kushite culture are either gone or skewed. In addition to traditional street fare, market stalls serve food fit for demons, such as ear stew or blood soup.

Shops cater to both mortal and immortal clients, and the city guard will always side with a powerful demon over a mere adventurer.

Sanguine Walls

Crafted from giant blocks of ochre-colored stone set with mortar made of lightning-infused blood, the high fortifications around Nangui protect the city from the encroaching vines of Yawchaka. A group of sorcerers renews and reinforces the spells on the walls daily.

The Stone Heart

Although he is aware of the petrified tree that rests beneath his palace, Nulu Nagoa has thus far has paid little attention to the Stone Heart. Once a thriving local World Tree, its trunk was severed 100 feet above the ground and turned to stone thousands of years ago during a cataclysmic battle between the gods. And yet, the ancient druids of Kush suspected that the heart of the tree still lived, and they speculated that passages might exist within the stump. One legend claims that a druidic device called the Lalob Key could open a passage inside the Stone Heart, but the key was lost during the rise of the Green Walker.

The petrified stump is a prominent landmark in Nangui, and it separates the city into its two districts, the Branches





and the Roots. The homes and businesses of Nangui's wealthier citizens, as well as the Eternal Lord's palace, are located in the Branches, which encircle the flat top of the stump with the Necrotarium at the center. Everyone else occupies the Roots. The petrified roots of the tree radiate out from the base of the Stone Heart. Protruding 20 feet from the ground, the roots serve to informally subdivide the Roots District into its different neighborhoods.

Branches District

From their lofty perch in the Branches District, the city's elite look down upon the common citizens. In the distance, the Green Walker's bulk looms over the jungle. For those with the money and power to qualify for residency, life in the Branches is indeed good. The best gardens, restaurants, shops, and artists cater to the citizens of the Branches.

Access to the district is carefully controlled. Nulu Nagoa's personal troops, the Horned Guard, monitor the district's elevated and enclosed platforms. Teams of ogre zombies lift and lower these caged platforms, better known as the "steps to the Necrotarium," up to the palace using heavy chains. Those lucky (or unlucky) enough to be summoned enjoy an unparalleled view of the city below, before being plunged into the dangers of the arch-lich's personal domain.

Market of Found Wisdom

Surrounding the Stone Heart, the tents, stalls, and shops of the Market of Found Wisdom offer goods from the Living Jungle of Yawchaka, from elsewhere in the Southlands, and also from distant planes. Although common items can be found here, the market is best known for its enchanted wares. This free-for-all marketplace of magic draws vendors and customers from across the Southlands and indeed across Midgard, many of whom arrive by spell or arcane conveyance.

Although the market specializes in items of demonic origin, some Kushites claim that any magic item in existence can be found in the Market of Found Wisdom. And if it is found in the market, surely it can be purchased—or so goes the conventional wisdom. In this case, the rumors are mostly true; the Market of Found Wisdom is truly a smorgasbord for the magical connoisseur. The only other comparable bazaar is Abeu Plaza in Kel Azjer (see page 66). The specialized potion and scroll markets of Maillon in the north and Lignas in the west also offer excellent magical merchandise, but Nangui provides a more accessible source of exotic wares.

Roots District

Most of the city's residents live hemmed in between the walls of Nangui and the Market of Found Wisdom in the sprawling, twisting streets of the Roots. As is true in any good-sized city, this district of common folk has nicer areas and poorer ones; here the petrified roots of the World Tree separate. The residents have built houses and other buildings on top of and between the protruding roots. Some city streets run over the roots; others tunnel through them.

Unlike other cities, the slums of Nangui feature such oddities as demons begging for a drop of blood to get them through the night in exchange for services or knowledge. The Shining Guard's regular patrols keep the anything-goes atmosphere from getting out of hand. Too much disruption and chaos is bad for business.



MAJOR CITIES

The other important cities of Kush are described below. Like Nangui, each is walled to keep the jungle out.

Kanjar

Located close to the northwestern border on the banks of the Green Nuria, Kanjar is Kush's second largest city. Its governor is Sakhmakh, a tiefling with prophetic powers that were bestowed on him by the dark deities of Kush. Sakhmakh previously served as Nula Nagoa's most trusted councilor until the lich grew tired of the tiefling's cryptic visions and moved him to Kanjar to get him out of the way.

Kanjar's palace contains a domed temple dedicated to Baal-Hotep, Nakresh, Set, and the arch-devil **Parzelon**, the King of Secrets (*Creature Codex*, p. 101), where Sakhmakh sacrifices hapless prisoners, reading the hidden messages in their innards while in a drug-induced trance.

Pernoro

The city of Pernoro is located high in the jungle-covered hills, close to the southern edge of Yawchaka. There are few demons here, and the population's bloodlines are less tainted than those of most other Kushites. Pernoro's wily governor Naqyrinsan is one of the few members of the Court of the Eternal Lord who isn't a sorcerer. He pays just enough lip service to the demons to avoid questions about his loyalty, while focusing his efforts on the lucrative timber trade. The jungle around Pernoro is rich in blackwood trees, and the city's merchants are always on the lookout for log drivers to float timber downriver for sale in Nangui.

Suadu

Built on the banks of the Green Nuria around fifty miles from Kanjar, Suadu is on the Demon's Walk ley line that also passes through the Great Sinkhole and Nangui. A former dwarven trading post and iron mine, it fell under the control of a cadre of tieflings in recent years. Its governor, the tiefling sorcerer Melka Sinjmakh, is an accomplished summoner and demon binder who surrounds herself with fiendish allies and servants. Melka's lover is an ambitious **marilith** named Xensyra, and the pair are plotting together to summon more aberrant creatures into the world.

history of the high jungles

The Bangweulu and the kijani are thought to be the original inhabitants of the High Jungles, but their legends of the earliest days, when the water first poured forth from the sky, tell us little. The known history of the region begins with the foundation of Glorious Umbuso. The titans built the Pillared Stair, a colossal series of terraces

and hexagonal rock pillars that climbed the southwestern side of Black Lotus Mesa, and established a district of the city of Ramagani on the plateau, the northernmost outpost of their empire.

Three thousand years ago, when the titans succumbed to the magical plague that drove them to madness and the Great Web of ley lines they had created began to unravel, the tiger-headed titan Alkush imparted his divine spark to his followers—the druids who would later come north to found Kush. To avoid the madness that struck down his fellow titans, Alkush placed himself in stasis inside a magical cocoon in Gala'ikos (see page 192).

After the collapse of Glorious Umbuso, the kingdom of Nuria Natal expanded southward, claiming the High Jungles as part of its territory for a time. Several Nurian wizards built towers on Black Lotus Mesa, eager to study the Celestial Waterfall and the enchanted waters of the mesa. Dwarves from the north settled in the mountains and built the city of Haldaheim, where they forged great wonders in its workshops.

Not long afterward, the druidic followers of Alkush arrived from the Abandoned Lands. Settling in the jungle, they named their new home Kush, after the titan who had gifted them with his divine spark. The druids traded with the dwarves of Haldaheim and befriended the kijani, who shared their ancient lore with the newcomers. As it happened, this knowledge would ultimately lead to the downfall of all.

Around 2,100 years ago the area saw more new arrivals. A group of mages and their families fleeing westward from a failed rebellion in Sikkim crashed into Black Lotus Mesa in a stolen flying castle. After discovering that they could harness the magical properties of the Celestial Waterfall to power their spells, they raised what was left of their fortress into the air and founded the Sky Nation of Aerdvall. Below on the swampy islands of the mesa, a new leader rose up among the white apes, uniting the disparate tribes and building a city. When this "Last Father" died, the white apes constructed a great tomb in his honor.

Four hundred years ago, disaster struck. The well-meaning druids of Kush were tricked by demons into using kijani knowledge to summon the Green Walker. The Walker rose out of the earth, mutating the flora and fauna of the jungle and causing it to grow unchecked, transforming the surrounding savannah into dense forest. Worse still, as the Walker tore itself out of the ground it created a sinkhole that swallowed Haldaheim, forcing the dwarves who survived to seek refuge in Sebbek Sobor. The kijani fled too, heading south to the Zobanu Jungle, and those that stayed were destined to become tendril puppet servants of the Walker. The Green Walker's rampage flattened Lutonge and many other communities,



and it was checked only when the druids sacrificed both themselves and Alkush's divine spark in a great ritual to constrain the abomination.

With the druids gone, the Kushites who remained felt betrayed by their former leaders. They turned to darkness, making pacts with demons and other fiends to more quickly rebuild their kingdom. When the lich Nulu Nagora became Eternal Lord 300 years ago, he traded souls to the infernal powers in exchange for forbidden lore, establishing Kush as a center of magical power.

More than a century ago, concerned that the arcane wasting disease might spread to Ramagani, the ramag shut off the connection to their district on Black Lotus Mesa, dooming their fellow citizens to an isolated and miserable existence.

Forty-six years ago, the balor Wra'onai and a small army of Kushite cultists stormed across Nurian territory, burning and pillaging, before perishing at the hands of former God-King Sut-Akhaman in the Siege of Per-Xor.

current events

Strange happenings are afoot in the High Jungles, both on top of Black Lotus Mesa and inside Yawchaka.

SERVANTS OF THE WHITE APE

Over the last decade, the white apes of Black Lotus Mesa have united under a "New Father," the northern interloper Josef Kranz. Kranz has been building up his territory, seizing control of both ape and Bangweulu villages. Although the aeromancers of Aerdvall have the ability to stop Kranz's expansion, they have taken little interest in his activities so far.

Believing control of the mesa to be within his grasp, Kranz is turning his attention northward to Nuria Natal. He plans to send his white apes into the southern cities of that kingdom to infect their priests and wizards with the arcane wasting disease. With their most powerful defenders out of the picture, Kranz will lead his simian armies into battle, taking each city one at a time.

RAMAG REUNIFICATION

Thanjiwe was the wisest and most magically gifted of the ramag of Black Lotus Mesa. When she died, the tribe entombed her body in one of the hexagonal pillars of the Pillared Stair. This entombment served to complete the two-part incantation that Thanjiwe had begun when she first passed into adulthood, which partially reopened the sealed connection in the Great Web of Glorious Umbuso between the monolith and the city of Ramagani.

The lost ramag hope to use the portal to return to their people and escape the white apes, but a monolith also needs to be reactivated on the other side for it to function. Perhaps the characters would be willing to guide a group of emissaries overland to the nearest Ramagani district to petition for reunification.

RETURN OF THE DRUIDS

The titan Alkush lies asleep in a crystal cocoon that floats 50 feet above the ground in Gala'ikos, Seat of the Titans (see "The Sleeping Gods", page 192). A few months ago, Alkush began to dream of the Green Walker and how the abomination might be permanently banished. As he dreamed, so did a young Kushite druid named Ufuoma Malangu, a direct descendent of the druids to whom Alkush had given his divine spark.

The dreams have brought the druids back to Yawchaka. Ufuoma leads the Circle of Orchids (see page 113), druids who have come to the Living Jungle to banish the Green Walker and allow the jungle to return to normal. The means to achieve this goal lie buried somewhere in the dreams that Alkush and Ufuoma share, and in the ancient scrolls of the original druids. So far, Ufuoma has determined that the answer involves the divine spark and the Stone Heart, but she needs the Lalob Key in order to get inside the petrified World Tree.

Unknown to Ufuoma and the other druids, the Green Walker has placed three unwitting agents within the Circle of Orchids. Fumu and his companions (see page 113 for details) spend their time secretly undoing much of their colleagues' work in containing the jungle's expansion, and, worse, have orders to extract the divine spark from the Green Walker when the time is right to allow their master to walk free once more.

adventure seeds

Many opportunities for adventure exist in the High Jungles for the bold and foolhardy willing to seek them out.

A LAST REQUEST

A dwarf elder has recently passed away from old age, and his last will offers a great payment to those willing to transport his corpse overland to Haldenheim and let it tumble into the depths of the sinkhole. Once a keystone from a ruined city arch is returned to his family, the inheritance will be released.

EXPEDITION TO VERDANT FALLS

Governor Sakhmakh's recent visions have revealed the presence of druids to the north of Kanjar, and he is preparing to send a team into the jungle to investigate. Will the characters accompany the sorcerers and bearded devils on the expedition, or do they intend to warn the druids before the Kushite cultists arrive?

If the characters ally with the Circle of Orchids, Ufuoma Malangu could enlist their help in defending Verdant Falls from the vine lords and tendril puppets, or in obtaining the long-lost Lalob Key to the Stone Heart.

GARDEN OF DELIGHTS

The Sultan of Siwal has become enamored with the idea of creating a garden bearing fruits and blooms from all over the Southlands and beyond. He offers the characters a rich reward and favor in his court if they can retrieve several different living samples of plants from Black Lotus Mesa. When the characters approach the mesa, the Green Walker learns of this obsession through a converted tendril puppet. When the characters finally do bring the requested plants back to Siwal, they and the court are in for a surprise—because one of the samples is actually a green seed pod.

INTO THE STUMP

Kushite scholars claim that Black Lotus Mesa is a grand stump of a World Tree, and that the tunnels found in the Broken Circles (see page 102) lead to other planes of existence. One obsessed scholar in Nangui is searching for adventurers to take him to the mesa to explore this theory. If they accept his profitable offer, the characters eventually learn that the scholar is seeking a specific extraplanar portal mentioned in ancient texts; supposedly it leads to a lost artifact that can control the mesa's white apes. Even worse, the scholar is just a puppet for a powerful devil who seeks to wrest control of the apes from Josef Kranz and enslave all the mesa's creatures, including the refugee ramag.

SPINDLES IN THE ATTIC

The characters are hired to discover the fate of a legendary minotaur hero of the Moon Kingdom who disappeared 300 years ago during the Mharoti attack on Cindass. If the characters travel to the Well of Urd and successfully bluff or sneak their way past the Three Sisters, they might be able to learn the hero's story by finding and unraveling one of the hundreds of spindles in the attic of the sisters' cottage.



the kingdoms of salt and steel



The civilizations of the Southlands' western reaches are bustling places where lucrative trade ties together traditions as ancient and variable as the land itself. Here, the Narumbeki form their fierce but well-oiled warriors into legions that make even the most confident monarchs tremble; the dwarves of Sebbek Sobor have carved out a new homeland; the tropical lands of Lignas are inhabited by an aloof, serpentine populace; and the Kingdom of Morreg is a paradox of egalitarian values and belief in divine fate. Together, these civilizations are the Kingdoms of Salt and Steel, one of the most influential regions in the Southlands.



geography

Separated from the deserts of the north by the Mbazha Mountains, these areas of varied terrain experience a hot, tropical climate.

Moving southward, the rugged northern reaches of Narumbeki give way to grasslands and savanna dotted with patches of forest. Acacias, locust-bean trees, and mighty baobabs, capable of surviving through long dry spells, grow across the region, which has vast numbers of large animals, including **elephants**, **rhinoceroses**, giraffes, and zebras, and predators such as **lions**, leopards (**panthers**), and **hyenas**. Monstrous inhabitants of the grasslands

It is customary to conceal your identity when shopping in the Scroll Market of Lignas Proper.

include **axe beaks**, **bulettes**, zebra-patterned **centaurs**, and the xenophobic “elephant centaurs,” the **loxoda** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 280). To the east, where the land climbs toward the High Jungles, the woodlands have been burned in an attempt to keep Yawchaka at bay (see “The Burning Fields”, page 128).

Ringed by the Eleyiti Mountains, the Olu Jungle encompasses the entire kingdom of Lignas. Heavy summer rainfall feeds the crocodile-infested Selwheyha and Nyanssha rivers, which flow into the Western Ocean at a huge mangrove-forested delta. Thousands of plant species can be found in the tropical rainforests, from the towering ironwood, mahogany and teak trees that form the forest canopy, woven with orchids and other epiphytes, to dangerous plants such as the **monkey’s bane vine** (see page 271).

denizens of the jungles

A wide variety of animal life inhabits both the Olu Jungle and the Fendeel Jungle on Morreg’s southern border. Below is an encounter table featuring some of the creatures commonly found there. A creature for which no source is given can be found in the core rules.

WESTERN JUNGLES ENCOUNTERS

d20	Creature	CR	Source
1	2d6 anophilo	1	<i>Creature Codex</i> , p. 39
2	2d6 apes	1/2	—
3	1d6 arboreal grapplers	3	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 25
4	2d8 baboons	0	—
5	1d6 elephants	4	—
6	1d3 fleshpot hornets	6	<i>Creature Codex</i> , p. 161
7	1d6 giant boars	2	—
8	1d3 giant constrictor snakes	2	—
9	Giant crocodile	5	—
10–11	1d6 leopards (panthers)	1/4	—
12	1d6 millitaur	3	<i>Tome of Beasts</i> , p. 288
13–14	1d4 monkey’s bane vines	4	See page 271
15	2d6 serpentfolk of Yig	1	<i>Creature Codex</i> , p. 324
16	1d8 serpentine lamias	1	<i>Creature Codex</i> , p. 248
17	Spirit naga	8	—
18–19	1d6 swarms of insects	1/2	—
20	1d4 swarms of poisonous snakes	2	—

narumbeki, shield of the south

The grasslands south of the Mbazha Mountains thunder with the marching feet of the Narumbeki legions. Once the beloved people of the titan Mwari, the Narumbeki were pitted against the “armies” of other titans as if they were toy soldiers. After the dissolution of the titan empire, the Narumbeki fled northwest and settled on verdant plains dotted with herds of zebra centaurs, gnu, and rhinoceroses. But the tribe never forgot its passion for soldiering.

Over the centuries, the Narumbeki have reformed themselves into a society dedicated to the art of organized warfare. A confederation of tribes that observe a rigid, caste-based social structure, all Narumbeki are part of the army, more often called the legions. For the past 200 years, much of Narumbeki’s efforts have been devoted to holding back Kush’s living jungle and the monsters on the eastern border. But in recent years a new threat has risen in the west: the gnolls of Dabu. Even worse, eight years ago the Mukani (High Warlord) of Narumbeki was exposed as a thrall of the Green Walker.



CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

Loyalty to the legions dominates Narumbeki society. At the age of six, each Narumbeki joins the legions as a porter or a message-runner. At age twelve, these recruits enter one of the Khandato, or training schools. They spend their time training in group combat and one-on-one fighting until formally enlisting at the end of their schooling. During training, the recruits wear collars locked with an adamantine ring that is not removed, even after graduation, until the individual notches a kill in battle.

Narumbeki soldiers rotate between active-duty assignments, staffing forts along the border, and reserve duty in their home kraal, or settlement. Troops on active duty might be ordered to defend the border forts or conduct raids into Dabu and Kush. When Ebo Adashe was High Warlord, the legions even made bold raids into the Abandoned Lands—in his words, “to bring greatness to Narumbeki.” These foolhardy expeditions ended eight years ago, following Adashe’s fall from grace.

Narumbeki troops not on active duty still train regularly while working as artisans, cowherds, farmers, and in other civilian roles. Each citizen is a capable warrior, no matter what other occupation they might hold.

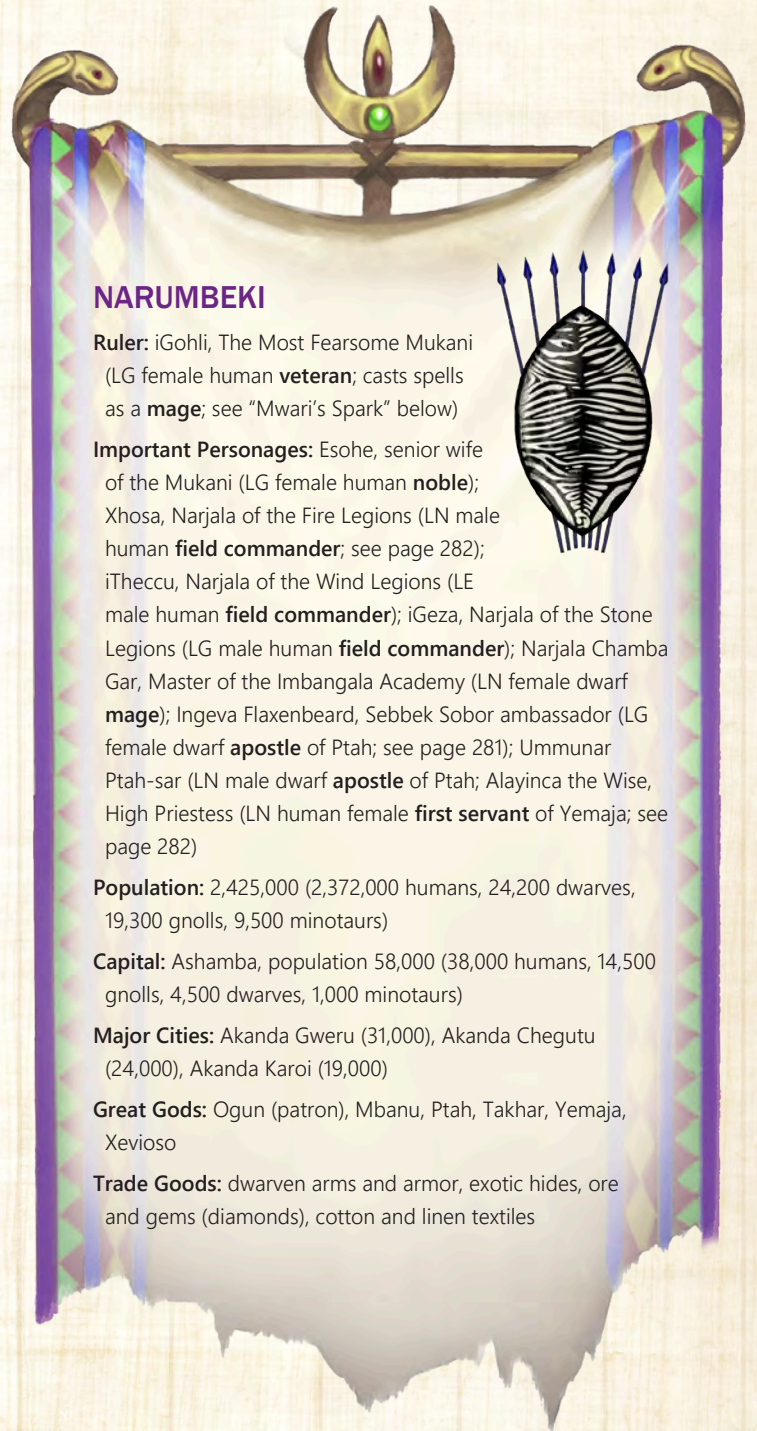
GOVERNMENT: THE MUKANI

The current Mukani, or High Warlord, is iGohli, previously the esteemed Narjala of the Stone Legions. She became the Mukani after exposing her predecessor, Ebo Adashe, as a thrall under the control of a Kush vine lord.

Ebo Adashe was a proud warrior who rose through the ranks to become the youngest Mukani to take the Zebra Throne 40 years ago. Exposed to a green seed pod planted on the battlefield by an agent of the vine lords (see page 111), he became an unwitting thrall of the Green Walker.

While he was under the monstrosity’s influence, the Mukani’s decisions became increasingly erratic. He expelled Lignas’s ambassadors for spying and repeatedly disregarded the treaty with Dabu, escalating tensions with the gnolls. Worst of all, Ebo scaled back the legions’ presence on the Burning Fields, enabling the Living Jungle to make its first significant advances in centuries.

The Green Walker slowed the growth of the infestation within the Mukani’s body to prevent his detection for as long as possible, but eventually outward signs of the infection became visible. When green vines sprang forth from Adashe’s eye sockets, mouth, and ears, iGohli drew her sword and slew the tendril puppet. As the Mukani died, the divine spark of the titan Mwari leapt into iGohli, marking her as the rightful heir to the Zebra Throne.



NARUMBEKI

Ruler: iGohli, The Most Fearsome Mukani (LG female human **veteran**; casts spells as a **mage**; see “Mwari’s Spark” below)

Important Personages: Esohe, senior wife of the Mukani (LG female human **noble**); Xhosa, Narjala of the Fire Legions (LN male human **field commander**; see page 282); iTheccu, Narjala of the Wind Legions (LE male human **field commander**); iGeza, Narjala of the Stone Legions (LG male human **field commander**); Narjala Chamba Gar, Master of the Imbangala Academy (LN female dwarf **mage**); Ingeva Flaxenbeard, Sebbek Sobor ambassador (LG female dwarf **apostle** of Ptah; see page 281); Ummunar Ptah-sar (LN male dwarf **apostle** of Ptah; Alayinca the Wise, High Priestess (LN human female **first servant** of Yemaja; see page 282)

Population: 2,425,000 (2,372,000 humans, 24,200 dwarves, 19,300 gnolls, 9,500 minotaurs)

Capital: Ashamba, population 58,000 (38,000 humans, 14,500 gnolls, 4,500 dwarves, 1,000 minotaurs)

Major Cities: Akanda Gweru (31,000), Akanda Chegutu (24,000), Akanda Karoi (19,000)

Great Gods: Ogun (patron), Mbanu, Ptah, Takhar, Yemaja, Xevioso

Trade Goods: dwarven arms and armor, exotic hides, ore and gems (diamonds), cotton and linen textiles

In the past eight years, iGohli has proved herself a capable Mukani. Fearless and determined, she is well advised by her senior wife, the calm and composed Esohe. She has rebuilt the diplomatic relationship with Lignas and has doubled the number of legions on active duty to deal with increased raiding by the gnolls of Dabu and the growth of the Living Jungle. The vine lords offer the most significant threat to the Mukani’s rule—who knows how many tendril puppets have already infiltrated the legions and other influential positions in Narumbeki?

Mwari's Spark

Each Mukani becomes the recipient of the spark left by Mwari, the nation's departed titan. This divine gift grants the Mukani the spellcasting trait of a **mage** but allows them to select their prepared spells from a wider list.

The Mukani is also granted the power to imbue the cavalry casters, the elite mounted mages of the Narumbeki, with the knowledge to cast spells from outside their discipline, and to bond with their zebra mounts.

Cavalry casters are mages who can choose to replace one prepared spell at each level with a spell from another class's spell list. The bond between a cavalry caster and their zebra mount allows them to fight together as a seamless unit. While mounted on their zebras, cavalry casters can make any spell that targets only the caster also target their mount. The bond also allows a cavalry caster to communicate telepathically with their zebra mount when it is within 1 mile.

NARUMBEKI LEGIONS

The foot legions of the Narumbeki use advanced tactics and formations, while the zebra-riding cavalry provide ranged support. No one outside the Narumbeki can say how these mages keep their mounts under control; **riding**

zebras (see page 273) will not usually serve as mounts for anyone but Narumbeki mages.

A Narumbeki warrior typically wears zebra hide armor, carries a zebra hide shield, and wields an assegai, a heavy spear. The warriors are superbly trained and fight cohesively; this is the biggest reason for their success.

The twelve legions are organized into four groups of three. The Fire Legions specialize in ranged combat, using arrows dipped in dwarven naphtha (see page 127). The soldiers of the Wind Legions move quickly, darting in and out of combat, and are known for speedy night marches. The Stone Legions fight wherever the battle is fiercest, and their defensive skills make them almost unmovable.

Finally, the Imbangala are the zebra-mounted soldiers of the Narumbeki. These troops concentrate on getting their spellcasters into and out of battle swiftly, no matter what they must trample on the way.

Eight of the twelve legions are on active duty at any time—this number was doubled by the current Mukani to deal with the increased threats to Narumbeki. The inactive legions are available to be called up on short notice, although more time is needed to muster the troops during harvesting and planting seasons.

NARUMBEKI LEGION TITLES AND ORGANIZATION

The great legions of the Narumbeki are organized in a strict system of ranks. A legion consists of twelve impi, or regiments, of 864 warriors each, with logistical support provided by caretakers called ithana. Each impi includes twelve companies of 72 fighters each, and every company is made up of twelve six-soldier squads called shields.

Currently, the Narumbeki have eight legions on active duty, bringing the total number of battle-ready troops to nearly 83,000, with four more legions ready to be called up if required. Added to this are the approximately 10,000 support and training staff of the ithana.

The legions' rank structure and the Narumbeki names for these ranks (in parentheses) are as follows:

- High Warlord (Mukani)
- General (Narjala)
- Colonel (Kanali)
- Captain (Teni)
- Lieutenants (Ntanga)
- Soldier (Butho)



DWARF ALLIES

No matter the state of its treaties with other nations, Narumbeki will never sunder one ancient and special relationship: the nation is a major ally of the dwarves of Sebbek Sobor. The Narumbeki aided the dwarves when the Great Sinkhole consumed their old capital. Dwarf refugees were greeted with open arms, and entire clans resettled under Narumbeki protection.

While a few clans moved south to dig new clanholds, others remained under the Mukani's martial rule, which appealed to the dwarves—as did the ready market for their ironwork, armor, and weapons. The Mukani of the time kept as many of these talented smiths as he could: dwarves are highly respected among the Narumbeki, and they are often referred to by the title “forgemaster” or “mastersmith” regardless of the dwarf's age or skill.

Dwarven equipment is one of Narumbeki's major exports to caravans heading north. The secret of dwarven naphtha (see below) was a gift to the Narumbeki long ago as well, when the Green Walker first threatened the plains, to help them contain the ever-expanding jungle with fire.

Dwarven Naphtha

This ancient dwarven alchemical mixture is similar to gunpowder, but it is liquid and therefore useless in firearms. A dose of dwarven naphtha costs 20 gp and can be used like a poison to coat a weapon so that it deals fire damage.

Dwarven Naphtha (Injury). A creature that takes slashing or piercing damage from a weapon or a piece of ammunition coated in dwarven naphtha must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or take 2 (1d4) fire damage. The creature must repeat the saving throw at the start of each of its turns. On each subsequent failed save, the character takes 2 (1d4) fire damage. After two successful saves, the effect ends.

Dwarven naphtha is also dangerous in large quantities. It is stored and transported in kegs (which hold 100 doses each). In this quantity, if the naphtha is exposed to lightning or fire, it explodes. A creature within 20 feet of an exploding keg must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Anything that takes damage from an exploded keg or kegs of naphtha is at risk of catching on fire. A keg of dwarven naphtha costs 2,000 gp.

RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

As one would expect from a kingdom steeped in military tradition, the worship of gods of war and battle is widespread in Narumbeki. Ogun is the land's patron deity: the god has a fortified temple, the Sword Hall of Ogun, in Ashamba. The archers of the Fire Legions are prevalent among his worshippers; their general, Narjala Xhosa, is a

devotee. Others serving in the legions follow Takhar and Xevioso, while farmers and merchants pay their respects to Yemaja of the Rivers.

Dwarves, as well as human crafters, jewelers, and smiths, worship Ptah, the hardworking architect of the gods. The high priest of Ptah is Ummunar Ptah-sar, who presides over a huge temple-forge complex in Ashamba, called the House of Portals, staffed by several hundred human and dwarf clerics.

In addition, the dwarven forgemasters raised temples to Mbanu as Hammer God and Master of Flames when they first arrived. Those sites now draw as many human worshipers as dwarven ones: Mbanu himself sometimes appears in Narumbeki in dwarven form, and at other times in human guise. The dwarves seem not to mind sharing their favored forge god with their allies; on the contrary, they see it as a sign of a firm alliance.

COMMERCE

Merchants head north from Akanda Chegutu through the Narumbeki Gap in the Mbazha Mountains to join the Lion Road, which winds through the Crescent Desert to the Nurian city of Corremel. Although this is a well-established caravan route, the trip is long and perilous, and wise traders hire the best guides and mercenaries to protect their goods. Dwarven arms and armor, diamonds and other precious stones, and exotic hides from the beasts of the grasslands and jungles fetch the best prices.

Narumbeki merchants heading south to Lignas and Morreg trade dwarven equipment and bales of raw cotton for lumber and ivory.

ASHAMBA

Ashamba, the fortress-capital of the Narumbeki, looms over the surrounding grasslands, close to the border with Dabu. Its 70-foot-high walls are painted with colorful murals that depict victorious legions. At the center of the city, four eagle-topped statues on the largest building in Ashamba mark the Mabuti, or Eagle Palace. The city is a marvel of defensive architecture. The Mukani can sit on her Zebra Throne and look out from her wide balconies upon the city's concentric rings of streets, the smoking dwarven forges, and the vast legion barracks.

Also inside the walls of the city is the Proving Ground, the barracks of the zebra-riding spellcasters of the Imbangala Academy. The thunder of hooves and the “whoosh” of a fireball as the Imbangala students practice their maneuvers can be heard from several streets away. The Narumbeki say that once a candidate sets foot on the Proving Ground, they will emerge as a legionnaire, a zebra-mounted spellcaster, or a corpse. Chamba Gar is the



master of the Imbangala Academy; it is said that she can cast a *lightning bolt* spell while standing on the back of her galloping zebra.

OTHER OUTPOSTS: AKANDAS AND KRAALS

Narumbeki never builds undefended towns or open settlements. Instead, two types of walled fortresses dot the landscape. An akanda is the size of a small city and often serves as the headquarters of an individual legion. A kraal is only as populous as a village but still heavily fortified with walls and towers.

Akanda Gweru

The closest akanda to the Burning Fields, Gweru is the home base of the First Fire Legion. The city has a large dwarf population, including dozens of alchemists who produce naphtha in a well-guarded facility. Unbeknownst to the others, the dwarves' master chymist has been turned into an unwitting thrall of the Green Walker and has been tampering with the mixture on the orders of the Walker, making the substance extremely volatile. If things continue in this fashion, it is only a matter of time before the whole akanda burns to the ground.

Akanda Chegutu

Located in the foothills of the Mbazha Mountains, Chegutu is an important stop on the Lion Road caravan route to Nuria Natal. As the last settlement on the road before travelers reach the oasis of Qitta, the akanda does a good business in camels, supplies, guides, and guards.

Akanda Karoi

Situated on the turbulent border with Dabu, this southern akanda is the headquarters of the Third Wind Legion; the soldiers are kept busy dealing with gnoll raids on caravans heading south to Lignas.

Kraal Marii

This kraal near the edge of the Burning Fields grew up around a thousand-year-old baobab tree that is home to a powerful elder dryad. This tree is involved in several local traditions. When the children of the village begin their military training, they eat a bowl of couscous flavored with leaves from the baobab. In later years, after making their first kill in battle, they eat the couscous again; this is part of the ceremony in which their collars are unlocked and removed. Finally, each legion visits the baobab to pay its respects before an assignment in the Burning Fields.

Recently, the legions stopped making animal sacrifices to the dryad inside the tree on the advice of the kraal's priest, an unwitting thrall of the Green Walker. He lied to the generals, telling them the tree had grown too weak to bless their expeditions, in the hope that their efforts

against the Living Jungle would be less effective. Without the sacrifices, the baobab and the dryad are both in danger of dying. If the characters go inside the tree's huge hollow trunk, they can speak to the dryad, who explains that she and the baobab need the blood offerings to thrive; she doesn't know why they have stopped. The elder dryad is a Medium fey; it uses the **dryad** stat block, but it lacks the Tree Stride trait and it is able to assume the form of a talking **giant poisonous snake**.

KONDANAMWALI

Northwest of Ashamba, near the border with Dabu Uhlza, stands an enormous baobab known locally as Kondanamwali, "the tree that eats maidens" in the local dialect. Kondanamwali gets its sinister name from a legend that the baobab swallowed four young women from a nearby kraal after falling in love with them. The truth of the tale is that Kondanamwali is a World Tree, and the women hid inside its huge trunk to escape from their annoying suitors. Wandering deeper into the network of tunnels beneath the trunk, they became lost among the roots of Yggdrasil after fleeing from a group of **kallikantzaros** (*Creature Codex*, p. 233) and couldn't find their way home to Midgard.

THE BURNING FIELDS

Two of the active Narumbeki legions defend Ashamba against the gnolls of Dabu and patrol the kingdom's borders. The other six legions are stationed along the edge of the Burning Fields, a wide swath of scorched ground on the border between Narumbeki and Kush.

Since the rise of the Green Walker, the Living Jungle has sought to expand into Narumbeki. To combat this threat, the legions continually use fire and magic to burn away the invasive greenery in a campaign that has gone on for hundreds of years. Under the leadership of Ebo Adashe, the burning was scaled back, enabling the Living Jungle to reclaim much of the cleared territory. In the eight years since the former Mukani's death, the legions have struggled to burn enough of the jungle to recover the lost ground.

Using the proper mixture of naphtha and charcoal, and acting at the best times and seasons to ignite their fires, the legions are expert at the process, setting fire to the edge of the forest just before a thunderstorm erupts, to keep the blaze from running rampant. But, while this technique ensures that the fires don't rage out of control, possibly spreading to the grasslands, the Walker and its altered fungi and molds use the flames to help spread their spores. Consequently, mind-altering ash clouds or contaminated rainfall poses a threat in the vicinity of the Narumbeki's controlled burns, especially in times of high winds.

Skullburn Ash

Skullburn ash often floats on the winds following a controlled burn. Victims afflicted with indefinite madness because of exposure to skullburn ash become fanatics obsessed with worshipping at the foot of the Green Walker.

When a creature inhales or ingests skullburn ash, it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become infected. The creature is subject to an episode of short-term madness that occurs 1d3 days after infection and lasts for 1d10 minutes, during which time the creature experiences visions of the Green Walker.

After finishing a long rest, the creature must make another DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a successful save, the creature recovers from the disease. On a failed saving throw, the creature is afflicted with long-term madness that lasts for 1d10 × 10 hours.

When the long-term madness ends, the creature must make another DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a successful save, the creature returns to the initial stage of the disease and experiences another bout of short-term madness within the next 1d3 days. On a failed saving throw, the creature is afflicted with indefinite madness. Obsessed with the Green Walker, the creature is compelled to travel to the Living Jungle by the fastest means possible to pay its respects to the monstrosity.

Sootstorm Rain

When rain falls in the vicinity of a recently burned area, muddy brown sootstorm rain is the result. Spores released into the atmosphere taint the rain, causing it to stain buildings and infect victims with a crusty, pale beige mold that grows on the skin. If a creature dies from the effects of sootstorm rain, its body collapses, becoming a patch of sickly, pale mold capable of infecting others.

When a creature comes in contact with sootstorm rain, the creature must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or become infected.

It takes 1d3 days for sootstorm rain's symptoms to manifest in an infected creature. Symptoms include weakness and fatigue. The infected creature's weapon attacks that use Strength do 1 less damage per die, and the creature gains 1 level of exhaustion.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the damage penalty for weapon attacks that use Strength worsens by 1, and the creature gains another level of exhaustion. On a successful save, the damage penalty is lessened by 1, and the creature's exhaustion level is decreased by 1. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected creature's exhaustion level below 1, the creature recovers from the disease.

sebbek sobor

The city of Haldaheim once stood as a wonder of dwarven society, where crafters combined alchemy, earth magic, and forge lore to achieve breathtaking results. When the eruption of the Green Walker shifted the earth, this subterranean metropolis collapsed. The dwarves fled in panic as their capital sank into the earth and terrible creatures poured from the wound.

The refugees fled south to the mountains bordering the hill country between Lignas and Narumbeki. In exchange for the chance to build a new homeland, the dwarves promised to provide weapons and armor to the region's



SEBBEK SOBOR

Ruler: First Speaker among Holdmasters, Mhatmen Scorchbeard (LG male dwarf **noble**)

Important Personages: Brewmistress Ahlana Kha-Ahmet (NG female dwarf **cleric of the brew** of Ninkash, *Creature Codex*, p. 399); Holdmaster Alara (LG male dwarf **gear mage**, *Creature Codex*, p. 401); Holdmaster Hethe Fourfingers (LG female dwarf **noble**); Holdmaster Khundri (LN male dwarf **veteran**); Holdmaster Taharqa (LG male dwarf **noble**); Holdmaster Zondryr Notchaxe (LG male dwarf **field commander**; see page 282); Solet Ptah-sela, High Priest of Ptah (LG female dwarf **apostle** of Ptah; see page 281); Yostos Firemane, (LN male dwarf **first servant** of Mbanu; see page 282)

Population: 113,200 (96,500 dwarves, 13,500 humans, 3,200 heruti)

Capital: Sebbek Sobor, population 45,500

Major Cities: Madini Kaa (29,000), Dhahabu (16,600), Ardhi Mlango (12,300)

Great Gods: Ptah (patron), Aset (Isis), Mbanu, Ninkash, Takhar

Trade Goods: ale, metal goods, metal ingots and wire, gemstones, weapons and armor, perfume, goatskin leather, furniture



people. The Narumbeki readily accepted that deal, and the dwarves established Sebbek Sobor, which combines the local word for dwarf with the Dwarvish word for home. The dwarves also established three smaller holds in the mountains southwest of Narumbeki to improve their chances of surviving another cataclysmic event.

Some of the indigenous human tribes remained in the area. Most live in small villages, herding goats and growing crops in the hills or fishing on Lake Moduku. Several thousand live in the aboveground section of Ardhi Mlango; their warriors fight alongside the Brotherhood of the Axe against the tosculi of Corpshive. The presence of so many shiny things has also attracted a small population of heruti to the kingdom; nearly all live in Dhahabu.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

Dwarven society maintained its structure and traditions even as its people fled the destruction of Haldaheim. The dwarves, organized into craft brotherhoods, looked to their guild leaders to guide them through the journey south. Hundreds of warriors gave their lives to protect their kin and defend the retreat, and popular songs and mournful dirges are still sung to acknowledge their sacrifice.

When the dwarves came to their arrangement with Narumbeki, the guilds came together to form the Conclave of Brotherhoods and build the city of Sebbek Sobor as the foundation for the dwarves' economic recovery. The surviving warriors created their own organization, the Brotherhood of the Axe, and they also joined the conclave.

GOVERNMENT

The Conclave of Brotherhoods governs the various dwarven communities of Sebbek Sobor. The conclave is a gathering of elders and guild leaders from each of the four major cities.

The elders of each brotherhood choose their group's holdmaster, who serves until death, retirement, or a successful vote to oust them. The conclave elects a First Speaker from among the holdmasters to determine the priorities for legislation and discussion for the year ahead, and to act as an impartial peacekeeper in the event of a dispute between rival clans, brotherhoods, and elders—not always with success. Feuds are often settled at a conclave through heated debate, with single combat a final recourse if all else fails. Mundane matters are handled on a daily basis by smaller groups.

Holdmaster Mhatmen Scorchbeard of the Brotherhood of Embers currently holds the office of First Speaker; his election has led to a marked increase in the number of fire elementals serving in the nation's Deepforges (see page 133), boosting productivity accordingly. The

previous incumbent, Nehset Twelvebraided, Holdmaster of the Brotherhood of the Axe, held the position for over two decades. Though he was highly regarded for his bravery against the horrors of the jungle during the retreat from Kush, Nehset saw his reputation irreparably damaged after his great friend and close ally, Ebo Adashe, the Mukani of Narumbeki, was discovered to be an agent of the Green Walker.

RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

The dwarves follow Ptah, their maker and creator, at the House of the Ram in the capital city and in dozens of great and small shrines in halls, at bridges and city gates, and elsewhere. Smaller but likewise sturdy temples serve Mbanu, god of the forge; Takhar, god of doors, death, and war; and Ninkash, goddess of beer and fellowship. Some dwarves also follow Isis, the healing goddess of the dawn, although they call her Aset, and a few follow the Serpent of Wisdom, Veles. Unlike Nurian dwarves, the dwarves of Sebbek Sobor do not worship Aten.

CRAFT BROTHERHOODS

The nation's craft guilds and brotherhoods have established chapters in all the cities of Sebbek Sobor:

Brotherhood of the Decanter. Led by Brewmistress Ahlana Kha-Ahmet, members of this guild are alchemists, brewers, and perfumers.

Brotherhood of the Chisel. This brotherhood is for sculptors and stonemasons. Its current leader is Holdmaster Taharqa.

Brotherhood of Embers. In the ascendancy following the appointment of their holdmaster Mhatmen Scorchbeard as First Speaker, the brotherhood's members are forge workers and glassblowers.

Brotherhood of the Pick. This wealthy guild's members are miners, excavating gemstones and ores, and digging new tunnels. The brotherhood is led by Holdmaster Khundri.

Brotherhood of the Wheel. With Holdmaster Alara at its head, this guild of engineers, gearworkers, and golemwrights runs the Golemworks and creates all manner of wondrous constructs and devices.

Brotherhood of Workers. This guild encompasses a variety of artisans including carpenters, leatherworkers, and potters. Its holdmaster is Hethe Fourfingers, a renowned cabinet maker.

Brotherhood of the Axe. This fighting brotherhood, led by Holdmaster Zondryr Notchaxe, allows its members to belong to multiple brotherhoods, and its focus is on weaponsmithing, armoring, and soldiering. These dwarves are the descendants of the soldiers who fought their way out of Haldaheim, and they are silently proud of carrying



Bulleete Graveyard

BURNING FIELDS

AKANDA CHIEGUTU

HEYAAD

API-GNASHERS

VIPER'S TONGUE

YAVET

NARUMBEKI

ASHAMBA

AKANDA GWERU

KRAAL MARI

AKANDA KAROI

DUNEHUMADZI

Ramagan

Stone Bird Grove

Corpsehive

MADINI KAA

NEGAL

SEBBEK SOBOR

DHAHABU

ARDHI MLANGO

RAMAG'S BOND

VIPER'S TONGUE

AVAWA

Ankhrimari

LIGNAS PROPER

Mamiwata's Mangrove

LIGNAS

LAKE TAINA

LAKE MOPUKU

DYULLA

TREEHOMES OF THE MAFRI

AKURAKUDA REEF

OLU JUNGLE

Silent Grove

MILES 500 250

TITAN'S ROAD

on this tradition. Members of the Brotherhood of the Axe are universally respected and sometimes even revered, particularly among the dwarf scholars who are intimately acquainted with the harrowing events of Haldaheim's fall.

COMMERCE

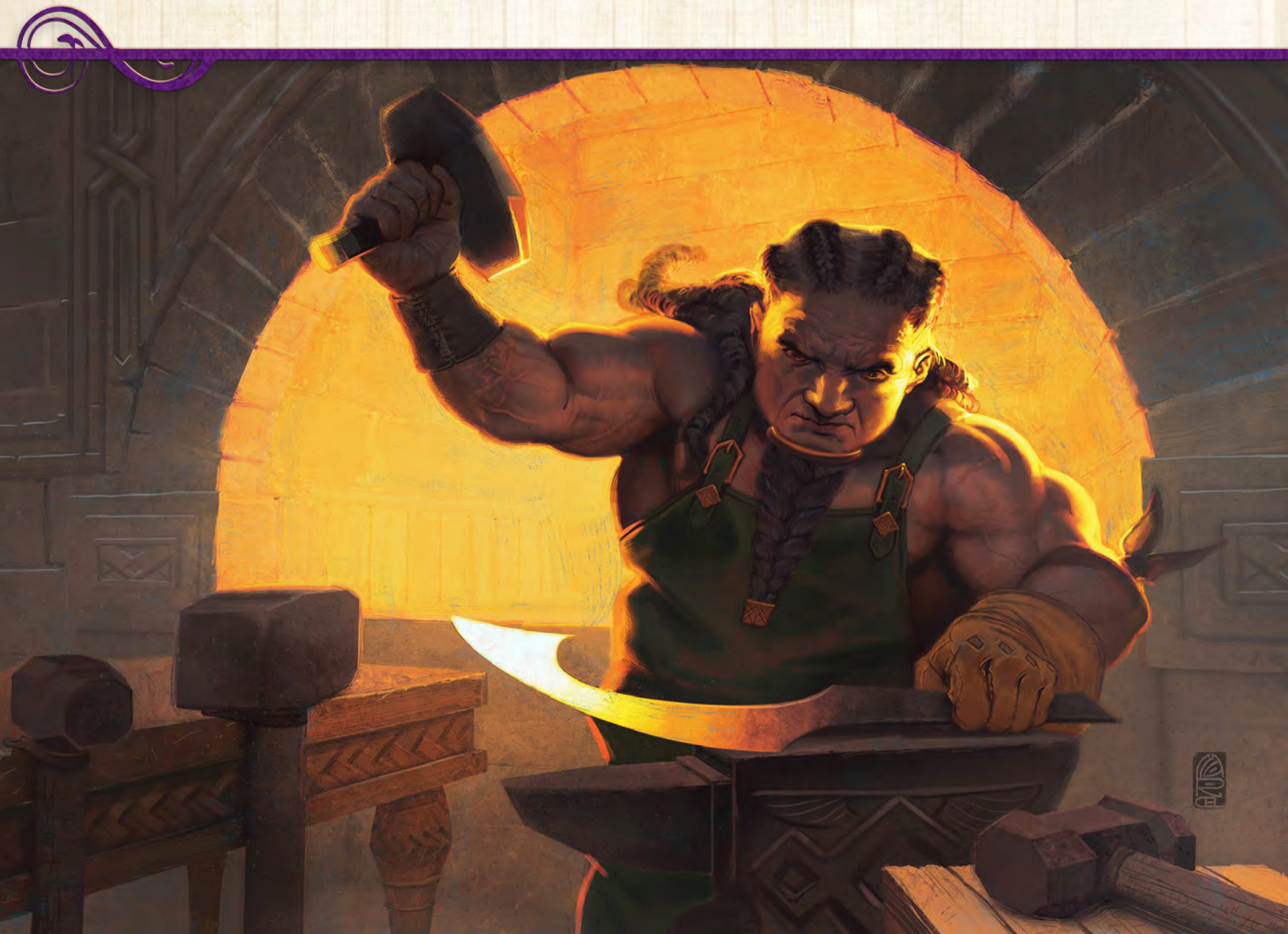
The dwarf artisans produce excellent metalwork, including weapons and armor, and other trade goods that are in demand in the neighboring kingdoms. The brewers of the Brotherhood of the Decanter use hops brought south from the jungles of Kush to produce fine dwarven ales with a distinctive grapefruit-like taste, and its perfumers distill exquisite fragrances enjoyed by the Lignans. The Brotherhood of the Pick mines rare gemstones beneath the mountains, while artisans from the Brotherhood of Workers produce fine quality leatherwork and hardwood furniture.

CITIES OF SEBBEK SOBOR

The four dwarven cities often quarrel about the best way to govern their new homeland. Naturally, each city has developed its own philosophies and perspectives stemming from its dominant brotherhoods. Since the fall of Haldaheim, the dwarves have presented a united front when dealing with their non-dwarf neighbors, taking care that the Lignans and others cannot easily meddle in their intricate internal politics.

Sebbek Sobor

Built into the mountainside on the shore of Lake Monuku, Sebbek Sobor is the largest dwarven city and shares its name with the nation. The Conclave of the Brotherhood meets here in the Hall of Elders, and the Brotherhoods of the Decanter, the Pick, and the Axe all have their primary chapterhouses in the capital. The House of the Ram is a gilded, many-pillared temple of Ptah directly beside the lake; the priests there are said to prize the lotus flowers that grow all around it to make reed golems infused with lotus magic.



Madini Kaa

The second largest city in Sebbek Sobor is Madini Kaa, which is the nation's forging center and houses the main headquarters of both the Brotherhood of Embers and the Brotherhood of Workers. As the northernmost hold, Madini Kaa is an important hub for trade with Ashamba, the Narumbeki capital. Its forges work almost constantly to keep up with the demand for weapons and armor to equip the Narumbeki legions.

Dhahabu

Situated at the eastern edge of the Olu Jungle, Dhahabu boasts the biggest chapter of the Brotherhood of the Wheel and is renowned for its Golemworks (see below). The city boasts a large population of heruti, who live in a complex of nests, shops, and other structures built into the cliffside high above the entrance to the underground chambers the dwarves occupy. Dhahabu's tunnels connect to those of Sebbek Sobor, allowing goods to be shipped between the two cities beneath the earth.

Ardhi Mlango

The smallest of the cities of Sebbek Sobor has a population that is fully one-third human. The largest chapter of the Brotherhood of the Chisel is based here, as well as a contingent of warriors of the Brotherhood of the Axe, who defend the city from raiding tosculi that emerge from the nearby Corpsehive (see page 205).

FAMOUS FOUNDRIES

Deep below the earth, the master forgers, arcane sculptors, and golemwrights of Sebbek Sobor work their magic. But sometimes not everything runs according to plan.

Deepforges

Harnessed fire elementals heat the vast halls and power the white-hot forges of Sebbek Sobor's smithies and clanholds; these elementals are summoned and bound by spellcasters acting on behalf of brotherhoods, small warrens, clan freeholds, and even rich individuals. Forcing these elementals into service enables the dwarves to maintain excellent forge-fires without deforesting Sebbek Sobor's mountainsides. Rather than burning wood to create charcoal for the furnaces, the dwarves use timber for shoring up mine shafts and crafting furniture, even exporting hardwoods to Nuria Natal for use in sandship construction.

Golemworks

Deep under Dhahabu, a small sect of the Brotherhood of the Wheel has built creation forges that burn bright with elemental fire. Here in the Golemworks, dwarf artisans give life to constructs, which are sent out to serve as gate

sentinels and warren guards throughout the nation. These statues take elegant and lifelike forms, and each one is a masterpiece of dwarven craftsmanship.

The golems produced by the Brotherhood of the Wheel are a point of pride and rivalry among the dwarves. Each is crafted after referring to drawings and prior examples, and yet each strives to surpass all previous works. Some dwarf golemwrights will stop at nothing to outdo their fellows, and famous golemwrights are held in high regard during the Conclave of Brotherhoods.

Lignas, land of the serpent scholars

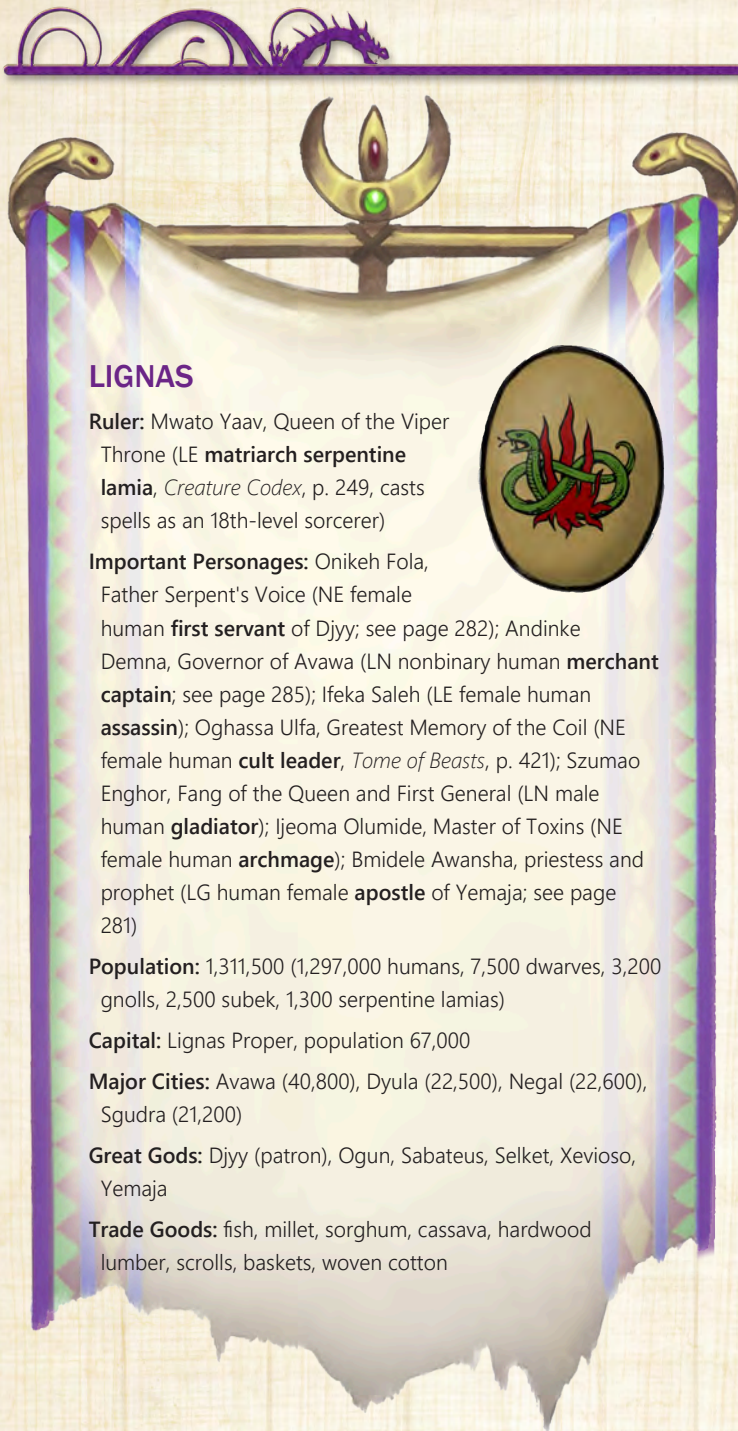
A tropical monarchy nestled along a verdant river delta, Lignas was founded by scholars and arcane disciples of the titan Mamiwata. These groups brought the last lights of their once formidable eldritch discipline with them. Their cities and towns dot the shores of the Selwheyha and Nyanshsha rivers, which join at Avawa before continuing to the Western Sea.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

In the light of day, Lignas is morbid, quiet, and unfriendly. But much like the serpents of the jungle, the cities and towns of Lignas have a vibrant nocturnal culture. Their architecture is curved and coiled, and many buildings have scale-like roof tiles and serpentine towers. The common folk are adept farmers; indeed, farming is considered a vital, proud pursuit.

A loose caste system underlies Lignas society. At its top is the Coil of Memory (see page 135), a kingdom-wide cult of mystic researchers. The expression "as silent as a serpent" correctly describes the members of the Coil. Their paranoia and their clandestine work have defined the Lignan people for the past 200 years. For centuries the Lignans shared their knowledge generously, but that changed with the rise of the Coil, when the kingdom's rulers became secretive, power-hungry, and cruel.

Although fishing is common enough along the coast, the Lignans are not a seafaring people. They tell stories of a great sea monster that lives at the end of the Selwheyha River delta and occasionally destroys ships that sail nearby. This monster has not been seen in living memory, but no merchants dare risk traveling near the area when so much trade is possible with adjacent nations that can be reached by road. Some sea trade does flow from Morreg through the port town of Avawa, but several Morregi ships have gone missing in recent months, leading to speculation that the monster has become more active. See Akurakuda Reef, page 141, for more information.



LIGNAS

Ruler: Mwato Yaav, Queen of the Viper Throne (LE **matriarch serpentine lamia**, *Creature Codex*, p. 249, casts spells as an 18th-level sorcerer)

Important Personages: Onikeh Fola, Father Serpent's Voice (NE female human **first servant** of Djyy; see page 282); Andinke Demna, Governor of Avawa (LN nonbinary human **merchant captain**; see page 285); Ifeka Saleh (LE female human **assassin**); Oghassa Ulfa, Greatest Memory of the Coil (NE female human **cult leader**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 421); Szumao Enghor, Fang of the Queen and First General (LN male human **gladiator**); Ijeoma Olumide, Master of Toxins (NE female human **archmage**); Bmidele Awansha, priestess and prophet (LG human female **apostle** of Yemaja; see page 281)

Population: 1,311,500 (1,297,000 humans, 7,500 dwarves, 3,200 gnolls, 2,500 subek, 1,300 serpentine lamias)

Capital: Lignas Proper, population 67,000

Major Cities: Avawa (40,800), Dyula (22,500), Negal (22,600), Sgudra (21,200)

Great Gods: Djyy (patron), Ogun, Sabateus, Selket, Xevioso, Yemaja

Trade Goods: fish, millet, sorghum, cassava, hardwood lumber, scrolls, baskets, woven cotton

GOVERNMENT

Lignas is ruled by the sorcerer-queen Mwato Yaav, the Lady of Vipers, who ascended to the throne 35 years ago after ritually assassinating the previous queen in accordance with Lignan tradition. Beneath her is a tangled web of nobility, rife with feudal obligations and political scheming.

Mwato Yaav has done a masterful job of keeping her potential successors too busy or disorganized to challenge her, ruling Lignas through the application of dark wisdom and raw terror. The sorcerer-queen controls a network of spies, poison-using assassins, and magically trained serpents to ferret out secrets and dispose of her foes.

Her most capable operative, Ifeka Saleh, is being sent to Morreg on a near-suicidal mission to assassinate the High Saaxir and steal the orb holding the titan Amhara's spark.

As well as assassins and spies, Lignas maintains a well-trained army of warriors and sorcerers to defend itself from Morreg and its other enemies. Szumao Enghor, Fang of the Queen and First General, is the army's experienced and loyal commander. Her command over the nobility and the Coil of Memory is as tight as the grip of any constrictor.

The Lignas Spark and the Royal Regalia

During the final moments of Mamiwata's rule, the chief disciple of the lamia titan assassinated her mistress and wrested the titan's divine spark out of Mamiwata's body and into her own. This practice has persisted until the present day: the current queen holds the Lignas spark, and ritual assassination is the only way to transfer the spark to a successor. This requirement and tradition have made the spark a rarefied thing, a royal secret, and the sole dominion of the queens of Lignas.

A queen who holds the spark slowly transforms into a **serpentine lamia** (*Creature Codex*, p. 248), with the process taking two or three years to complete. First, her eyes begin to change, granting her the Seductive Gaze trait; then her fingers lengthen into talons and shimmering scales grow on her lower body. Finally, her legs extend and merge to form a serpentine tail capable of constricting a foe. After holding the spark for five years, the queen gains the powers of a **matriarch serpentine lamia** (*Creature Codex*, p. 249).

The spark enables the queen to attune to the three artifacts that comprise the royal regalia of Lignas: the *Mantle of Scales*, the *Shadow's Eye*, and the *Fanged Gauntlet*.

The *Mantle of Scales* grants the queen the ability to change shape at will between human, serpentine lamia, and giant constrictor snake forms as an action. Unless she is a matriarch serpentine lamia, she can transform only into a standard serpentine lamia using this ability.

The *Shadow's Eye* increases the potency of the queen's charm spells and Seductive Gaze or Seduce ability, imposing disadvantage on saving throws to resist them.

The *Fanged Gauntlet* grants the queen a +3 bonus to melee spell attack rolls, including her Debilitating Touch action.

The queen must be wearing all three items to perform the sinister ritual used to populate the Unwilling Council.

The Unwilling Council

Mwato Yaav is advised by the Unwilling Council of the Viper Throne, a collection of nearly 200 spirits of past rulers and important nobles, dating back 3,000 years to Mamiwata's chief disciple. Each spirit is bound into its gem-studded skull through the performance of a nine-hour

ritual and is thereafter compelled to serve the Viper Throne for all eternity. Lignans speak of the Unwilling Council only in whispers; nobles worry they might earn a place in its ranks by becoming too valuable to risk losing to death.

THE COIL OF MEMORY

The Coil of Memory is an organization whose members protect their repository of Lignan knowledge and magical secrets while sending out a sinister force of spies to watch the common people from the shadows. By delving into every aspect of the arcane, the Coil's laboratories and libraries have unearthed many of the most coveted arcane techniques and political secrets in the Southlands. Members of the Coil believe that although the mysteries of existence must be explored, any discoveries are meant for Lignans alone, not to be shared with lesser nations. Their attitude is much the same concerning arcane knowledge that has fallen into the hands of other nations. Under the leadership of the enigmatic Oghassa Ulfa, Greatest Memory of the Coil, the organization's current efforts are directed toward stealing the secrets of combat divination as practiced by Morreg's warriors.

Assassins who serve the Coil of Memory are sometimes charged with hunting down and killing commoner spellcasters who are considered a danger to the Viper Throne. Rural, lone sorcerers who demonstrate sufficient potential are offered the opportunity to join the Coil. Those that refuse disappear (and the group hides its nefarious deeds well).

Noble blood isn't required to join the Coil of Memory, but all senior members are noble by virtue of either birth or marriage, or as a reward for a great accomplishment. While commoners who clash with agents of the Coil are ruthlessly disposed of, nobles are accorded a degree of mercy and are locked in the dungeons below the Tower of Scaled Fellowship instead.

Although it's spoken of only in hushed whispers, a mysterious cult dedicated to the moon is hidden among the highest ranks of the Coil. Some members of the cult are serpentine lamias, and persistent rumors claim that the moon cult transforms its members into lamias over time through the careful use of rituals, breaking a long-held taboo against increasing the number of lamias in the kingdom to the point where the populace presents a threat to the queen. On the first night of each full moon, the cult gathers in secret to engage in debauchery and excess; the blood of innocents is often spilled during these bacchanalian occasions.

RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

Nearly all Lignans venerate Djyy, the Great Serpent, the kingdom's patron god. They believe the Great Serpent lives in the earth, and its shedding skin keeps the soil fertile. The largest temple of Djyy stands in the city of Lignas Proper. Its high priest, known as Father Serpent's Voice, is a young woman named Onikeh Fola. She replaced the previous high priest, Aleh Koumbii, after his "wise counsel" upset the Lady of Vipers.

The secret cult inside the Coil of Memory pays homage to the moon, venerating Sabateus as the Moon's Husband. Yemaja of the Waters, Sabateus's bitter rival, is worshiped in the city of Avawa, which has a large temple dedicated to the goddess. Lignas's soldiers and farmers often revere Ogun, the Warrior God, and Xevioso, the Lord of War and Thunder. The warden of the Coil of Memory's subterranean prison serves as one of Ogun's high priests. Assassins, poisoners, and spies sometimes worship the dark goddess Selket.

Silent Grove

This sacred grove near the eastern edge of the Olu Jungle is dedicated to Kwansi, the Spider God. Tended by High Talespinner Aya Nanbo (CG female human **apostle** of Kwansi; see page 281), one of Kwansi's most revered devotees, the shrine is magically warded against snakes of all sorts. The High Talespinner hates the tyranny of Lignas's serpent rulers and offers sanctuary to those on the run from the Coil of Memory's assassins, hiding them from their pursuers through illusions and trickery. Characters who have angered the Lady of Vipers (or are looking for someone who has) might end up here if a sympathetic villager points them in the right direction.

COMMERCE

Lignas's farmers produce a surplus of crops, including millet, sorghum, and cassava, which they trade with the dwarves of Sebbek Sobor. Sea fish and tasty eels caught in the delta are also in demand in the dwarfholds. Hardwood lumber harvested from the Olu Jungle is sold to merchants from Narumbeki, Morreg, and places farther afield, as are reed baskets and woven cotton; garments made in Lignas are often decorated with snake motifs and spiral patterns in bright colors. And, of course, the city of Lignas Proper's scroll market is justly famed throughout the Southlands.

Recent tensions with Morreg have jeopardized the lucrative maritime trade with Gendebelo; the merchants of Avawa hope that things will soon settle down.



LIGNAS PROPER

Built immediately after the fall of the titans on the Viper's Tongue ley line, the city of Lignas Proper retains vestiges of the tail end of titanic culture. A few of its walls and buildings are sized for the old, cyclopean scale, though in the millennia since the titans' fall, these gargantuan walls have been festooned with smaller, more human-sized structures that reflect the titanic culture on a reduced scale.

The scholars and merchants of Lignas Proper are curious, inventive people. Many of them believe that great secrets and great wealth are still to be found in the titanic ruins of the Abandoned Lands, in overgrown fey cities, and elsewhere. Exploratory expeditions set out regularly to gather sacred serpents, dig up tombs, or chase down rumored manuscripts and lost libraries of the titans. Many of the city's most famous citizens have earned that status as explorers—even if some of the explorations involved deciphering musty scrolls rather than crossing a raging river. The most successful are always invited to join the Coil of Memory, and those who refuse end up in the dungeons until they relent.

Lignas Proper sprawls across both banks of the Selwheyha River. Three bridges span the waters, each one an example of the city's architectural wonders, tall enough to allow a sailboat to pass underneath. Canals and aqueducts feed the rich farm fields that lie nearby. The

city's merchants gather in several floating marketplaces, while barges transport raw goods up and down the river's length. With a population of roughly 67,000, Lignas Proper is one of the largest cities in the Southlands.

Tower of the Scaled Fellowship

At the center of the Lady of Vipers' sprawling fortress lies the Tower of the Scaled Fellowship, a tall, conical, malachite-tiled structure. As the headquarters of the Coil of Memory, it holds the group's vast repository of hoarded spells, invocations, and secrets in a collection twice the size of what was held in the Great Library of Lignas before it was burned to the ground over 1,000 years ago. The tower's scriptorium provides resources for both the Lignan court and its military, and the building also houses laboratories and classrooms as well as a network of subterranean vaults. Great inventions have emerged from its halls, from mighty spells that can raise bountiful harvests to methods for controlling the Selwheyha's floodwaters.

Given the Lignan disposition toward secrecy, the tower is one of the most secure places in the Southlands. A permanent *private sanctum* effect surrounds the buildings both above and below ground. Once inside, visitors must present official documents at a succession of gates and guarded portals. Warrior-mages patrol the halls, and the tower's corridors are littered with magic traps.

Sinuuous Spires of the Serpent Masters

Located close to the Tower of Scaled Fellowship, this pair of intertwined snake-like towers—one tiled in a green and black pattern, the other in olive and brown—acts as a research center for all things serpentine. The Coil of Memory's serpent masters engage in a wide variety of activities here, from training snakes to becoming assassins, to creating venomous extracts from diluted venom, poisonous plants, and special reagents to change the effect of a serpent's poison bite.

The ancient and wizened Ijeoma Olumide serves as the Master of Toxins. She is more than 120 years old, having prolonged her life span with potions brewed from rare plants found only in the jungles of Kush. Ijeoma is a former student of Ama Ndamon, the priestess of Bastet who created the distillate that the Coil of Memory still uses today to tame Lignas's dangerous reptiles. After disposing of her erstwhile mentor with a fast-acting poison from a venomous tree frog, Ijeoma took over her role overseeing the serpent masters of the Coil and their training.

Scroll Market

In the outer quarters of the city, a shantytown of tents, ramshackle huts, and fortified wagons comprises the Scroll Market of Lignas Proper. Plying their trade from shadowy doorways and magic huts that disappear at



ANCIENT MAPS

When the characters come across an old map—or something that could be a map—consider using the following details to make things more interesting.

- The parchment seems blank at first. But when a drop of blood splatters on it during a fight, the blood forms small lines radiating from a corner of the page. It would take a lot of blood to cover the whole map ...
- A map depicts a series of small islands, drawn in faded ink on a piece of green silk and marked with the monogram of a noble from Cathay.
- The bone armor seems primitive, but the inside is stained to create a map that leads to the greatest treasures of its original owner.
- The thin sheet of copper has a star map engraved in it, but it displays a sky with the wrong number of moons, and constellations no one has ever seen.
- An ancient map of the southern grasslands and lakes of Glorious Umbuso is hand-painted on a folding fan made from ivory.





the first sign of trouble, the market's vendors offer the smuggled, secondhand, or corrected efforts of the Coil of Memory's scribes. Maps, spells, invocations, manuscript drafts, and old journals of expeditions that survived terrible privations await buyers alongside blank books, rare inks, and writing kits.

The market's bylaws state that only written materials or bookbinding supplies, such as inks and glues, can be sold within its boundaries. Second, all customers must remain anonymous, for no merchant wants to be accused of selling to an adversary of the Coil of Memory. Some patrons don *hats of disguise* but most prefer to wear a simple mask to conceal their true appearance.

At the end of a row of stalls, a pennant emblazoned with a bound scroll crossing a silver key flies over a slate-gray tent. Inside is a pale-skinned, white-haired, and obviously foreign male human named Artrec, whose tent offers enchanted items from distant lands. Genial and polite, Artrec maintains the air of a potent arcanist. Visitors to the tent claim to have seen bustling crowds in a different city when they've glanced outside while browsing Artrec's wares, but when they exit the tent, they always step back into the streets of Lignas Proper—and the crowds are gone. In fact, Artrec's tent exists in both Lignas Proper and the hidden city of Kel Azjer in the Dominion of the

Wind Lords at the same time, allowing the old man to offer items found nowhere else in Midgard, and for which other merchants would pay dearly.

Another seller of note is the bone dealer Daishiya, who has maintained the same stall for the last 60 years. Her business succeeds because Daishiya exploits a loophole in the market regulations. She etches skulls, femurs, and other bones with enchantments that are released when the bones are broken, similar to the way potions work. Although her merchandise clearly violates the letter of the law, Daishiya has been in business for so long that she is considered a fixture of the market and no official dares to try removing her.

MAJOR CITIES

The four other major cities of Lignas are described below.

Avawa

This city on the Selwheyha River is the base of Lignas's fishing industry and is favored by visiting merchants from Morreg sailing upriver from the coast. Governed by the wily Andinke Demna, Avawa is less intimidating to outsiders than Lignas Proper, so foreign traders prefer to buy and sell goods here, particularly given the recent tension between the two kingdoms. Governor Demna is



one of only four nobles to turn down an invitation to join the Coil of Memory and keep both their liberty and their lives. Demna argued that joining the Coil would offer an unwanted distraction from making as much money as possible for the kingdom in his gubernatorial role. Amused, Mwato Yaav agreed.

Dyula

Located on the southern shore of Lake Tana, Dyula is an important hub for trade going to and from Sebbek Sobor. Goods are transported across the lake by ship before being loaded onto carts for the final overland leg to the dwarven holds.

Negal

This small city is connected to Narumbeki by road and does a brisk trade in foodstuffs and lumber with merchants from Akanda Karoi and beyond.

Sgudra

Situated on the kingdom's southern border, the heavily fortified city of Sgudra has a large garrison, stationed here in case the armies of Morreg decide to strike. The Coil of Memory has many agents here, and Sgudra's governor, Elebiju Wurade (NE matriarch serpentine lamia), is an influential member of the organization's moon cult. The atmosphere in Sgudra is oppressive; arrests and "disappearances" are commonplace.

Kingdom of Morreg, Land of Ancestors

In the Kingdom of Morreg, death does not end one's duty to the state. Obsessed with prophecy, prediction, and divination, the citizens of Morreg place dedication to the realm above individual rights of privacy or freedom. Even after death, the greatest of the Morregi become living reliquaries, continuing to safeguard their descendants.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

The tiered cities and towns of Morreg feature buildings cut from enormous slabs of rock. Important buildings are multilevel structures, with their roofs at ground level. These buildings are surrounded by steep-sided, cleared areas called deep plazas. Streets, which are little more than open-air trenches, stretch out between the deep plazas. The rest of the cities and towns rest on the surface, with lavishly decorated bridges spanning the streets.

The unfettered use of oracular powers dominates life in Morreg. Divinations or auguries preface almost every activity, and some citizens use *scrying* or *clairvoyance* spells to keep tabs on their neighbors. The people of Morreg have remarkably little shame about this surveillance; instead,

they believe that all citizens have a duty to serve the state's interests. This is a stance the Morregi adhere to militantly.

Morreg's constant scrutiny is not limited to its own citizens. The same logic that frees its people from social shame also manifests itself in a proactive—some would say ruthless—protection of their sovereignty, even if no one else perceives a threat. The Morregi strike against individuals and communities far beyond their lands. When questioned about such attacks, they explain that they foresaw some grave danger that their target would pose to the kingdom in the future if left unchecked.

Ruuxa, the Living Reliquaries

The Morregi deeply revere their ancestors because they believe that the dead can see past the boundaries around the present. The most accomplished members of Morregi society are chosen for the honor of being transformed into a living reliquary, known as a ruuxa (pronounced RU-sha).

At the moment of death, these honored citizens have their skulls removed, imbued with the dead individual's spirit, and placed into carved recesses in one of the host of obelisks that dot the cities and countryside. From these locations, the living reliquaries dispense advice to the citizens, and they delight in making predictions.

The obelisks create an aura that enhances all divination spells cast within Morreg's borders, allowing the caster to increase either the range (as the sorcerer's *Metamagic* option *Distant Spell*) or the duration (as *Extended Spell*) at no extra cost. At the GM's discretion, creatures targeted by a divination spell that is cast within 60 feet of an obelisk have disadvantage on their first saving throw to resist its effects.

GOVERNMENT

The High Saaxir and the Mhondoros Council rule Morreg. Although Morreg is technically a republic with a king as head of state, those who sit on the council are appointed only after being subjected to long and complex magical divinations. The one hundred members of the Mhondoros Council are split into various, ever-changing factions. The High Saaxir is not considered a council member and possesses the power to overrule the council if necessary. The passing on of the title of High Saaxir is a complex process—careful divination chooses the next king, though familial lines of succession are fairly common in the kings and queens of Morreg.

The current king, High Saaxir Ras Dashan, is increasingly obsessed with external threats, especially those from Lignas, and feeds that obsession through the use of powerful divination magic. The serpent kingdom to the north has long coveted Morreg's oracular powers, and tensions between the two nations are on the rise.



AGGESAL PLAINS

TITAN'S ROAD

TREEHOMES OF THE MAFRI

VIPER'S TONGUE

LIGNAS PROPER

LIGNAS

OLD JUNGLE

WHITE APES

MORREG

ELBEXTEL MOUNTAINS

THE MSYNA

HILLS

YOUNGA

FENDEELI JUNGLE

LAKE DEBARI

THE KIPAI PROMISE

RAMAG'S BOND

RAMAG'S BOND

TITAN'S ROAD

TITAN'S HIVE

Manadai

Ammalsine

Polinkai

Munayo

Titan's Hive

NMABI

Protem

Ramagani

ADULIS

Silent Grove

SGUDRA

Palace of the Heirs

HAWULTI

Ezana's Stone

AKXUUM

ROHA

GENDEBELO

Mamivata's Mangrove

AKUKAKUDA REEF

Ankhirmani

AVAWA

DYULA

Miles 0 250 500



MORREG

Ruler: High Saaxir Ras Dashan (LN male human **archmage**)

Important Personages: Counselor Yadeta (NG male human **mage**); Counselor Bedatu (CN female human

mage); Bahr Negus, Commander of the Dhukasa (LN male human **battle mage**, *Creature Codex*, p. 397); Amene, Mistress of the Dalacha (N female human **archmage**)

Population: 1,202,000 (1,147,500 humans, 24,000 dwarves, 17,500 gnolls, 13,000 Murkscale lizardfolk)

Capital: Akxuum, population 51,000 (45,900 human, 4,100 dwarves, 1,000 gnolls)

Major Cities: Gendebelo (35,700), Roha (20,400), Hawulti (18,300), Adulis (15,300)

Great Gods: Ogun (patron), Kwansi, Old One (Anu-Akma), Xevioso, Yemaja

Trade Goods: ivory, incense, pottery, glassware, rare birds, hunting cats

Amhara's Spark

The High Saaxir safeguards the spark of the titan Amhara, which is contained in a bejeweled orb used in the ritual that creates the living reliquaries. An individual attuned to the orb can absorb the Morreg spark to gain unlimited divination abilities—perhaps allowing them to cast any divination spell at will. Since any mortal mind would likely shatter if exposed to such oracular knowledge, the High Saaxir and his predecessors have refrained from attempting this.

Ifeka Saleh, Lignas's top operative, has been sent to Morreg to assassinate the High Saaxir and steal the orb. Of course, it is hard to steal something when your crime has been foreseen.

The Dhukasa

Morreg's armies, known as the Dhukasa, are led by the gray-haired Commander Bahr Negus, whose loyalty to his nation and its rulers is unswerving. The soldiers of the

Dhukasa are renowned for their skilled archers and their indomitable spear-wielders, but above all, for their battle seers who are trained in the art of combat divination.

Combat divination enhances a warrior's ability to anticipate foes' actions and react to enemy intentions even before an attack or an ambush takes place. Battle seers learn to notice subtle cues that others miss, heed premonitions, and trust their lives to their honed intuition.

RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

Ogun is the patron deity of Morreg, worshiped by soldiers and those who live along the forested southern border. This region boasts several impressive temples built from rare woods and adorned with lifelike carvings. Xevioso, god of war and thunder, is also honored by Morreg's military, particularly its ferocious spear-wielders. Xevioso's priests are often among the best and worst (most fanatical) officers in the army.

With divination central to the Morreg way of life, it is unsurprising that Kwansi, Patron of Seers and Oracles, is afforded respect, but his chaotic nature and his opposition to tyranny limit the influence of his priesthood. Offerings are made to the Old One, a mask of Anu-Akma, by those who hope to be transformed into a ruuxa after death; that god's priests preside over the rituals that create the living reliquaries. Farmers and merchants tend to worship Yemaja of the Rivers.

COMMERCE

Despite recent tensions over lost ships and frequent border skirmishes, Lignas remains an important trading partner. Morreg's incense, glassware, and fine pottery are much in demand in the Land of the Serpent Scholars and elsewhere along the Southlands' western coast.

Rare songbirds, trained hunting cats, and ivory are exported through the port of Gendebelo to the lucrative northern markets of Barsella and Capleon, where they fetch excellent prices. The price of ivory is climbing—following divinations that predict the extinction of the native elephant population within the next ten years, the Mhondoros Council has recently placed severe restrictions on the amount of hunting that can take place. In response, elephant poaching is on the rise.

AKXUUM, CITY OF EYES

Built on the banks of the Ekeze River, Akxuum is a walled city decorated with gardens, plazas, and fountains. Living reliquary obelisks tower over each street intersection. At the heart of the city, a deeply recessed area holds the sprawling buildings that house the Mhondoros Council, including chambers for the High Saaxir and the one

hundred councilors. The largest buildings in the city—its temples, libraries, and guild halls—are all hewn from monolithic blocks of stone.

On the city's eastern side stands the Gray Tower, where the wizards and oracles of the Dalacha, the so-called Gray Seers, hone the art of combat divination, a type of spellcraft prized by the Morregi above all others. Amene is the Mistress of the Dalacha. This unassuming 60-year-old woman is said to have never sustained an injury in combat, despite having fought in the Dhukasa's front line in several battles. Morreg's archers also receive their training in the Gray Tower, learning how to alter the course of an arrow so that it strikes true.

The Blindmarket

A black market in Akxuum called the Ballamar, also known as the Blindmarket, sells items that keep their owners safe from scrying, divination, and detection spells. Because that sort of protection is forbidden by the laws of Morreg, the Ballamar shifts locations often and masks its presence with the most powerful anti-divination items at its disposal.

Potential customers need a current Ballamar patron to vouch for them. Then, they must track down Olatimbo the One-Legged and whisper the password to obtain directions to the Blindmarket's current location. Olatimbo (CN male human **priest** of Kwansi) runs the Ballamar and is the only one who knows when and where it will move. The Blindmarket is small, with only half a dozen vendors, so it can sometimes be found operating in a small alleyway or even out of a back room in a building.

MAJOR CITIES

Morreg's other four major cities are described below.

Adulis

Situated in the rugged hills close to the northern border, the city of Adulis is protected by a large garrison of the Dhukasa. Its well-trained soldiers guard against raids from Lignas to the north and the belligerent trollkin kingdom of Nmabi to the east. Adulis's ever-cautious governor, Counselor Yadeta (NG male human **mage**), regularly casts divination spells in an attempt to ensure that his city does not experience any nasty surprises.

Gendebelo, the Gates of the Sea

This port city is a major hub of trade for the western coast of the Southlands and is perhaps Morreg's most cosmopolitan city. Ships bound for Sudvall, Lignas Proper, Cindass, and even the cities of the north, such as Capleon and Barsella, depart from here; the constant babble of foreign tongues can be heard at the dockside. The irrepressible Counselor Babajide (LN male human **battle mage**, *Creature Codex*, p. 397) runs Gendebelo; he has

ambitions of building a merchant fleet capable of sailing even farther into the Middle Sea and has been conducting divinations to determine how to achieve this goal.

Hawulti

This city in Morreg's southern lowlands is renowned for its ivory. Talented artists carve detailed scenes into elephant tusks, depicting daily life in Morreg, the creation of the living reliquaries, and coastal trade. The languorous Counselor Bedatu (CN female human **mage**) governs the city and has been slow to clamp down on elephant poaching, despite the doom-laden predictions of the ruuxa Ndingbo, the city's former ruler. The frustrated living reliquary is now actively seeking out adventurers to tackle the poachers.

Roha

This port on the Ekeze River delta, run by Counselor Folake (CG female human **scout**), a former jungle explorer, is Morreg's biggest market for exotic beasts and birds. A cacophony of squawks, growls, and roars, and a pungent bouquet of animal aromas greets anyone who comes nearby. A huge plaza holds buildings, stalls, and cages that contain everything from hunting cats such as lions, leopards, and cheetahs, to **war ostriches** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 307) and **riding zebras** (see page 273), and from beautiful birds of paradise to 15-foot-long crocodiles. Adventurers can find work in the surrounding jungle, perhaps capturing highly prized **sunset raptors** (*Creature Codex*, p. 351) for a merchant.

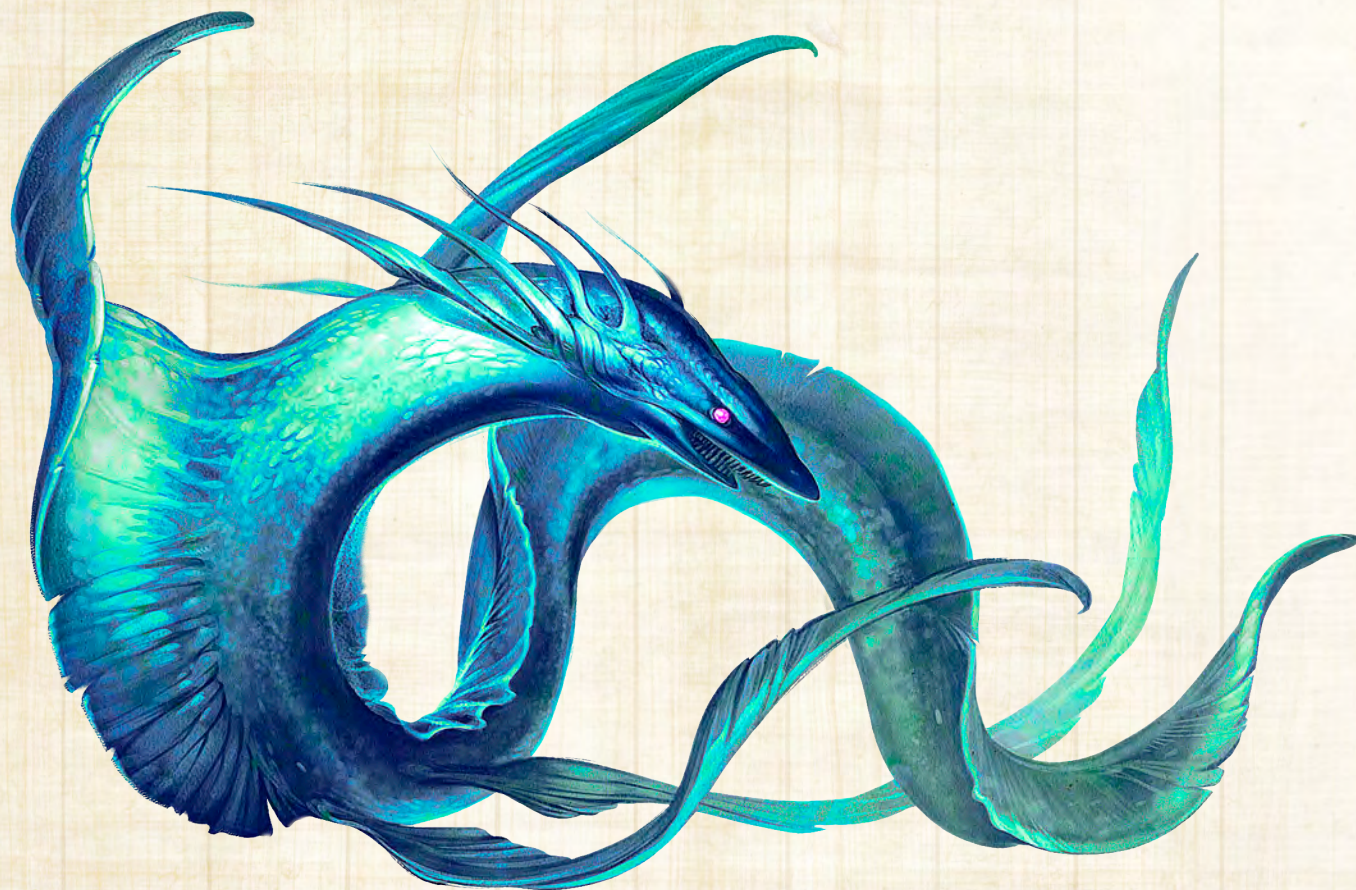
perilous sites

Although the Kingdoms of Salt and Steel are a bastion of civilization in the Southlands, numerous locations throughout these lands threaten doom for the unprepared. Below are a few examples.

AKURAKUDA REEF

Fishers and seafaring merchants who ply their trade along the coast near the Selwheyha delta have long told stories of a huge sea monster that used to haunt the area, preying on ships. The monster, an **adult sea dragon** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 135) that the stories refer to as Reefsquall, hadn't been seen for over a century, but has recently returned to reclaim its lair after many years spent searching for a mate.

Reefsquall makes its lair at the base of the Akurakuda Reef, a 200-foot-tall wall of coral teeming with fish, located a few miles offshore from the delta. Since its return, the sea dragon has been occasionally attacking and sinking Morregi merchant ships and using their wreckage to update its collection of plunder on the sea bottom.



The Morregi merchants initially blamed the Lignans for their lost vessels, but their diviners have since identified the true culprit. As a result, both Andinke Demna, the governor of Avawa in Lignas, and the merchants of Gendebelo are offering a reward to anyone who can put a stop to the attacks by killing or driving off the dragon. Those willing to take up the challenge must first brave the tempestuous seas around the reef. On entering the water, the characters will face a dozen or so **reef sharks** before they can swim down to Reefsquall's lair. If the sea dragon is defeated, a glittering hoard of gold and gemstones awaits the adventurers in the sunken wrecks.

ANKHRIMARI

Located in the Olu Jungle, downriver from the Lignas Proper, this underground temple complex was created in ancient times by dwarf followers of Ptah and abandoned in the time of the God Wars, when Ptah was overthrown by Aten. The only building that survives aboveground is the astronomical observatory, which houses the entrance to the ruined underground halls.

A powerful naga lich known as Ssessk'ai Us'kari, the Whisperer in Shadows, seized control of the underground complex 12 years ago. He brought in several tribes of

serpentfolk of Yig (*Creature Codex*, p. 324) and enslaved the humans, halflings, and dwarves he found in the area, wild and unprotected as it was by Lignas. Ssessk'ai Us'kari is a five-headed naga lich; it can use Multiattack to make five Bite or Spit Poison attacks per round (as a guardian naga) in place of the lich's Paralyzing Touch ability.

Attempts by members of the Coil of Memory to spy on the lich's activities have nearly always met with failure. According to reports from the few who have overheard the lich's followers and survived, the Whisperer in Shadows is trying to assemble the elements of a powerful ritual.

The truth of the matter is that the Whisperer currently holds the *Black* and *Red Crowns of Veles*, two artifacts in the shape of spiked stone crowns that grant their wearers dominion over drakes, dragons, dragonborn, and lizardfolk. The serpent-god Veles created several of these crowns long ago, to protect members of the lesser "hairy races" from the predations of her favored children, the dragons. At least three such objects are known to exist.

The crowns grant their wearer epic powers of leadership, charisma, and might, including immunity to the magical powers and the awesome presence of dragons. Legends say that the wearer of a crown slowly turns into a dragon, eventually becoming as mighty and tyrannical as a natural-born dragon.

It is not known how the *Black Crown* came into the Whisperer's possession, but the *Red Crown* is thought to have been stolen from the deposed Sultana Casmara Azrabahir by disguised serpentfolk as she fled the Mharoti Empire. The Imperatrix of Dornig reputedly holds another crown, which is said to be responsible for her unnatural longevity. Other folktales say the mightiest of the crowns was lost with the destruction of the western Arbonesse by the Isonade, and it now lies deep within the sunless depths of the ocean with the aboleth.

Exploring the Ruins

The ruins of Ankhrimari are home to over two thousand **serpentfolk of Yig** (*Creature Codex*, p. 324) and slaves in the service of the Whisperer in Shadows. Several notable locations in the ruins are described below.

Observatory. Without high-level magic or a large amount of digging, Ankhrimari can be entered only through the old observatory. The large marble dome is full of smashed, rusted, and corroded equipment (shattered iron telescopes, crushed brass orreries, and bent and smashed cold iron astrolabes) and is watched over by a pair of **thread-bound constrictor snakes** (*Creature Codex*, p. 353) woven into ancient tapestries that hang on the walls.

A secret stone door leads down into the ruins. This door can be opened only during the 10-minute period around sunset or the 10-minute period around sunrise.

Receiving Hall. Scarred murals and smashed bas-reliefs dedicated to Ptah cover the walls in this chamber, and the constellations of the night sky decorate the vaulted ceiling. A group of **servants of Yig** (*Creature Codex*, p. 325) guard this chamber. They are aware of any opening of the secret door in the observatory dome above at sunset, and are alert at those times, but do not know that the door also opens at sunrise. If the characters enter when the day is new, they might be able to surprise the guardians.

Temple of Aposis. This defiled shrine is now a temple of darkness. Once dedicated to Ptah, it has been desecrated and rededicated as a temple of Aposis, the Chaos Serpent of the Underworld. Three **spirit nagas** serve as priestesses here, tending to the needs of the temple and accepting living sacrifices on the large bloody altar. The nagas fight intruders without quarter or surrender, since they have no fear of death.

Priestesses' Lair. Behind a secret door in the temple's eastern wall is the lair of spirit nagas. The walls are covered with vandalized murals and tapestries of Ptah. The floor is strewn with embroidered pillows for the nagas' repose, as well as the broken bones left over from their recent meals. The characters might be able to befriend Monife (NG female human **commoner**), a slave, and learn valuable information about the layout of the complex and the treasures held in the Whisperer's laboratories.

Tunnels Beyond. Beyond the temple are tunnels heading deeper into the ruins, leading to the slave pens, the halls of the serpentfolk, and the magical and alchemical laboratories of the Whisperer in Shadows.

DUNHUMADZI

Situated on the Viper's Tongue ley line, the tallest mountain along the western coast houses the collapsed remains of a titan-sized stairway. Bits of the remaining structure lead to an ancient site atop the mountain's snow-covered peak. This crumbling building used to be a titanic stellar observatory.

When Glorious Umbuso was at its height, the rhino-horned titan Mwari would invite his fellow titans to stargazing parties at the observatory at astronomically significant times of the year to view the splendors of the Southlands sky and the constellations of other worlds far from Midgard.

Today, a band of **degenerate titans** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 381) lives in the ruined structure, worshipping the great marble statue of Mwari as a god. They have gathered a hoard of ancient eldritch devices and piled them up around their deity as an offering. Some of these devices might yet function. The titans hunt the wild goats living on the mountain for food, but occasionally venture into the valleys in search of humans to eat.

EZANA'S STONE

In a remote vale on Morreg's southern border, a large standing stone rises 75 feet into the sky. This stone is carved like a stylized tower with windows, and its door has no handle; it resembles the obelisks in the Morregi capital of Akxuum. Shadowy silhouettes appear on the stone face to impart cryptic answers to any questions asked by visitors.

These silhouettes are products of a Morregi mage named Ezana-rei, who exists in the stone as a huge living reliquary and resists any attempt to move or destroy its home. Although its answers always seem plausible to a certain extent, Ezana's reliquary twists the truth to cause the most misery possible. The voices that answer the questions often change tone and speaking patterns with each response, leading some to suggest that the menhir is not truly a reliquary, but a prison that holds the traitorous souls of exiled rulers.

LOST DIAMOND CAVERNS

Somewhere among the highest peaks of the Mbazha Mountains, at the heart of a network of ancient mine tunnels, lie the fabled Diamond Caverns, where the walls are lined with sparkling diamonds. A clan of **crystalline devils** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 105) makes its lair in the cavern,



although this fact is rarely mentioned in any survivor's tale—or in any pitch from merchants eager to hire someone to obtain the cavern's riches. The fiends can assume the form of precious jewels, enabling them to sow thoughts of betrayal and murder among the greedy treasure-seekers who “find” them.

MAMIWATA'S MANGROVE

This 150-foot-tall tree covered in bright yellow flowers stands out amid the mangrove forests of the Selwheyha river delta, its stilt-like roots protruding 20 feet out of the water. Named after Lignas's titan patron, Mamiwata's Mangrove is a World Tree. Explorers who climb its spindly trunk and clamber into the upper reaches of its branches can cross over to the pathways of Yggdrasil, while those who dive beneath its roots can travel to the Plane of Water. The mangrove's roots are guarded by dark-skinned merfolk with brightly colored tails who worship Yemaja of the Waters; gifts of jewelry made from corals and shells can sometimes persuade them to allow travelers to pass.

PALACE OF THE HEIRS

A race of sorcerers called the Xangu-Xa built an expansive city deep in the Olu Jungle, and then were extinguished by plague. The remaining towers and buildings are called the “Father's Palace” by the enormous **white apes** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 408) that now occupy a quarter of the ruined city. The sorcerers awakened these gentle apes of the forest to serve as soldiers and laborers while their own population died from the sickness. The apes also suffered from the plague, which caused their fur to turn white.

Calling themselves the Heirs, the white apes live in the decrepit halls and make a poor attempt to emulate the culture of their dead creators. Few of them can read, but they do have a rich oral tradition. The white apes still carry the disease, known in Morreg and Ramag as the arcane wasting (see the sidebar on page 24). Humanoids can catch it through contact with the bodily fluids of an ape or other infected creature, and spellcasters who become infected can pass it on to the targets of their spells. Frequently circulated tales of the strange sickness keep all but the foolhardy from seeking out the palace's lost wealth.

The Last Father's Tomb

Hidden in the heart of the apes' city is the well-guarded tomb of the last sorcerer king to perish from the plague. Behind its sealed doors lie the riches and legacy of the Xangu-Xa sorcerer culture, watched over by the elite hunters of the white apes. These guards add the heads of new trespassers to the enormous pyramid of sun-bleached skulls that stands before the tomb.

Circle of All Minds

A ritual casting space used by the ancient sorcerers, this enormous inlaid ring of gold, mithral, and cold iron now serves as the meeting site for the apes' tribal elders. One theory of its true nature is that the circle was used to perform the incantation that awakened the apes; another says that it is a *teleportation circle* linked to the similar ruins on Black Lotus Mesa. Either way, its value as plunder is surely 10,000 gp or more, but removing the inlay would require slaughtering or driving away all the white apes.

STONE BIRD GROVE

A field of pillars stands alone in a broad valley near Narumbeki's southern border. Each pillar is topped with the statue of a stone bird of a different species. Posted here to guard a great treasure at the center of the grove, the birds come to life as **possessed pillars** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 314) and mangle unwelcome visitors.

The stone birds and the pillars date back to the time of Glorious Umbuso, and the legendary treasure at the center of the grove is rumored to be the titan Mwari's assegai. The point of the weapon has been thrust into the ground, where it has impaled the skeletal remains of a rival titan.

Whistling Acacia

This World Tree, a solitary umbrella-shaped giant acacia, is visible across the featureless Djibbar Plains from miles away. When the wind blows, its sharp, hollow thorns produce an eerie whistling sound that attracts nearby herds of giraffes. The animals are unable to resist the call of the Whistling Acacia, and they gather around the tree in numbers to feed from its thorny branches. The arrival of the giraffes often brings hungry **children of Yggdrasil** (*Creature Codex*, p. 61) from the planar pathways in search of prey.

History of the Kingdoms

The known history of the Kingdoms of Salt and Steel begins with the titans of Glorious Umbuso. Rhino-horned Mwari ruled the grasslands, the lamia Mamiwata presided over the jungles, and three-eyed Amhara governed the hills and valleys. The titans built great cities, wondrous palaces, and cyclopean monuments to their own glory.

Foreseeing the fall of Glorious Umbuso and his own fate 3,000 years ago, Amhara passed on his divine spark to his most promising protégé, then left to seek shelter with the sea god Nethus. When madness struck, Mwari led his mortal armies into battle against the other titans; he perished in the fighting, and his spark passed to his High Warlord. Mamiwata was assassinated by her own chief disciple, who seized the spark.

Little has been recorded of the early dynasties that ruled the kingdoms after the titans' fall, but in the centuries that followed, Narumbeki's military prowess, Lignas's scholarly reputation, and Morreg's ambitions all grew. Then, 1,500 years ago, a prince named Fadokonu rose to the throne of Morreg and began expanding his influence to the neighboring lands.

The Enlightened Empire of Morreg lasted for 500 years, ruling much of the western coast from Lignas to beyond the Baridi Mountains in the south, even receiving tribute from the minotaurs of the Moon Kingdom. Concerned by the Empire's growing power, Zunia Za, High Warlord of Narumbeki, and Queen Firnia Makku of Terrotu, on the eastern side of the continent, formed a military alliance.

The Enlightened Empire's collapse began 1,000 years ago with the ascension of Prince Agajay to the throne. A disciple of the dark god Mot, Emperor Agajay made a series of disastrous decisions, disregarding the counsel of the High Saxxir in favor of the guidance offered by his necromantic cabal. He suppressed the Lignans, enraged the gnolls, and provoked a war with the allied kingdoms of Narumbeki and Terrotu. When the Great Winged Fleet, his vanity project to open up sea trade with distant lands, failed, Morreg's enemies closed in. Narumbeki war bands looted the cities and villages of the valleys and grasslands, while Lignas was sacked by the gnoll warlord Ama Uroyechef the Toothless and its Great Library was burned to the ground. Humiliated, the emperor was forced to sue for peace and grant Lignas its independence.

In the centuries that followed, Morreg sank into a long period of decline, while Narumbeki consolidated its military might, and Lignas's serpent scholars sought to regain the knowledge lost with the destruction of the Great Library.

Then, 400 years ago, the Green Walker appeared in the jungles of Kush, devastating the dwarven hold of Haldaheim. The dwarves fled west, where they were welcomed with open arms by the Narumbeki. Some stayed in the kingdom; others went south to establish new holds in Sebbek Sobor. As the Living Jungle spread westward, the Mukani ordered the first of many controlled burnings to keep it at bay.

Around 200 years ago, the cult known as the Coil of Memory arose in Lignas, insinuating itself into the higher echelons of the serpent scholars, and developing magic poisons and other sinister innovations. Relations between Morreg and Lignas became strained once again a century ago when a terrible disease, called the arcane wasting (see page 24), spread through Morreg's mages. Lignas was blamed, although the real culprits were the sorcerers of Xanguì-Xa, who first created the white apes nearly 2,000 years before.

Forty years ago, Ebo Adashe became the Mukani of Narumbeki. At first, he was a bold and brilliant leader, but his behavior turned increasingly erratic after he became infected by the spores of the Green Walker. Five years later, Lignas gained a new ruler too, when the fearsome Mwato Yaav seized the Lignas spark and the Viper Throne.

current events

Things seldom stay the same for long in the Southlands. The events of the last decade have led to new threats and opportunities for those living in the Kingdoms of Sand and Steel.

TENDRILS OF THE WALKER

Eight years ago, iGohli, the Narjala of the Stone Legions, killed Narumbeki's ruler, Ebo Adashe, and took the Zebra Throne. Adashe's death has removed the Green Walker's highest-placed agent in Narumbeki, but the vine lords of Kush (see page 111) have seeded hundreds more thralls throughout the kingdom. These mind-controlled spies remain undetected for as long as possible, hiding in plain sight within the legions or in other positions of power, serving as the eyes and ears of their masters in the Living Jungle. When the time is right, each will be given orders to sabotage a burning session, or to assassinate a troublesome target.

At the same time, Adashe's past interference in the legions' work in the Burning Fields has left Narumbeki struggling to contain the growth of the Living Jungle and burn it back to its original border.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

Relations between Lignas and Morreg have been strained for years, but things have become worse since Mwato Yaav took the Viper Throne and Ras Dashan became High Saaxir in Morreg. Although occasional clashes occur between their troops in the unclaimed land around the border, assassinations or small-scale military strikes against persons and locations of interest are more common. Both nations take an aggressive approach to dealing with potential threats.

Since Morreg's oracular powers give the republic a significant edge, Mwato Yaav and the Coil of Memory are determined to steal the orb that holds the titan Amhara's spark. The challenge is in how to do this without the High Saaxir and the Mhondoros Council foreseeing the impending theft. The Lady of Vipers has challenged her top agent, Ifeka Saleh, to assassinate Ras Dashan and capture the spark. Saleh's first step will be a visit to Akxuum's Blindmarket (see page 141).

QUEST FOR A CROWN

The naga lich known as the Whisperer in Shadows recently seized control of the ruins of Ankhrimari near Lignas. Backed by evil serpentfolk, the lich enslaved the humans, halfings, and dwarves living nearby and began work on a powerful ritual involving an artifact in its possession called the *Black Crown of Veles*, one of several magic crowns created by the Serpent-God long ago to protect against dragons. Five years ago, the Whisperer's serpentfolk agents obtained the *Red Crown*, stealing it from the deposed Mharoti Sultana, Casmara Azrabahir.

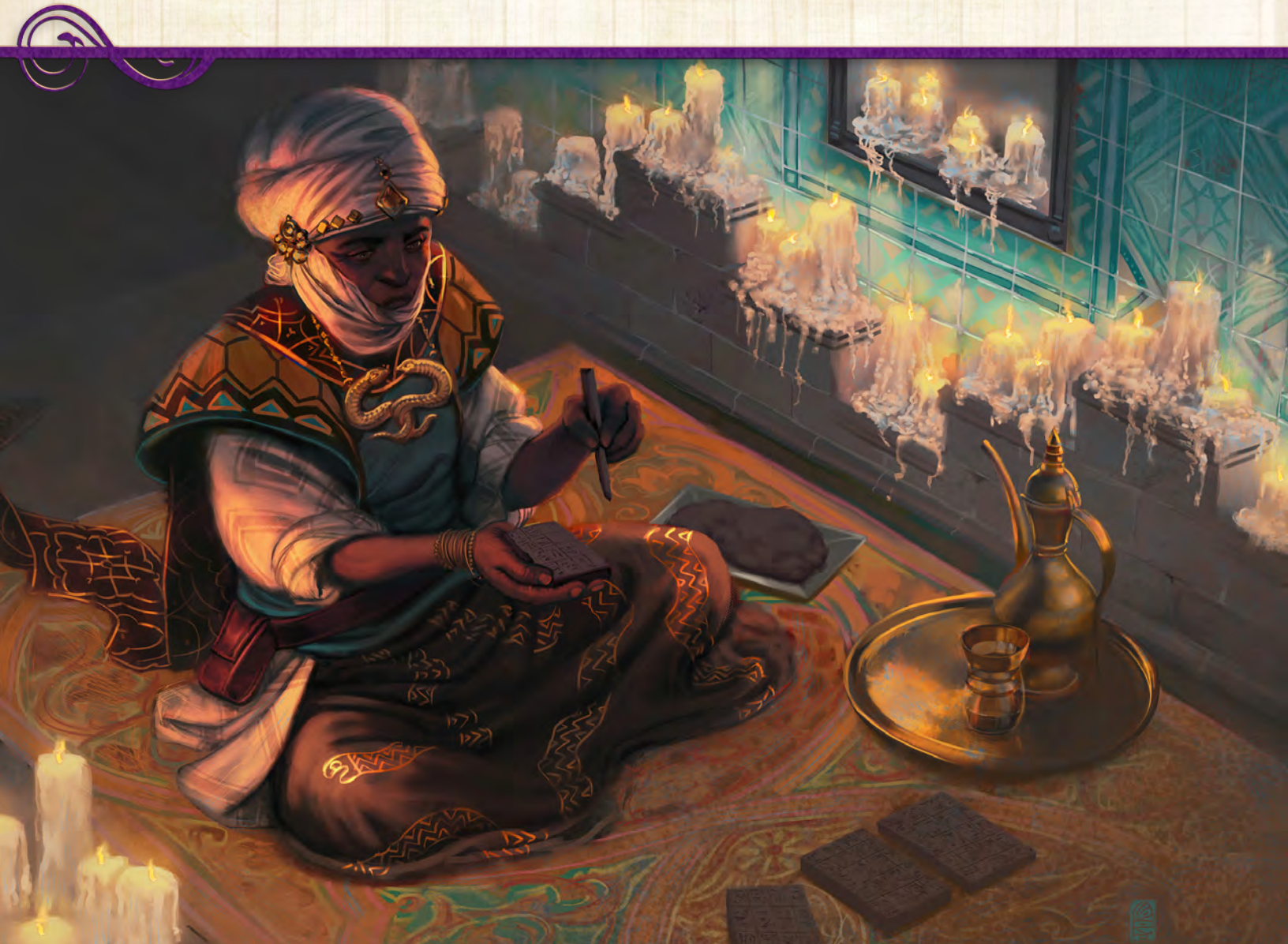
To complete its ritual, the Whisperer needs at least one more crown and has dispatched his agents to Dornig to steal the one belonging to the comatose Imperatrix. Diviners in Morreg warn of dire consequences if the lich obtains a third crown, so the members of the Mhondoros Council are contemplating whether it is best to send their own to team to Ankhrimari or to warn the Lignans so the Coil of Memory can deal with the problem.

adventure seeds

Adventures in the western regions could be driven by magical dangers in Narumbeki, skulduggery in the Scroll Markets of Lignas Proper, or Morreg's machinations.

CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGERS

The characters are attacked somewhere outside Morreg by a squad of well-drilled soldiers of the Dhukasa, trained in combat divination. If the adventurers survive the attack, they can interrogate the **battle mage** (*Creature Codex*, p. 397) who leads the group and learn that one of the living reliquaries has identified them as a threat to the safety of the Kingdom of Morreg, to be disposed of by any means necessary. The characters need to figure out what future "crimes" they are destined to commit, or the attacks will keep coming.



KINGDOM OF FREE CONSTRUCTS

Master Kawef of the Brotherhood of the Chisel was renowned among the dwarf golemwrights for his incredibly lifelike constructs, but his most recent masterpiece turned out to be a little too lifelike. Trying to push the boundaries of golemcraft, Master Kawef imbued his latest creation, an **iron golem**, with genius-level intelligence. But a life of docile servitude was of limited appeal to the new construct, which named itself Aware.

Two weeks ago, the golem killed Kawef and smashed its way out of the Golemworks to freedom. The construct seized control of a dozen **armory golems** (*Creature Codex*, p. 194) and led them into the network of tunnels beneath Dhahabu and Sebbek Sobor, where it has taken up residence in a disused foundry and declared the establishment of a Kingdom of Free Constructs.

So far, Aware has resisted all attempts by the dwarves of the Brotherhood of the Chisel to dislodge it and has lit the forges so it can manufacture additional defenders. The members of the Brotherhood are hoping to find discreet (and expendable) adventurers to deal with Aware before things get even more out of hand.

OUT OF MIND EXPERIENCE

An important Narumbeki individual—a governor or an advisor—has become infected with skullburn ash (see page 129) and must be rescued before reaching the Green Walker. If the Walker communes with the victim, it will learn intimate details of the legions' efforts, and the consequences would be disastrous. The jungle does not impede the infected, but those that pursue them through the thick vegetation are not so fortunate. The characters face poisonous foes, hungry white apes, a hostile environment, and a victim who doesn't want to be saved. Once they've recovered their target, how will they protect their captive during the trip back through the Green Walker's realm?

SCROLL FOR THE MARKET

The characters stumble upon encoded parchments in the Scroll Market of Lignas Proper that tell of a plot to overthrow Mwato Yaav, to disrupt the Narumbeki's relations with the dwarves, or to pave the way for a foreign invasion. What's worse, these items are being bought and sold by unwitting third parties. Can the characters discover who is orchestrating this plot, and then infiltrate the conspiracy to stop it? Once their activities are revealed, how will the conspirators respond? They might try to lure the characters to their cause, decide to silence them with cold steel, or craft an elaborate betrayal to feed misinformation to the adventurers' patrons.

SAY THE WORDS!

A group of artisans from Sebbek Sobor believe they have discovered the proper route and secret phrases needed to enter Stone Bird Grove (see page 144) and recover the legendary assegai of Mwari that's hidden at its center. To ensure their safety, they have asked, hired, or called in favors to arrange for the characters to escort them into the Grove. One of the artisans, however, has no intention of sharing the treasure with her fellow dwarves, and she secretly sabotages the efforts—by garbling some of the translated pass phrases, which prompts the grove's guardians to attack, and activates the protective traps in the area. Will the adventurers unmask the saboteur before it's too late?

TENTACLED BOOKHOUND

The characters encounter a **gargoctopus** (*Creature Codex*, p. 167) named Vysrim on the banks of the Selwheyha River. The creature recently met another of its kind and wants to impress its new friend with a gift from the Scroll Market of Lignas Proper—perhaps a tome recounting the history of the ancient sorcerers known as the Xangui-Xa. Vysrim is keen to browse the stalls and tents for itself so it can choose the perfect book. If the characters can smuggle the gargoctopus into the market to shop, Vysrim will share lore with them pertinent to their current quests.

the corsair coast



The Corsair Coast is a region of untold variety, featuring everything from a fallen city of possessed princes to kingdoms of ferocious hunters to a chain of islands in which the rule of law is found only at the end of a pirate's cutlass. There is incredible danger here, but for those stout enough of heart and strong enough of limb, the promise of power and riches beckons.

geography

The lands of the Corsair Coast span 5,000 miles from Ishadia in the north to Terrotu in the south and encompass a wide variety of terrain, from desert and mountains to jungle and grasslands.



Beyond the fertile Arandis river valley and the rugged hills of Ishadia, the sand dunes of the Sarklan Desert extend southward down the coast to Mhalmat, the City of Freedom. Here, the Spice Road crosses the craggy hills that separate the desert from the coastal plains of the Fallen Kingdom of Aksaba. The road follows the coast past ancient ruins to Sar-Shaba, the City of the Seal, and beyond, traversing the ominous Silent Forest and winding through Kesara, the Land of the Saffron Rajah.

The Viungo Jungle runs the length of the Spice Coast from the border of Kesara to the southernmost settlement. Flora and fauna in this tropical rainforest are similar to what's found in the Olu and Fendeel jungles on the western coast (see "Denizens of the Jungles", page 124).

Hashim the wind mage and the pirates of the Baboon's Fury attack a slaver's ship off the Spice Coast.



To the west, the snow-capped Yoyera and Chando mountains separate the jungle from the savannah of Omphaya and the rolling hills and grasslands of Terrotu. Small clans of **degenerate titans** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 381) and a mated pair of **adult wind dragons** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 145) deter all but the most foolhardy travelers from negotiating the high passes. The smaller Dusar Kankara range marks the divide between the two other ranges, extending east to the coast and bisecting the jungle; mountain gorillas dwell in its tree-covered lower reaches.

In the Tethys Ocean, a chain of small tropical islands curves between the sultanates of Shibai and Zanskar on the two largest islands to the north and south. Many of these islands are tiny, and only experienced sailors with good charts can navigate the reefs and channels safely. Sharks, dolphins, manta rays, and numerous colorful fish species can be seen here. At least one **zaratan** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 414) lives among the islands; **rocs** haunt the skies overhead.

Ishadia

Long ago, the marble halls of Ishadia rivaled the splendor of the celestial realms, and the gods themselves walked the land beside aasimar knights flying the banner of the horned lion. The great nation, created by the union of Ishadia's kings with Aksaba's queens, ruled an empire that stretched from the Ruby Sea to the Spice Coast.

When this golden age came to an abrupt end, Ishadia went into decline, falling under Nurian rule for a time, before returning to something like its former glory. This second period of prosperity ended 350 years ago when the Dragon Empire threatened to destroy the realm and its entire population in a flood of dragon fire. Today, Ishadia holds itself together just barely against besieging dragons, internal struggles, and hunters of ancient secrets.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Wheeling Angels five years ago, when Ishadia and Khandiria stood side by side and triumphed against the Mharoti, the area has seen a brief respite from conflict. Yet even though the attention of the Dragon Empire has shifted elsewhere, Ishadia's commanders dare not lower their guard.

The Ishadi still believe their nation to be one of upstanding knights. They share a hatred for dragonkind and a heritage of angelic wrath and passion from a bygone age of gods now dead. Paladins or pirates, the Ishadi are not content to remain the dregs of the south.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

In ancient days, the gods and their forebears walked among—and dallied with—mortals. As a result, divine blood runs deep in Ishadia. All aasimar in the nation can

trace their family line back to a god, dead or alive, even if official lineages are specious. Many unfortunate aasimar have a celestial bloodline that traces back to a dead god, one who was killed and devoured during the ancient war between the deities. Often, these celestial orphans find that they must seek out a living deity or angelic patron to protect and expand their power. These individuals might be able to wrest the power of their deposed ancestor away from a dire enemy, such as jealous Aten, known in Ishadia as the Murderer of Pantheons and Toppler of Thrones. Nuria Natal might be a natural ally against the Dragon Empire, but the mutual suspicion between the two nations runs deep.

Motivated by a yearning for lost glory, and a deep-rooted fear of extinction, Ishadi culture pulls its citizens in several directions at once. At some moments, the Ishadi represent everything glorious, a people unbowed, just as they were before the dragons began assaulting them. At other moments, they show their ruthless side, justifying cruel reprisals as righteous acts in the face of Mharoti depredations. Proud of their heritage, the Ishadi are not hesitant to point out their ancient accomplishments, and they are quick to defend their homeland against any perceived disrespect. As a local saying goes, an Ishadi who does not take up arms to defend a slight against their country is not truly worthy of their heritage.

The Ishadi view Northlanders with suspicion, and anyone from the Mharoti Empire with outright hostility. Ishadia maintains a relatively cordial relationship with Khandiria, and with Nuria Natal and the other desert cities, seeing them as allies against the dragons, but Ishadia and Shibai have come close to war several times over the last decade or so. Ishadia still sees its former colony as a subordinate that should be paying tribute, rather than an independent nation. To punish the upstart colony, dozens of merchants from the city of Sequra have outfitted their vessels as privateers and are carrying out secret orders to raid Shibai ships and seize their riches.

The Ishadi look down on most other Southlanders, with notable exceptions such as the Lignan scholars and the Aksaba, the mourned people of Sar-Shaba. This dismissive attitude often leads to friction with merchants and travelers from the Spice Coast and Terrotu.

GOVERNMENT

Since the death 115 years ago of the last monarch to sit on the Phoenix Throne, King Mohsen Dahburzmihir, Ishadia has been ruled by its military. General-Regent Atred Mardhu leads the Council of Commanders from his base in the fortress city of Mardas Adamat. Mardhu is devoted to Ishadia's defense and is unafraid to experiment with innovations to gain the upper hand in the ongoing

fight against Mharoti expansion. In addition to developing new magical and mundane war machines and weaponry, Mardhu has championed a secret military project, against the advice of his fellow commanders.

Prince of the Sapphire Sky

During the last siege of Mardas Adamat soon after the death of King Mohsen Dahburzmihir, the Ishadians captured Marduzak, a young wind dragon. The General-Regent ordered the creature be shown mercy. After being magically reduced in size, Marduzak was confined deep beneath the Third Gate of Ashadon in Mardas Adamat, where he was raised in celestial light and educated in the seven Ishadian virtues (see “Religions and Deities,” below).

Marduzak has grown into a dragon of the light who seeks either to convert his corrupted Mharoti brethren, or to help destroy them. He has gathered a small corps of other scaled folk that want to see a more enlightened Dragon Empire. After he was restored to his full size, Marduzak made a dramatic appearance at the Battle of Wheeling Angels five years ago, driving off the flame dragon Domentziolus, Lord of Smoldering Embers.

Marduzak, now called the Prince of the Sapphire Sky, patrols Ishadia’s skies on the General-Regent’s orders, watching for enemy dragons. The other members of the Council of Commanders are of two minds. Ludari and Lilette Sorgas believe the dragon will help defeat the Mharoti; Ninshuel the Ancient and Khorpa Elegza think it’s only a matter of time before Marduzak betrays Ishadia.

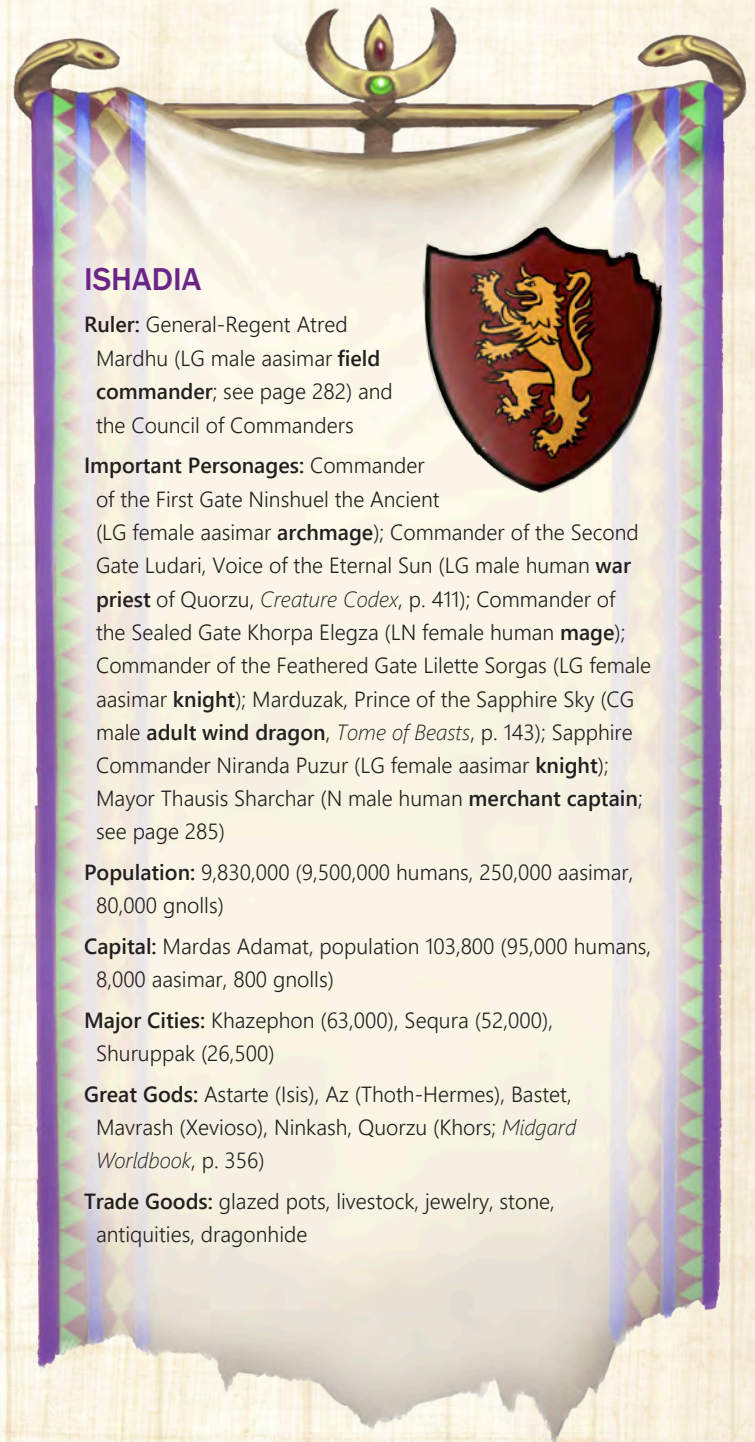
RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

Given the divine blood that flows through their veins, it is not surprising that the Ishadi are a devout people. Astarte (known as Isis in Nuria Natal) and Quorzu (called Khors in the north) are two of the most widely followed deities. Ishadia’s biggest temple, the Basilica of the Golden Lion in the holy city of Shuruppak (see page 152), is dedicated to all the gods of the pantheon and to the seven Ishadian virtues: humility, diligence, courage, temperance, generosity, kindness, and peace.

Because of their ancestral connection to the Seven Heavens, Ishadian clerics, paladins, warlocks, and wizards can add angelic spells to their spell lists, and many wizards follow the angelic scribe arcane tradition (*Deep Magic*, p. 177). Although the Ishadi hold celestials in high regard, worship of angels is forbidden.

COMMERCE

Other merchants in Ishadia trade with Nuria and the desert cities, dealing in glazed pottery, jewelry, and items made from dragonhide, as well as livestock, antiquities, and



ISHADIA

Ruler: General-Regent Atred Mardhu (LG male aasimar **field commander**; see page 282) and the Council of Commanders

Important Personages: Commander of the First Gate Ninshuel the Ancient (LG female aasimar **archmage**); Commander of the Second Gate Ludari, Voice of the Eternal Sun (LG male human **war priest** of Quorzu, *Creature Codex*, p. 411); Commander of the Sealed Gate Khorpa Elegza (LN female human **mage**); Commander of the Feathered Gate Lilette Sorgas (LG female aasimar **knight**); Marduzak, Prince of the Sapphire Sky (CG male **adult wind dragon**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 143); Sapphire Commander Niranda Puzur (LG female aasimar **knight**); Mayor Thausis Sharchar (N male human **merchant captain**; see page 285)

Population: 9,830,000 (9,500,000 humans, 250,000 aasimar, 80,000 gnolls)

Capital: Mardas Adamat, population 103,800 (95,000 humans, 8,000 aasimar, 800 gnolls)

Major Cities: Khazephon (63,000), Sequra (52,000), Shuruppak (26,500)

Great Gods: Astarte (Isis), Az (Thoth-Hermes), Bastet, Mavrash (Xevioso), Ninkash, Quorzu (Khors; *Midgard Worldbook*, p. 356)

Trade Goods: glazed pots, livestock, jewelry, stone, antiquities, dragonhide

stone quarried in the southern mountains. And, despite intermittent raids by both sides, trade carries on warily with the nearby Mharoti city of Sarkland.

The most unscrupulous merchants in Sequra are heavily involved in the slave trade with Cathay that flows through Shibai, then down the Spice Coast to the Golden Sultanate of Zanskar. This previously lucrative route is lately under increased threat from the Istagal Raiders and other pirates, following the recent Shibai slave revolt (see “The Showka Passage”, page 155).



Mardas Adamat, the City at the Gates

The fortress-city of Mardas Adamat has stood firm against the Dragon Empire for more than three centuries. Here, the ancient strongholds known as the Four Gates of Ashadon protect Ishadia, their battlements adorned with dragonkin skulls taken as trophies over the years.

Governed by General-Regent Atred Mardhu and his Council of Commanders, each one responsible for a different gate and its garrison, the city is a beehive of activity. Engineers expand the underground cisterns, reinforce the fortifications, and test new magical and mundane weapons, while regular drills keep the soldiers battle ready, and the Prince of the Sapphire Sky, Marduzak, patrols the sky.

KHAZEPHON, CITY OF BAUBLES

Ishadia's second largest city, Khazephon, sits at the confluence of the Arandis River and its tributaries. Here, the Great Dam once stood until the dragons shattered it and released its captive waters on Ishadia more than a century ago.

During that battle, as the Mharoti Empire's army threw itself against the spears and slings of the defenders, the might of Ishadia seemed destined to carry the day. Even a seemingly certain victory is never certain, though. The devious Satarah al-Beldestani, the legendary dragonborn paladin of Seggotan, a draconic sea god, decided that the Mharoti did not need Khazephon to be intact to claim what they wanted from it. She unleashed the full force of her army's draconic power into the dam. The structure buckled, sending a deluge over the city and the surrounding countryside. Thousands died, including Ishadia's last monarch, King Mohsen Dahburzmihir.

The city has been rebuilt, and today it is an eclectic, teeming, amorphous place of lively markets, caravan tents, and shanty districts interspersed between ancient temples and high-walled estates. The sudden flood revealed silt-covered ruins and more than a few tunnel shafts, all of which seem to date to the time of the first gods. Expeditions to explore and plunder these sites have been few and largely unsuccessful.

The leaders of Khazephon want their rejuvenated city to be recognized once again as Ishadia's center of activity, and they are drumming up support to return the capital to their city. Sapphire Commander Niranda Puzur has ordered work to begin on repairing the Great Dam despite protests from those that believe the dragons will only destroy it again.

Palaces of Khazephon

Along the sundered dam above Khazephon, occupying the ridge that once overlooked the city's artificial lake,

stand more than twenty grand residences. Their walls bear hammered gold reliefs that record the histories of the elite families of Ishadia in staccato Enochian script. Their high, arching halls open onto long porticos lined with pillars carved out of marble and capped with animal sculptures. An order of **lammasu** (*Creature Codex*, p. 247) patrols these palaces, protecting the sacred flames that burn within these sanctums of the noble clans.

The lammasu do not abandon these mansions, because they know of a secret prophecy: a divine spark is split between the fires, awaiting a true scion of Ishadia who will collect the pieces and claim the spark. The prophecy goes on to say that once the spark is restored, its host shall lead the Phoenix Throne to glory again. Until that time, the lammasu remain dedicated to their duty.

See *Warlock Lair 16: Lamassu's Secrets* for details on the palace of House Zisuthros. The palace's mosaics provide clues to the identity of Ishadia's true scion.

SEQURA, THE THIEVES' HAVEN

Located at the mouth of the Arandis River, Sequra is a den of corruption, its walls and streets literally washed white with regularity to cover up the evidence of crimes and violence. Here, foreign traders, White Sea pirates, and local guilds that are little more than fronts for criminal organizations mingle openly and freely.

Tausis Sharchar is Sequra's mayor and the leader of its largest guild. Sharchar siphons off wealth to fund his interests in Shibai, and he is concerned about the impact that the recent slave revolt and the subsequent increase in piracy have had on his city's economy.

SHURUPPAK, CITY OF LIONS

The holy city of Shuruppak is a center of military planning, training and readiness, and a place of pilgrimage from Zobeck, Triolo, and other northern cities. At the city's heart is the Basilica of the Golden Lion, one of the largest and oldest temples in Midgard, which holds the Portal of the Heavens, a gateway that leads to the first of the Seven Heavens.

Basilica of the Golden Lion

Built when the gods still walked in the world, the Basilica of the Golden Lion bears evidence of the divine hands that aided in its construction. Towers of white marble inlaid with gold reach toward the heavens. The architecture in the complex exhibits elements of different cultures blended into a seamless whole.

Seven fluted rotundas, called aspects, form the perimeter of the basilica. Connected by high walls, the aspects are named for the seven Ishadian virtues.



Fahleel

Janqarim

SHURUPPAK

SEQURA

Roruka

Cemetery City

SARKLAN DESERT

HARIEK HILLS

WHITE SEA

GRAY TITAN'S WAY

SHOWKA PASSAGE

LOTUS ROAD

Per-Maraut

MHALMET

MHALMET

MASIRAH

DUMAT

MOUNT ERBAI

UGUAR

MOSYLON

SHIBAI

ALHIIR

YSTOLA

TALUT

THE DEMON'S WAY

Kebrassa

Yebarada

MEGHAL YUHATARA

Merule

TEHAWA

Ziridium

FALLEN KINGDOM OF AKSABA

GREAT HIVE OF ARBEYACH

SAR SHABA

EUDALIS

Kalubi

YOYERA MOUNTAINS

SILENT FOREST

KESARA

RAJAH'S PALACE OF WATER

IRAM

SERAPION

TROLLKIN

Kimona Proving Ground

VIUNGO JUNGLE

MILES 0 250 500



If the basilica is the heart of Ishadia, the Great Agiary is the heart of the basilica. The enormous golden dome dwarfs the buildings around it; an eternal lantern burns in the open-topped cupola, radiating a pillar of light that extends from earth to sky.

Also inside the Agiary is the Portal of the Heavens, an arch of translucent white stone that is a direct gateway to Taivas, the Hall of Elysian Dawn, first of the Seven Heavens. In days gone by, the aasimar of Ishadia used the portal to visit their divine progenitors; today such travel is prohibited by law and custom except in direst need.

The Golden Tablets of Ishadia. The *Golden Tablets* are the holy books of the aasimar of the Southlands and the Old Gods of the South, including some now dead and gone. These texts are normally found printed on vellum and papyrus scrolls, and sometimes as rare books in Northern languages. According to legend, Ishadia's Old Gods handed down the original tablets to the nation's aasimar clergy during a golden age long gone, and these relics are kept in the basilica. The various translations differ markedly. The worshipers of Horus have their stringent but essentially peaceful version; the worshipers of Aten abide by a much more warlike version of the ancient manuscripts.

The oldest and rarest versions of the text, copied directly from the original tablets, contain the secrets of angelic magic (*Deep Magic*, p. 173).

sultanate of shibai

The fabulously wealthy island nation of Shibai controls the fabled Showka Passage, the most important trade route in the Tethys Ocean, which connects the north and west of Midgard to the distant lands of the east.

Founded by a loose conglomeration of merchant households from Ishadia, Shibai has achieved autonomy and is nominally ruled by its sultan, although the true power remains in the hands of the wealthiest houses. Shibai has welcomed immigrants from Cathay, Khandiria, Sikkim, the Southlands, and elsewhere, producing a distinctive blend of human races among the populace. Activity on the island is concentrated entirely on trade, with its port cities on the coast being sustained by inland farms.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

Shibain society cares about amassing material wealth above all other considerations. Status, power, and position depend on personal holdings, and individual families can rise or fall depending on the results of the latest trade voyage. Those of noble rank hold almost unlimited power in Shibai—power that is tempered only by the presence and influence of the other nobles.

A common Shibain saying notes that “Only the blind man fails to marvel at the glory of Shibai!” Certainly, ostentatious displays of wealth, including marble palaces, ornate carriages, and public fountains made of carved jade, are the norm for Shibai's rich and powerful. In the capital, a street paved with gold is named after Ziba the Golden Queen, who ruled when the island was still an Ishadian colony. The Street of the Golden Queen was paid for by the merchant houses, which competed for sponsorship of the longest sections, and the precious metal paving is secured under a *wall of force*.

GOVERNMENT: THE SULTAN AND THE AMIRS

The current Sultan of Shibai, Hyfad al-Khanlar, rules in name only, as the merchant houses more or less govern themselves. His rank is an honorary status that is granted to the head of the Council of Amirs on a rotating basis. Although prestigious, it is a stressful, unenviable position. Hyfad's situation has become increasingly precarious following the recent slave revolt (see page 178).

The real power in Shibai rests in the hands of the five wealthiest households, each of which administers a port city. Their mercantile operations control fleets of ships, port facilities, warehouses, and other implements of trade.

Over the centuries, a well-defined hierarchy has developed. Each of the thirty-six households in Shibai is controlled by a merchant prince or princess called an amir, along with each one's qadi, or designated heir. Every amir has a faction house in Shibai's capital, Mosylon. The amirs of Masirah and Uguar were both killed in the slave revolt, so their qadis have stepped into those roles.

Below the amirs are the sayyid, lesser relatives of the house, who hold minor positions of authority. The other two noble ranks, the mirali and the faris, are not necessarily held by household members. The mirali are ship captains who enjoy full autonomy on their own vessels. The faris are anointed warriors who make up most of Shibai's small but well-trained military force.

RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

Shibai's status as a center of maritime trade means that one can find worshipers of nearly every major god of the Southlands and eastern Midgard on the island. Thoth-Hermes is Shibai's patron deity, but the island's cities also have splendid temples to Eshu, Lady Vindros (a mask of Rava), Nurul (Kwansi), and Yemaja.

COMMERCE

The merchant fleets of Shibai trade with nations along the Corsair Coast and the distant ports of Cathay and the East. The sultanate produces few goods of note, instead serving

as an intermediary and facilitator. The Shibains take great pains to make their distant trading partners believe the opposite, though. Casting themselves as the source of goods rather than just a middleman in the process keeps profits fat and prevents anyone from cutting them out of the system entirely.

The Showka Passage

This well-used trade route crosses the Tethys Ocean, connecting the Southlands to Cathay. Shibai provides the transportation and organization that makes traversing the Showka Passage possible.

Merchant ships from Ishadia and Mhalmel buy slaves, tea, spices, and manufactured goods from Cathay with Zanskarian gold. These cargoes are routed through Shibai. Then, the slaves and manufactured goods are sold to the Spice Coast settlements in exchange for loads of spices, and to Zanskar for crates of gold.

This lucrative route has always been the site of frequent pirate attacks, and these assaults have increased exponentially in the years since the slave revolt. In addition, the moguls of Khandiria are not above sending their navy to plunder Shibai's ships from time to time. Nowadays, at least two warships accompany most large groups of vessels, and substantial bounties are on offer for the heads of the most infamous pirates.

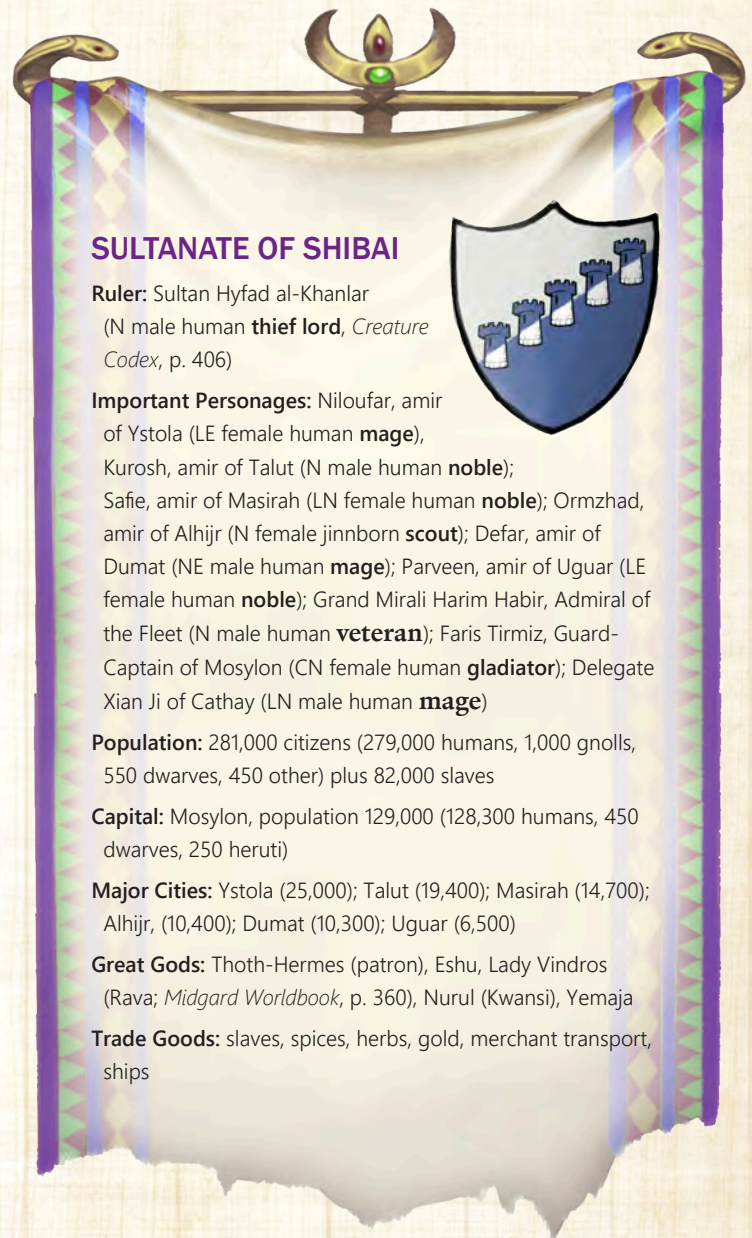
MOSYLON, CITY OF GOLDEN TOWERS

The capital of Shibai shines above a harbor dotted with domed golden spires that reach toward the sun. The city oozes wealth, and even the most modest home is made of hand-cut marble. The households compete by building ever more ornate palaces with ever higher towers. When a house abandons an older spire, it is quickly snapped up by a lesser house, which leaves behind an old tower in turn. The result is a city bristling with hundreds of towers—much to the delight of daredevils, thieves, and the city's small population of heruti, who all appreciate and enjoy the higher elevations that others would rather not ascend.

Several new spires are under construction to replace those damaged in the slave riots. Cathay's influential trade representative, Delegate Xian Ji, lives in an ornate, many-tiered pagoda built in the eastern style. He was most unamused when his tower was scorched in the fires during the revolt.

The Qasr

At the center of Mosylon is the Qasr, a grand palace that looms high above the city's other towers. The meeting place of the Council of Amirs and the site of the sultan's throne room, the Qasr features lavish meeting halls, council chambers, and courts; rat-filled dungeons and



SULTANATE OF SHIBAI

Ruler: Sultan Hyfad al-Khanlar (N male human **thief lord**, *Creature Codex*, p. 406)

Important Personages: Niloufar, amir of Ystola (LE female human **mage**), Kurosh, amir of Talut (N male human **noble**); Safie, amir of Masirah (LN female human **noble**); Ormzhad, amir of Alhijr (N female jinnborn **scout**); Defar, amir of Dumat (NE male human **mage**); Parveen, amir of Uguar (LE female human **noble**); Grand Mirali Harim Habir, Admiral of the Fleet (N male human **veteran**); Faris Tirmiz, Guard-Captain of Mosylon (CN female human **gladiator**); Delegate Xian Ji of Cathay (LN male human **mage**)

Population: 281,000 citizens (279,000 humans, 1,000 gnolls, 550 dwarves, 450 other) plus 82,000 slaves

Capital: Mosylon, population 129,000 (128,300 humans, 450 dwarves, 250 heruti)

Major Cities: Ystola (25,000); Talut (19,400); Masirah (14,700); Alhijr, (10,400); Dumat (10,300); Uguar (6,500)


Great Gods: Thoth-Hermes (patron), Eshu, Lady Vindros (Rava; *Midgard Worldbook*, p. 360), Nurul (Kwansi), Yemaja

Trade Goods: slaves, spices, herbs, gold, merchant transport, ships

well-stocked armories occupy the out-of-the-way spaces. Much of the intrigue that permeates Shibain society originates in the halls of the Qasr.

Nest of Eshu

The heruti of Mosylon are few in number but quite influential. They are excellent spies and gossips, able to eavesdrop on conversations that take place inside high towers. Their leader, Lady Toowhee (CN female heru **doom croaker** of Eshu, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 324) always seems to be one step ahead of her rivals. The Nest of Eshu, as the heruti call themselves, deals in merchant information, weather predictions, and the destruction of reputations through rumors and smear campaigns. The group is respected, sometimes even feared, by the merchant class.



Crossroads Souk

Of all the gathering places and markets in Shibai, the greatest is the Crossroads Souk. Located in the heart of Mosylon, the souk attracts merchants and traders from across the Tethys Ocean. It is a diverse place with a vast range of wares; visitors might find Cathay arms dealers in a stall next to Mharoti kobold tinkers, for instance.

A slave market anchors one end of the souk. Here, slaves who survived the journey from the Northlands and the east are measured, evaluated, and traded to their new owners, who then transport them to the Spice Coast or Zanskar. In the aftermath of the slave revolt, guard numbers have been tripled on the orders of the current Guard-Captain of Mosylon, Faris Tirmiz (CN female human **gladiator**), to ensure that another uprising does not occur.

MAJOR CITIES

Each of Shibai's other major cities—five coastal ports and the inland city of Uguar—is controlled by a wealthy merchant prince or princess.

Alhijr

This estuary city is famous for its spice market. Here, exotic spices and herbs from all over Midgard—and sometimes farther afield—are bought and sold in a huge,

covered bazaar topped with a domed roof decorated with tiled mosaics depicting ships and the sea. Ormzhad, a water jinnborn who abandoned her *siraati* path long ago to join Shibai's merchant houses, serves as amir of Alhijr.

Dumat

Defar, the amir of Dumat, has tried to compensate for his city's status as the smallest of Shibai's ports by building one of its most theatrical palaces. His ornately decorated home is situated on a floating island several hundred feet above the harbor. Built of white marble, it is surrounded by a beautiful garden with fountains and orange trees.

Masirah

Notable for its enormous temple to Yemaja of the Waters and the 50-foot-tall bronze statue of the goddess that stands at the entrance to its harbor, Masirah is controlled by the ostentatious Jahan merchant house, led by Amir Safe, its brash former qadi.

Talut

Shibai's navy is based at Talut, the island's third largest city. Grand Mirali Harim Habir commands the fleet that protects merchant vessels from the pirates of Mhalmet and the Free Islands of Tethys. Hyfad was the amir of Talut before becoming Sultan of Shibai, and was replaced by his lugubrious qadi, Kurosh.



SIGHTS AND SOUNDS IN THE SOUK

The souk can be an amusing, confusing, or dangerous place. When the characters are wandering around, consider using some of the ideas below to spice up the experience.

- That fruit you bought from the nice street vendor has poison wasp eggs in it, and they are going to hatch tonight.
- A dark-hooded figure offers to buy a single second of your life.
- A conniving parrot claims he is a powerful wizard and just needs you to change him back into ... a groll?
- The old woman offering to read your fortune really is a seer, but she uses her powers to determine what she can tell you that you'll pay the most for, not what you actually need to know.
- A dealer in rare creatures wants to buy your familiar, animal companion, or bonded mount. The price he offers keeps going up, and he won't take no for an answer.
- A young man asks if you will agree to marry him ... someday. He doesn't want you to go through with it; he just needs to be promised to someone so his parents will leave him alone.
- The goblin market is a section of the souk where the maze of tents, wagons, crates, curtains, rugs, and racks is designed for folks between 2 and 3 feet tall. Gnomes, goblins, and similarly sized shoppers and merchants manage fine, but larger people have to squeeze through narrow passages, and the market guards avoid this area.
- A platinum piece sits in the middle of the road. A circle has been drawn around it in chalk. It does not seem to be a trap, but no one is willing to risk picking up the coin.
- The fruit vendor's shop is made of bricks of dried fruit. She sells her shop brick by brick and does not explain where the fruit bricks come from.
- A wishing well is full of coins. You can take any of them—but each one has someone else's wish carved on it. You must fulfill the wish on a coin you steal, or you'll be cursed.
- A camel the size of an elephant wanders through the souk, wearing expensive, high-quality tack and harness and spitting in people's drinks. No one knows who owns it.
- A magic carpet shop appears to be staffed by animated, talking magic carpets.

Uguar

Shibai's only inland city is also its smallest. Located on the edge of the forest, it supplies lumber as well as crops to the capital. The charmless and cruel Parveen took over as amir following the death of her predecessor in the slave revolt; she has a reputation for overworking the slaves on her farms.

Ystola

The glistening marble city of Ystola may be one-fifth of the capital's size but it has half as many golden-topped spires, and it boasts Shibai's tallest tower. Amir Niloufar was expecting to be the next sultan. She is so annoyed at being passed over in favor of Hyfad that she is using her spies to leak the movements of her rivals' vessels to the Istagal Raiders and other pirates.

Mhalmet, city of freedom

The only mainland port that trades heavily with the Free Islands of Tethys, the freewheeling city of Mhalmet is a den of iniquity where pirates, traders, smugglers, and adventurers coexist under the rule of the almighty coin. Mhalmet is the endpoint of a trade route that runs through Saph-Saph, Nuria Natal, and Siwal. The city also attracts



MHALMET

Rulers: The Black Table

Important Personages: Kikki Longarm (CE female gnoll **bandit lord**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 418); Velissa the Green Ghost (LE female human **mage**); Ahmed al-Aksaba (N male human **gladiator**)

Population: 34,970 (29,500 humans, 3,200 gnolls, 950 minotaurs, 620 dwarves, 500 aasimar, 200 dragonborn)

Great Gods: Takhar (patron), Isis, Ninkash, Sabateus, Thoth-Hermes

Trade Goods: shipbuilding, sailcloth, rope, copper, fish



caravans from deeper in the Southlands, so it brims with exotic goods and materials. Anything can be had on the dark streets and alleys of Mhalmet—for the right price.

Mhalmet is ruled by the dozen or so members of the Black Table, a collection of pirates, thieves, and caravan raiders who command considerable personal power, wielded to line their own pockets. The Black Table regularly dispatches raiding parties to demand protection money from slave vessels, trading caravans, and simple travelers alike. Currently, the Black Table warlords Kikki Longarm, Velissa the Green Ghost, and Ahmed al-Aksaba, are in the ascendancy, but Mhalmet's politics are volatile, and the balance of power can shift rapidly.

Mhalmet is a popular destination for escaped slaves from the Spice Coast or Shibai—the pirates of Mhalmet are always in need of fresh sailors and don't ask many questions before signing up new recruits. Famous pirate visitors to the city include the Istagal Raiders, who wage war on the slave trade; the pirate queen of the Spice Coast, Fatima al-Graghn; and the bloodthirsty Intisar the Manacle. See *Free Islands of Tethys*, page 170, for more information.

MHALMET LOCATIONS

Mhalmet can be a dangerous place, so newcomers ought to be cautious when visiting any of the establishments described below.

Five Gold Tankards Caravanserai

Located just inside the city gates, this walled three-story compound offers accommodations for newly arrived caravans, stabling for their camels, and somewhere to store goods before they are brought to market. In the shady central courtyard, palm trees grow around a fountain that depicts a jovial Ninkash pouring water from her oversized tankard. Lodging here is convenient but pricey, and merchants must pay protection to the Black Table on arrival or risk their goods going missing.

House of Blue Smoke

Mhalmet has several “dens” where patrons can go to inhale dream smoke, a highly addictive drug that causes euphoria, which is grown in parts of the east. These high-end establishments offer their customers luxurious surroundings, silk divans, and attractive young attendants. At the other end of the spectrum, the House of Blue



Smoke is scruffy and ill-kept, and only the poorest, most desperate addicts come here. Thefts and violence are commonplace occurrences.

Salon of Mysteries

This club is a favorite of Mhalmet's idle rich. Here, they can trade their coin for delights of all kinds. Extravagant while maintaining an air of studied elegance, the Salon of Mysteries offers games of chance, fine dining, and exquisite companionship. The owner, Wazen Al-Shamuri, prides himself on being an honorable businessman who ensures that the games of chance are fair.

Recently, a bigger, gaudier establishment called the Lounge of a Thousand Whispers opened nearby. This new business is playing dirty, bribing bureaucrats to close Wazen's doors without warning, hiring thugs to hassle Salon customers, and generally trying to drive Wazen out of business. Wazen is attempting to minimize the loss of patrons by emphasizing customer loyalty and reminding his guests of his sterling reputation, but his establishment has still suffered a worrying drop-off in income.

Sandalwood House

Adventurers in Mhalmet are often drawn to the infamous Sandalwood House, a social club and guild hall where like-minded thrill-seekers can join expeditions into the Southlands to hunt big game, discover lost civilizations, or plunder ancient tombs. The Dashing Scoundrels, a discerning thieves' guild that carries out daring heists with considerable panache, can be contacted here.

sar-shaba and the fallen kingdom of aksaba

Few know the truth about the collapse of the Kingdom of Aksaba, brought about by a multitudinous festering of evils. Those who do know—dedicated scholars and a handful of archivists—shy away from discussing the horrors that still dwell in its onetime capital: Sar-Shaba, the City of the Seal.

At its height, Aksaba was a land of arid dunes, shimmering oases, and pristine cities and trade forts. Dynastic marriage united Aksaba's queens and Ishadia's kings, creating two strong lineages, the Azadim and the Makudai, which together ruled Ishadia and Aksaba during a golden age. The Azadim lineage of Ishadia waned with the years, and eventually the Makudai dynasty emerged to lead both kingdoms for generations.

The empire formed by the united crowns remained the undisputed king of the Tethys Ocean until an Azadim usurper named Harnoch-Khedan seized the throne with



AKSABA

Nominal Ruler: Kebwe Menelon XVI beh Makara (LG male human **veteran**)

Important Personages: Mohzde Kasebi, Governor of Eudalis (N female human **noble**); Fakhri Rezghi, Fortress Commander of Meghal Yuhatara (LG female human **gladiator**); Shadmehr Khoshkam, Governor of Tehawa (LN male aasimar **knight**)

Population: 217,000 (198,000 humans, 15,500 aasimar, 3,500 tieflings)

Capital: Outer Sar-Shaba, population 5,800

Major Cities: Eudalis (24,000), Meghal Yuhatara (22,500), Tehawa (17,250)

Great Gods: Astarte (Isis), Sabateus, Mithras (Horus), Takhar, Thoth-Hermes

Trade Goods: myrrh, frankincense, palm oil, dates, scroll work, religious texts

the help of a contingent of bound fiends in a violent coup known as the Blood Coronation. The new king had the servants of both heaven and hell at his command, and his demonic servitors made him feared throughout the Corsair Coast.

Hailed as the living restoration of the Azadim kings by many Ishadians, Harnoch-Khedan spent his lifetime quelling Aksaban rebellion and foreign invaders. He was succeeded by Azhanzar the Proud.

Azhanzar lived to see his empire expand its borders, but also to watch his heirs sink into infernal decadence and fraternal violence. In his final years, Azhanzar regretted his imperious sins and those of his heirs, and he ordered the rebuilding of Sar-Shaba according to the celestial designs in his father's orichalcum-bound tomes. Summoning the last of his power, he brought together all the fiends his family commanded. Once the fiends had congregated, he activated heavenly sigils that trapped them within the newly warded city. Thus was completed the Censure of Sar-Shaba. With the city sealed, an exhausted Azhanzar died peacefully in his sleep that night.



THE PRINCES OF PERDITION

In his dying act, Azhanzar found absolution, but his kin were less fortunate. The princes and princesses who had made pacts with dark gods and demons were also trapped inside the city. The years of incessant infighting that followed culled the demonic hordes to a handful of the mightiest of them, while the royal scions who survived have likewise become powerful fiends.

Some of these newly evolved fiends are utterly changed, unrecognizable from how they appeared at the height of their mortal power, and these new forms reflect their corrupted nature. Because of the magic of the city's wards, most are not entirely aware that they are imprisoned, and they plod along in relentless repetition of the sins that started them on their dark paths. Others are starting to stir from their torpor and might soon break free from whatever restrains them.

All the mighty princelings have assembled courts of hell-touched mortals and minor demons to give their activities a veneer of importance and regality. Called the Harnochim, or Heirs of Harnoch, by modern Aksabans, most know them as the Princes of Perdition, irrespective of gender. The three most notorious among them are described below; others include Garshasp Blood-drinker, Princess Zebayallah, and Nishudas the Usurper.

Belith Hamona, the Gilded Queen

The eldest and favored daughter of the king, Hamona became the matriarch of the House of Harnoch after murdering her own mother, the First Queen of Aksaba, and framing her father's other wives for the deed.

Riches flowed into Sar-Shaba under Hamona's stewardship. She earned the enmity of Aksaba's neighbors by demanding irreplaceable treasures as tribute, such as the *Ten Teeth of Omphaya*, a powerful lion warrior's necklace, and the *Resounding Torus of Terrotu*, a magic device capable of preventing—and creating—earthquakes.

Hamona treated the Imperial Treasury as her personal fortune, sparing no expense in the reconstruction of Sar-Shaba, turning it into a fortress-palace to defend against those who would usurp her throne. Unknowingly, though, Hamona supervised the crafting of her own gilded cage. Greedy and corrupt, she was imprisoned with the rest in the Censure of Sar-Shaba.

Among the Heirs of Harnoch, Hamona was the most dangerous, and she came close to escaping the sealed city. In her furious attempt to break the seals, her magic damaged the Imperial Treasury, destroyed most of the hoard golems, and fused Hamona's body with a pool of molten gold. She lives on in this metallic form to this day, bound to the treasury.

This limitation has merely inconvenienced Hamona. She has established a network of spies and bandits that operates outside the seals, led by Afsaneh Hajar (NE female **tiefling cult leader**, *Tome of Beasts* p. 421). Afsaneh is a talented spellcaster who can suppress the seals long enough to allow a handful of Hamona's followers to come and go with new treasures to add to her collection. Any traders or explorers who represent an unknown benefactor in the Southlands might well be working for Belith Hamona.

Ezudai the Exile

Azadaiman, the firstborn of Harnoch-Khedan, was a brash, reckless warrior. Caring little for the trappings of royalty, he lost a bet with his younger brother on a dragon-hunting expedition and agreed to relinquish the right of succession to Azhanzar.

During the early years of Azhanzar's reign, despite being a loud and boastful bully, Azadaiman served as a capable general of the Aksaban legions, putting the cultist horde of Ru-Ur (see page 163) to flight, at least for a time, and expanding Aksaba's territory through conquest. His appetite for war was second only to his expensive tastes in food, clothing, and companions. What he could not purchase, he would take.

After being banished from Aksaba for a transgression against his kin, Azadaiman spent time in Omphaya and on the Spice Coast before being cast out yet again. After many years as a hermit, he returned to Sar-Shaba in answer to Azhanzar's summons. In his last audience with his brother the king, he acknowledged he had become dedicated to the way of the Hunter. Azadaiman took the mantle of Ezudai the Exile as penance for his many excesses.

Today, the City of the Seal is Ezudai's hunting ground. He tries to destroy the fiends within it, even his kin. He draws sustenance from the flesh of demons and the damned, and he uses his abilities to combat evil whenever he can. Unfortunately for those around him, the innocent sometimes get in his way.

Unlike the other princes, Ezudai has learned how to come and go from Sar-Shaba. Ezudai chases down and executes mortal followers of the Heirs of Harnoch, a service much appreciated by the city's Azadim wardens. But the eldest wardens have recently detected a disturbing pattern in Ezudai's behavior. Sometimes he strikes not against one of the princes, but against a pure-blooded Azadim, ritually murdering them. The elders rebel at paying this sort of price for an "ally," and they worry that an uninhibited and uncontrollable Ezudai could become the gravest threat among the princes.

The Amunathi, Blades of Punishment

After the Censure of Sar-Shaba, Azhanzar's ferocious daughter, Belith Amunath, seized the city's barracks



SAR-SHABA, CITY OF THE SEAL

INNER SAR-SHABA

Rulers: The Princes of Perdition, including Belith Hamona (LE female **gilded devil**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 106); Ezudai the Exile (LN male **erinyes**); Thabal-Seyunshyar, the Chosen One (NE male fallen **solar**); Garshasp Blood-drinker (CE male **nalfeshnee**); Princess Zebyallah (LE female **erinyes**); Nishudas the Usurper (CE male **balor**)

Population: 850 (800 tieflings, 50 lesser demons)

OUTER SAR-SHABA

Nominal Ruler: Kebwe Menelon XVI beh Makara (LG male human **veteran**)

Important Personages: Adnama the Righteous (LG female human **war priest** of Mithras, *Creature Codex*, p. 411); Tamathel the Redeemer (LG female human **noble**); Yijrabeth Malahta (LN female human **noble**); Gabedar beh Samera of Neruwa (LN male human **war chaplain** of Takhar, *Creature Codex*, p. 410)

Population: 5,800 (4,750 humans, 975 aasimar, 75 tieflings)

Great Gods: Astarte (Isis), Mithras (Horus), Takhar

Trade Goods: palm oil, dates, scroll work, religious texts

and stockade. In the centuries that followed, Amunath expanded her territory by dominating other Heirs of Harnoch and seizing control of their districts.

Twenty years ago, Amunath seized the Towers of the Setting Sun at the Western Gate. Concerned that the warrior-queen had found a way to weaken the seals, Eluhua, the youngest son of Azhanzar and the Makudai Queen Sheha, returned to Sar-Shaba from exile in the desert. With the help of Mojtaba, an aasimar priest of Mithras skilled in angelic magic, Eluhua was able to bypass the seals and lead a group of zealots armed with the famed *Shotels of the Ancients* into the city. They succeeded in killing Amunath, but the Azadim warriors were overwhelmed behind enemy lines and slain by the fallen celestial Halrael.

Already drenched in Amunath's demonic blood, the *Shotels of the Ancients* were further corrupted by the *Feathers of Shaihanael*, unholy relics of another fallen angel banished before the Censure. The zealots rose as vengeful angels, which Halrael dubbed the Amunathi. Subsequently, Eluhua challenged Halrael to single combat. The battle flattened and immolated the neighborhood and nearly collapsed the Western Gate. When the dust settled, both combatants were nowhere to be seen.

In the aftermath, Mojtaba placed new seals on the inner walls, separating the caravan district from the rest of the city. The Amunathi (NE **sammael** angels, *Creature Codex*, p. 19) remain a threat beyond the seals to this day.

THE AKSABANS

After the Censure sealed Sar-Shaba, the Aksabans outside the city pledged loyalty to either the Azadim line or the Makudai, and today there is little distinction between nobles and commoners. The descendants of the Azadim and Makudai lines keep a constant, thankless vigil over Sar-Shaba in case the seals fail. Each group believes it is their eternal duty to keep their ancient kin from escaping.

The Azadim are the less numerous of the two ethnicities. Ishadian by origin and slightly fairer than their Makudai cousins, they view themselves as wardens and sentinels of the City of the Seal, and they leave most matters regarding the rest of Aksaba to the Makudai.

The Makudai, who make up the majority of Aksaba's population, trace their roots to the native peoples of the ancient kingdom. They concentrate on preventing cultists from traveling to and from the city, and they hope to see their lands restored to their former glory and free of demonic taint.

Following the Battle of the Western Gate, the Aksabans rushed in to clear out the Towers of the Setting Sun and the rest of the former caravan district. For the first time in generations, the Aksabans are inhabiting a section of Sar-Shaba—from the Western Gate to the inner wall—in relative safety. The organizations described below all maintain a presence in this enclave.

King Kebwe Menelon XVI and the Queen's Guard

Kebwe Menelon XVI beh Makara is the nominal king of Aksaba and the leader of the Queen's Guard, an outfit that once consisted solely of the direct descendants of the Makudai dynasty. Kebwe Menolon knows that safeguarding and rebuilding Aksaba will take decades, and he's willing to work alongside his compatriots as just another rugged guardsman.



The king loosened membership criteria for the Queen's Guard to include the Azadim, a decision that has earned him some enemies. His Azadim wife is Yjrabeth Malahta, who has not taken the title of queen for fear of dividing the Makudai's support for her husband.

The Knights of Azhanael

This organization of knights works tirelessly to guard the walls of Sar-Shaba; though the Princes of Perdition cannot bring down the wards, powerful spellcasters can sometimes find a way to bypass the seals. Although the group is largely composed of Azadim, Makudai can also join the Knights, who are more integrated than other major Aksaban organizations.

The knights are led by Adnama. A devout follower of Mithras, she inherited the *Shotel of Justice*, one of the *Shotels of the Ancients* recovered following the Battle of the Western Gate.

The School of Salvation

Adherents of the School of Salvation believe they must redeem the lost souls within the city to restore the Azadim name to prominence. The group was founded as an act of charity by Saint Sheha, the Makudai queen who forgave the surviving Azadim after the Censure, at a time when her advisors recommended their execution or exile. Its biggest success is the redemption of Tamathel, a former thrall of Nishudas the Usurper.

Tamathel escaped Nishudas and bypassed the wards during the Battle of the Western Gate. Fleeing to the School of Salvation, she took part in the Ritual of True Atonement and was redeemed. After spending several years with the School of Salvation, she has even begun to age, albeit slowly. Tamathel believes it is her duty in this second life to help other servants of the Princes do penance for their sinful pasts, and to show that not all the imprisoned inhabitants are hopeless. She still has the ability to bypass the wards, and she makes regular sorties into Inner Sar Shaba with members of the school searching for souls to save.

The Swords of Sanctity

The Swords of Sanctity is a radical faction of Makudai that follows the teachings of firebrand thinker Ziridan, a rebel from the days of Harnoch-Khedan. The faction's members believe that the only recourse to the "Azadim problem" is the removal of all Ishadian or Azadim elements from Aksaban lands. The history of the Harnochim and the Censure of Sar-Shaba provide reason enough to support their manifesto.

The group's most visible leader is Gabedar beh Samera of Neruwa, a landowner of the line of Menelon who lost two sons serving in the Queen's Guard and one in the Knights of Azhanael. Gabedar's fiery speeches rile up the populace around Sar-Shaba against the Azadim; he often disparages Tamathel, questioning her redemption and declaring it is only a matter of time before her true evil nature becomes apparent.

RELIGIONS AND DARK CULTS

The Aksabans pay homage to a group of deities that are also widely worshiped in the desert lands to the north, in Ishadia, and elsewhere on the eastern coast. Their great gods include Astarte, Sabateus, Takhar, Thoth-Hermes, and the sun god Mithras, a mask of Horus, whose shrine in Sar-Shaba is located at the top of one of the Towers of the Setting Sun.

Centuries of trafficking with demons and dark gods by the royal scions of Sar-Shaba have given rise to a number of sinister cults, such as the three described below.

The Cult of Ru-Ur

The Cult of Ru-Ur has been a thorn in Aksaba's side from its founding, and its deluded followers plagued Sar-Shaba in the time before the Censure. The cult worships Ruhabulgog, demon god of hatred everlasting and harbinger of the dread titan Rohab-Og.

After the Censure, the cult's activity dwindled; most of its adherents were trapped inside the city along with the princes. Those few Aksabans who have been inside the

inner city have noticed that many of the sigils have been defaced with the crude, eye-shaped symbol of the Cult of Ru-Ur.

Over the last 10 years, a splinter group of the Cult of Ru-Ur has sprung up outside the city and is becoming increasingly active on the trade roads into Aksaba. Led by their overlarge chief, known as Rhuh-Ubak, these dragonborn marauders have been cutting the cult's symbol into the bodies of those they have slain. The raids are gradually advancing toward Sar-Shaba, where the cultists hope to join forces with their comrades inside the city. Both the Makudai and the Azadim have strengthened their patrols on the roads in response.

The Exulted

Shortly after the Battle of the Western Gate, a new cult, called the Exulted, arose in the city among followers of an angelic being named Thabal-Seyunshyar. Calling himself the Chosen One, the newly arrived Thabal claimed to be a light shining upon a wretched world, and he clearly believed the city to be in dire need of his enlightenment.

The Chosen One's followers see him as a specimen of perfection, with flawless Aksaban features, two pairs of resplendent wings, and eyes that see all the frailties of the mortal plane. Although the ultimate goal of the Exulted remains obscure, pacifying Sar-Shaba under Thabal's influence seems to be a priority. Even the heavens, they say, could use a new voice after eons of stagnation and inaction. They treat Thabal-Seyunshyar as a new god-king come to claim his throne in Sar-Shaba. They have even sent emissaries to other nations to preach the enlightenment of the Exulted. Great faiths have arisen in the Southlands from much humbler beginnings.

Not everyone has welcomed Thabal-Seyunshyar with open arms. The Knights of Azhanael have lost members to the cult, and concerned elders of the Azadim and the Makudai believe the Chosen One to be none other than Eluhua and Halrael, somehow fused into one entity following their apparent destruction at the Battle of the Western Gate.

RUHABULGOG

Demon God of Hatred Everlasting, Destroyer of Life and Love, Marshall of Menace, Conqueror of all Fears, Father of Demons, Son of the White Goddess and Herald of Rohab-Og

Domains: Tempest, Void

Alignment: Chaotic evil

Favored Weapon: Battleaxe



The elders are right to be worried. Thabal-Seyunshyar has entered the inner city and is using the Exulted and the Amunathi (see page 161) in a plan to claim Sar-Shaba district by district. Once the princes have been subjugated, he will turn his attention to the rest of Aksaba and beyond.

Seven Wicked Blades

The Seven Wicked Blades are a group of fanatics who worship Aposis the Devouring Worm. They seek to hasten the apocalypse by breaking the seals that keep the Princes of Perdition trapped inside Sar-Shaba. Most of the cultists are human; others are trollkin or lizardfolk of the Murkscale tribe. Their leaders, the nominal Seven Wicked Blades themselves, are all werecrocodiles.

The cult has mounted several expeditions inside the city to learn where the seals are weakest, and it has determined that Nishudas the Usurper and Garshasp Blood-drinker are closest to breaking free. The Seven Wicked Blades plan to release them first, in hopes that those princes will unleash centuries of pent-up rage on the Aksabans at the Western Gate. If the Cult of Ru-Ur or the Exulted or the Amunathi join in the fighting, so much the better.

The Seven Wicked Blades are based in a partly flooded temple to Aposis in Kalubi, a ruined town on the shore of Lake Gossai that was an important center for trade with Omphaya centuries ago. The waters of the lake are filled with **werecrocodiles** (see page 276) and **cipactli demons** (*Creature Codex*, p. 83) that serve the apocalyptic cult.

COMMERCE

The Aksabans export myrrh, frankincense, dates, and palm oil to their immediate neighbors and farther afield. Their scribes also produce beautiful scrollwork and illuminated religious texts that are much sought after in Ishadia. The city of Meghal Yuhatara handles much of the overland trade from the desert lands; sea trade flows through Eudalis.

BEYOND SAR-SHABA

Aside from the City of the Seal, there are other locations of note in the Fallen Kingdom of Aksaba.

Eudalis

This small port handles most of Aksaba's maritime trade. Most of its residents are Makudai, but a sizable population of Azadim also calls this home. Trade is mostly with Ishadia, Shibai, the cities of the Spice Coast, and more rarely with free sailing ships from Khandiria and farther afield.

The Ishadians believe they have a strong claim to the port, since they built the old harbor still in use today, though only a fraction of the original structure remains. Spies sent by Ishadia's regents have manipulated local politics to ensure the installation of Mohzde Kasebi, an Azadim governor favorable to Ishadian merchants, following the sudden death of the previous incumbent.

Meghal Yuhatara

This ancient fortress city guards the main trade way, especially the northwestern routes from Mhalmet, Siwal, and Nuria. Its location enables foreigners to engage in commerce without needing to come near the dangerous area around Sar-Shaba, but they pay higher prices for the privilege. The fortress is ruled by Commander Fakhri Rezghi of the Queen's Guard (LG female human **gladiator**) who dispatches regular patrols to keep the roads safe. Its inhabitants are predominantly Makudai.

Tehawa

This small city is ruled by Shadmehr Khoshkam, a former commander in the Queen's Guard, which maintains a



training facility here for young Aksabans known as the Captain's Guardhouse. The city also hosts temples to Astarte and Mithras, and shrines to their various saints known collectively as the Holy Queens.

Coastal Ruins

Four ruined Aksaban cities lie along the stretch of coast between Sar-Shaba and Mhalmel: the places once called Ziridium, Merule, Yebarada, and Kebrassa. Almost obliterated in the fighting between the sons and daughters of Azhanzar and their fiendish allies, these abandoned sites are still occupied by small groups of demons, devils, or evil cultists. Although some of the ruins are rumored to still hold magic weapons and other treasures from the glory days of the fallen kingdom, these places are best avoided.

Kesara, land of the saffron rajah

Where the Yoyera Mountains stagger toward the seas of the Spice Coast lies a deep valley surrounded by spectacular waterfalls and towering cliffs. In the midst of the vast Silent Forest is Kesara, a quiet place. Only a single, well-patrolled road allows access to the kingdom. Those who venture into the realm are always greeted with a broad smile by the Saffron Rajah—for the rakshasa ruler welcomes all distractions, though he is quick to visit his wrath upon visitors who bore him.

A cornucopian place blessed with a fine climate, Kesara is famous for its bountiful fields of saffron, upon which the fortune of its tyrannical ruler has been made. So obese that he is barely able to move, the terrifying Saffron Rajah, His Most Majestic Majesty Vaghamesh Drustani Arenja, King of Kesara, Exalted Potentate of the Silent Forest, and Protector of the Spice Road, is attended by a harem, and a bevy of deferential slaves. His is a world in which he is god, where his every whim is enacted and has been for centuries. Woe betide anyone who pronounces his name incorrectly or fails to speak his full set of titles when addressing him.

To his followers—a kind word for the crushed, terrified, and miserable thousands who serve him—he is all. He has worked slaves for weeks without sleep, until they fell and died, and amuses himself by thinking up new ways to mutilate and humiliate his subjects.

All visitors to the kingdom must be brought before the rajah. Those who amuse him he rewards with ridiculous riches—a singer might receive their weight in gold for a pleasing tune, for instance. Some visitors he even allows to leave. Others he keeps, sometimes long after they die. The guest wing of his sumptuous palace contains the preserved and grossly decorated corpses of some of his past visitors.



KESARA

Ruler: The Saffron Rajah, Vaghamesh Drustani Arenja (NE male **greater rakshasa**, *Creature Codex*, p. 311)

Important Personages:

Tsegay, His Most Majestic Majesty's Advisor (NE male human **noble**); Meseret-qui-Habte, Royal Cook (N male human **commoner**)

Population: 13,100 (12,200 humans, 400 gnolls, 220 dwarves, 280 others)

Capital: The Rajah's Palace of Water

Great Gods: worship of anyone other than the rajah is done in secrecy; those who keep gods revere the Hunter, Mot, Gamka (Vardesain), and Isis


Trade Goods: saffron, honey, tropical hardwoods

THE SAFFRON RAJAH

The Saffron Rajah is truly a king among rakshasas; he likes to indulge in everything that life offers, and there is no one in his circle foolhardy enough to try to restrain his decadent impulses. His deep, booming voice growls almost poetically, and he is apt to break into song or verse at the most inopportune moments.

Most of the time, the rajah's grinning, corpulent figure can be found on his bier, swathed in loose-fitting robes and cradled in the arms of a dozen bejeweled members of his harem. Whenever he moves through his palace, the moment he enters a room, smiles break out all around, and everyone joins in laughter at what he finds amusing, or they enthusiastically applaud his words. Everything he does, whether it be calmly considered or astonishingly cruel, is an act to be admired and applauded by his audience.

The mercurial monarch does experience prolonged bouts of what might be called a normal frame of mind. But the rajah's mood can change from joyous to angry in a second, and his punishments for displeasing him are horribly inventive.



If the rajah is such a terrible and unpredictable tyrant, why would anyone visit him? The rajah's great generosity is a known fact, and even if the characters might balk at entering Kesara, their sponsors might not permit such hesitation. The characters could be employed as muscle by a merchant hoping to make a deal for saffron, or might be charged with entering the kingdom to steal secrets from the rajah's archive. Perhaps the characters can use their host's love of gambling to wager their lives to secure an object vital to their current quest. Whatever the circumstances, meeting the rajah should make for a very memorable encounter.

Godflesh Liqueur

A secret of the Land of the Saffron Rajah is that the rajah himself partakes of a special and potent drink—the distillation of a god's essence. The body of a long-forgotten sea god is kept in stasis and immersed in a great stone vat of pomegranate wine that lies beneath the Palace of Water under heavy guard.

Twice a year, the rajah and his very favorite concubines, generals, priests, and potentates draw off a quantity of the wine and drink cups of this royal liqueur. Some who consume it are granted prophetic visions, while others are driven to great gluttony, lust, greed, or works of powerful charity and mercy. The rajah believes that drinking the liqueur will allow him to achieve divine status eventually.

The Rajah's Staff

All of the rajah's more than thirteen thousand subjects are his obedient slaves, but he requires more service from some of these unfortunates than from others. The position of advisor is the "reward" his subjects fear most. The rajah insists on receiving advice on all topics, which he often disregards, but he also hates it when his advisors simply agree with everything he says. The present incumbent, Tsegay, has held the post for only days, and the relationship has already deteriorated.

The post of royal cook is the next most feared "gift"; His Majesty has a discerning palate. Serving substandard meals to him or any of his guests has doomed many a cook. The present chef, Meseret-qui-Habte, has lasted a record five months but is running out of new dishes with which to impress the rajah.

The Saffron Watch, the rajah's royal guard, has grown over the centuries into a force that is so utterly disciplined that a murderous thought against their lord never enters their heads.

An offshoot of the Saffron Watch, the Silent Watch are the rajah's personal guards, who occupy his private chambers as onsite protection.

These thirteen **angatras** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 19) are so devoted to the rajah that they obey his every whim—to the point of self-destruction when commanded.

RAJAH'S SPICE ROAD

The Rajah's Spice Road is a broad stone thoroughfare that runs through the Silent Forest along the Spice Coast. Flags flutter along this road; some are black, without any markings, and others are bright yellow and festooned with prayer flags.

The Saffron Watch guards the road, always on the lookout for visitors. These elephant-riding guards with their bright livery are usually the first evidence of the rajah that visitors see. Each patrol offers his hospitality in the form of food, sweet delights, and honeyed words, hoping to encourage travelers to make a friendly visit to the Palace of Water to meet the rajah. Those who refuse the grand gesture are taken to the rajah by force.

Hundreds of laborers dressed in rags maintain the Spice Road, which is frequently blocked by landslides caused by heavy rainfall. The workers sing songs praising the rajah as they toil, watched over by **gnoll slavers** (*Creature Codex*, p. 189) on elephants and their pet hyenas. The work gangs are not chained. Fear alone is usually enough to keep them from escaping.



SILENT FOREST

This eerie place is well named. The forest lacks the typical bird calls and animal sounds of the jungle, creating a near-tangible stillness, as though noise is an unwelcome visitor. Here and there, decaying bodies slump against or hang from trees. The corpses show no sign of maltreatment, and those that hang simply look like dancing puppets.

Some time ago, the overindulgent rajah and his hunters hunted the forest's animal life to extinction. Although animals are gradually returning to the jungle's fringes, the Kesaran portion is bereft of anything other than vegetation and mosquitoes. Those who come here hear only their breathing and footfalls. Few escape with their lives; most die from starvation or thirst.

The Saffron Watch often does not bother to pursue these fugitives, preferring to taunt escaped slaves lurking near the road with promises of food and water if they would only come out. But if a noise rings out in the distance, indicating the presence of intruders in the rajah's lands, the troops make sorties into the forest to hunt down the newcomers. They are under orders from the rajah to keep the forest as silent as possible.

THE RAJAH'S PALACE OF WATER

The Rajah's Palace epitomizes the extravagant tastes of its owner. Water pours from dozens of fountains throughout, often creating "curtains" that divide one chamber from the next.

Honored guests are taken to the Inner Palace, which is full of palm trees, bloated fruits, and excess. This is a place where every indulgence of the guests and their hosts is humored, no matter how degenerate. "Ask, and it shall happen" is one of the rajah's most frequent quotes.

The rajah loves games and sometimes invite his guests to join him outside on the palace's lawn, a garden spanning a dozen acres, kept immaculate by slaves and watched over by guards mounted on great tigers. The rakshasa particularly enjoys games involving a wager. Visitors who bet their lives, or those of their companions, please him the most. He eagerly bets a fortune on games that offer him a chance of for some bloodletting.

The Saffron Rajah's presence in the Palace of Water creates regional effects and allows him to take lair actions. Use the following in place of a greater rakshasa's standard abilities as given in *Creature Codex*:

Regional Effects

The area surrounding the Rajah's Palace of Water is warped by the rajah's magic, which creates the following effects:

- A creature hostile to the Saffron Rajah can't recover from exhaustion after a long rest while within 1 mile of palace, as its sleep is haunted by bothersome dreams.

- Loud sounds are muffled by the Silent Forest that surrounds the palace. Spells and attacks that deliver thunder damage deal only half damage.

Lair Actions

While in the Palace of Water, the Saffron Rajah can take a lair action on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties) to cause one of the following magical effects. The rajah can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- A sweetly scented invisible vapor fills the halls of the lair. Each humanoid creature in the lair must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage on saving throws against enchantment spells until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- A psychedelic, twisting pattern of colored shapes appears in the air at a point the rajah can see within 120 feet of him. Each creature other than the rajah that can see the pattern must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become incapacitated and have a speed of 0 feet until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- A 15-foot tall, 30-foot long, 1-foot-thick wall of water rises up anywhere in the palace. The wall travels up to 100 feet in a direction of the rajah's choosing, then crashes down, soaking the area in a 30-foot radius around it. Any Large or smaller creature in the water's path must make a DC 18 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 33 (6d10) bludgeoning damage, is knocked prone, and is swept along with the water. On a successful saving throw, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone or moved.

ROYAL ARCHIVE

Deep within the palace is the Royal Archive, a series of chambers housing forbidden tomes, unseen spells, and dark secrets that the rajah has acquired over his long life. The archive is often the reason visitors come here, and those who earn the rakshasa's trust might be granted permission to peruse its volumes of eldritch lore.

In a secret chamber accessible from the archive is the largest collection of rakshasa arcana in the world. The tomes held here include an ancient copy of the infamous *Book of Skins*. This repulsive tome is bound in what appears to be the whole, desiccated skin of a monkey, whose head is bound into the cover using crude stitches. Its pages are bordered with the jagged writing of a spellcaster whose theories and thoughts are scattered.

Some believe the great rakshasa prophet Parikh imbued the original *Book of Skins* with his soul; others believe it contains the secrets of life itself. There are now several handwritten copies of the book, and rakshasas venerate and protect them as holy relics. A rakshasa who becomes aware of other creatures owning a copy does not rest until



SPICE COAST

Rulers: Addakala (NE male aasimar **black knight commander**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 418); Shaba Per-Set (NE female tiefling **Kushite sorcerer**; see page 283); Gunnar von Grisal (LG male dwarf **graveslayer**, *Creature Codex*, p. 400); Coowak Black (LN male heru **mage**); Sated Fang (LE female **darakhul**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 216); Abdul Itimad Nill Mo Chatoor (CE male **gnoll slaver**, *Creature Codex*, p. 189)

Population: 177,800 (143,100 humans, 12,100 trollkin, 9,300 dwarves, 6,200 gnolls, 4,100 nkosi, 3,000 others)

Major Cities: Iram (29,000), Kerala (25,000), Medinat (27,000), Serapion (33,000), Zawra (37,000)

Great Gods: Mbanu, Ninkash, Ogun, Sabateus, Yemaja

Trade Goods: animal fetishes, animals, diamonds, ebony, lumber, ivory, some gold, spices

the tome is returned to rakshasa ownership and the thief (for most non-rakshasa possessors of the *Book of Skins* are indeed thieves) is suitably punished. Skinning the thief to provide a cover for a new copy of the book is considered the best punishment.

The *Book of Skins* in the Royal Archive contains many illusion spells, as well as dark secrets and unique spells devised by the author of the copy that the rajah possesses.

the spice coast

Carved from the dense surrounding jungle, the communities of the Spice Coast provide the lion's share of trade in aromatic and culinary spices to the Southlands and beyond through commerce with Ishadia, Mhalmet, and Mosylon. Each of these city-states engages in a constant effort to keep the jungle from encroaching on its borders. The rainy, hot climate allows for year-round harvesting of spice crops, including black pepper, cardamon, cinnamon, coriander, kava beans, koseret, nutmeg, vanilla, and occasionally some prepared lotus flowers as well as various alchemical and seasoning herbs.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

Villages devoted to harvesting and slave-worked spice orchards dot the eastern coast. These outposts and farms are critical to driving the rich spice trade and are the beneficiaries of the equally rich slave trade. Ostensibly under the governorship of Ishadia, the remnants of Aksaba, and Shibai, each settlement works in relative autonomy while continuing to barter raw spices for gold, manufactured goods, and slaves.

In the villages and orchards, slaves of almost every race work side by side under the scrutiny of overseers that are called "caretakers." In addition to tracking down escaped slaves, these warriors must also protect their farmsteads against rampaging lizardfolk tribes, hungry animals, and monsters that prey on laborers and crops, as well as occasional raids by sahuagin from Nazantl. Most of the groups of caretakers are composed of mercenaries, since the work is dangerous. The beys offer rich bonuses for bountiful harvests and safe deliveries, and any spoils taken in the field are split in the caretakers' favor.

A spirit of adventure and exploration grips the populace, covered by a thin veneer of civilization reminiscent of Shibai or Mhalmet. Caretakers and treasure hunters delve into the jungle, chasing rumors of lost cities overgrown with vines or titan-era diamond mines.

BEYS OF THE SPICE COAST

Six beys, or leaders, rule the cities, and each competes against the others while trying to increase their own land's production. An Ishadian aasimar knight named Addakala rules Iram, the northernmost community, which is closely allied with Ishadia.

Shaba Per-Set, a Nurian tiefling sorcerer, commands Serapion. She secretly hates Addakala and often raids Iram's fields through proxies and hired swords. Shaba answers to a consortium of merchants based in Siwal.

Gunnar von Grisal, a dwarf paladin of Khors, rules the central city of Medinat. He maintains it as a prison colony, using convicts from Ishadia instead of slaves as laborers.

Kerala answers to Shibai and its bey, Coowak Black, a heru mage. Arrogant and deceptive, he was forced to leave Mosylon after an altercation with Lady Toowhee (see "Nest of Eshu", page 155).

Farther south, the city of Zawra is ruled by Sated Fang, a darakhul and a former native of Shibai. She became a darakhul after an accident while adventuring and has learned to control her hunger. Rumors persist, however, that those who displease her end up disappearing into her private larder.

The two southernmost communities, Burja and Badrani, specialize in harvesting alchemical reagents from



SAR SHABA
EUDALIS

HOOK ISLAND

SILENT FOREST

KESARA

RAJAH'S PALACE OF WATER

IRAM

SERAPION

ISLE OF RUKHS

FREE ISLANDS OF TETHYS

MUNGO JUNGLE

DUSAR KANKARA

THE SPICE COAST

Captain's Cove

MEDINAT

STRAITS OF ZAWRA

KERALA

ZAWRA

Burja

DARK MANGROVE

Badrani


Sunken Giant

CAPE OF GOLDEN DREAMS

ISLE OF BONES

NAZANTL

MILES
0 250 500



rare jungle plants and are overseen by the flamboyant, fez-wearing gnoll slaver, Abdul Itimad Nill Mo Chatoor. Originally from Per-Bastet, the former camel dealer came to the Spice Coast to seek his fortune after falling out with his brother Hakaan. Badrani is popular with treasure-seekers looking to explore the Dark Mangrove (see “Sunken Giant”, page 177).

AZADI SAFE HOUSES

Small clearings and reclaimed ruins serve as outposts for the sentinels who maintain a bloody but vital trail out of the Spice Coast for use by escaped slaves. The groups that call themselves “Azadi liberators” remain a thorn in the side of the beys. They raid the work crews from the cover of the Viungo Jungle, just beyond the territory controlled by the Spice Coast settlements. Over the last ten years, the Azadi have liberated 20,000 slaves from the clutches of the caretakers under the bold leadership of Yasamin the Scarred (CG female human **bandit captain**), a brave Azadi who suffered cruelly at the slavers’ hands before she escaped. The six beys have each placed a bounty of 1,000 gp on Yasamin’s head.

One settlement along the north coast, Captain’s Cove, serves as both a smuggler’s den and a recruitment site for pirates. Located in a hidden cove unknown to the beys, it is visited regularly by ship captains from the Free Islands of Tethys who need new crew members; many former slaves now serve their new commanders as privateers.

free islands of tethys

A long chain of jungle-covered clusters of earth and rock, the Free Islands of Tethys answer to no single government—or any government at all. Strong currents and treacherous reefs make the islands’ straits and channels both dangerous to traverse and a welcome haven for lawless bands of freebooters.

FATIMA AL-GRAGHN

A Mharoti exile, Fatima al-Graghni commands a fleet of twelve vessels. Most consider her the pirate queen of the Spice Coast. She displays a preference for raiding Ishadian vessels and enjoys prowling both the currents around the islands and the trade routes bound for Zanskar.

Her flagship is *Sea-Drake’s Bane*, a blue-scaled sailing ship that is capable of flying up to a mile at twice its normal sailing speed, allowing it to take its prey by surprise. Aruj (CN male heru **doom croaker**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 324), Fatima’s first mate and a priest of Thoth, commands the ship when Captain al-Graghni leaves the helm to lead a boarding party. On these occasions, the pirate queen wields an ice-coated *frost brand* scimitar. Thausis Sharchar, the mayor of Sequra (see page 152), has offered a bounty on Fatima al-Graghni, with a bonus for bringing her in alive and an additional bonus if her flagship is captured.

INTISAR THE MANACLE

This pirate raids the eastern shore of the Southlands, attacking coastal towns and merchant ships. Intisar is rumored to lust after Fatima, although the same rumors say that she spurns his attentions. When he overpowers a foe, he claims half of the survivors as slaves and kills all but three of the rest. These he spares so that they will spread his reputation across the Southlands.

The location of Intisar’s island stronghold is a closely guarded secret, but his fleet of six corsairs regularly bring their loot into port at Khilwah in Zanskar and at Mhalmat. Intisar’s lair is in a cavernous harbor protected from the typhoons that spin out of the Tethys Ocean. Its tunnels go deep into the island, and no one knows their true extent. Intisar wields a *rod of absorption* in combat, part of a cache of lost titan treasure he discovered in the passages beneath his lair.



FREE ISLANDS OF TETHYS

Ruler: Fatima al-Graghni (NE female human **war priest** of Seggotan, *Creature Codex*, p. 411) is the most powerful figure in the area, but no single ruler claims suzerainty over all the islands

Important Personages: Daneska the Sealion (NE female **nkosi pridelord**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 306); Intisar the Manacle (CE male human **battle mage**, *Creature Codex*, p. 397); Jakeem Spiceblood (CG male human **bandit lord**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 418); Yusef Ossmein (LE male human **veteran**); Zymmer Re’is (CN male human **gladiator**)

Population: 76,500, spread across a thousand small settlements, none greater than 1,100 people

Great Gods: a smattering of all the Southlands gods are revered in different places in the islands

Trade Goods: coconuts, dates, fish, obsidian, pearls, slaves, tortoise shells

ISTAGAL RAIDERS

The Istagal raiders represent a ray of hope in the archipelago. Over a dozen ships, each captained by a former slave, work together to limit or halt slavery, striving to release the human cargo bound for the slave markets that litter the Spice Coast, Zanskar, and Shibai.

The raiders' most formidable ships are *Baboon's Fury*, *Gift of Freedom*, and *Chainbreaker*. A few weeks ago, their captains dealt a devastating blow to the slavers of Ishadia, Mhalm, and Shibai by triggering the slave revolt in Mosylon's main souk (see "Shibai Slave Revolt", page 178). A bounty of 2,500 gp has been offered by Shibai for the head of Jaseem Spiceblood, the captain of *Baboon's Fury*, and 3,000 gp for the dwarf Hashim, wind mage of *Gift of Freedom*.

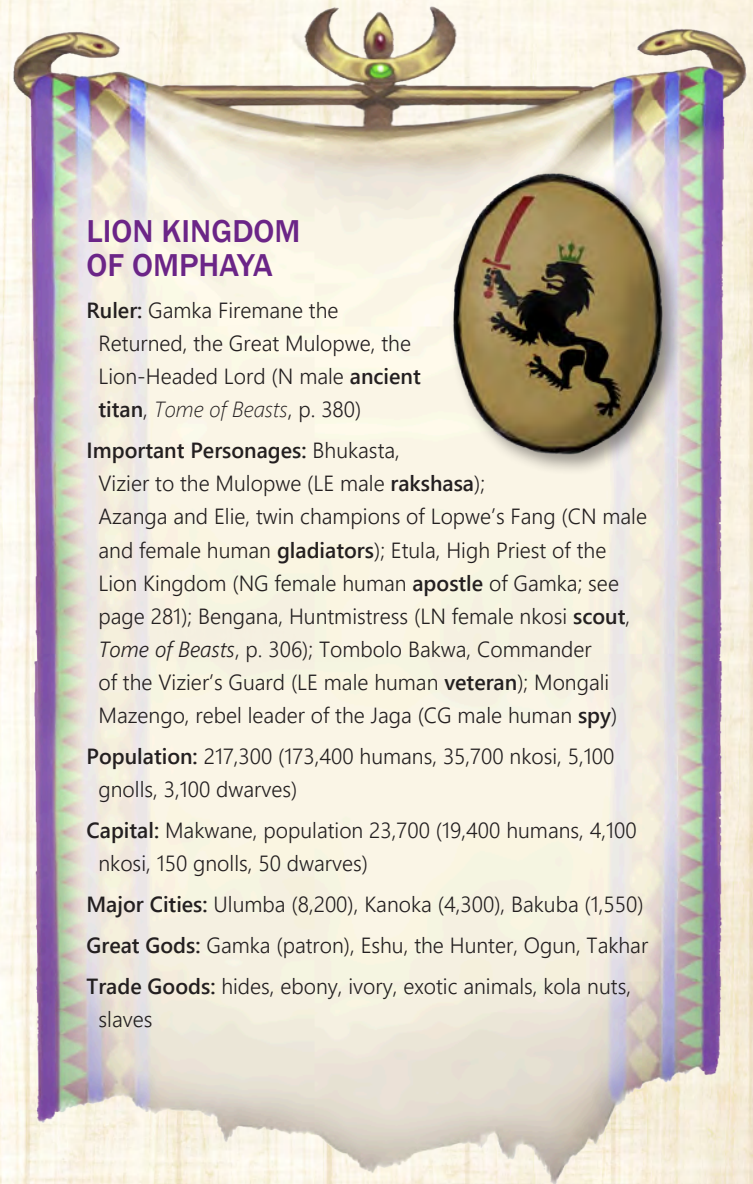
Although the slave revolt swelled their ranks, the raiders experience regular crew turnover on their vessels as freed captives return home. Additionally, the raiders sustained heavy losses in their last few sorties, so the group hopes to rescue more crews willing to join their cause.

The raiders employ innovative tactics against their foes. Hashim and his fellow wind mages (scholars of the air elemental tradition; see *Deep Magic*, p. 151) conjure magical windstorms and atmospheric effects to hide the raiders' vessels in fog and to outpace either targets or pursuers, while the artillery-master of *Baboon's Fury* has created a terrifying catapult shot that releases berserk mandrills upon impact.

THE SHIPS UNCHAINED

Once a disorganized mass of flotillas fueled by petty rivalries, raw ambition, and personal motivations ranging from pure greed to sincere altruism, the Ships Unchained were cajoled into a loose alliance five years ago that is united by a common purpose—to get rich by attacking and sinking the merchant vessels of Cathay, Ishadia, Shibai, and Zanskar. Previously, the Ships Unchained would alternately raid for loot, take up arms against the slave traders, and hire on as escorts for merchant flotillas. Following an incident when one small group of Ships Unchained attacked a second lot that had been hired to guard three Zanskari dhows, it became obvious that things couldn't continue the way they were.

Three of the most influential captains met in Mhalm's Salon of Mysteries and thrashed out an agreement. These notorious corsairs were Zymmer Re'is, a criminal who has been evading the clutches of the Sultan of Shibai for the past twelve years; Yusef Ossmein, a dashing native of Mhalm, who follows a gentlemanly code of pirate's honor—as long as it is reciprocated; and Daneska the Sealion, a nkosi deserter from Omphaya, who hopes to create a personal fiefdom in the Free Islands.



LION KINGDOM OF OMPHAYA

Ruler: Gamka Firemane the Returned, the Great Mulopwe, the Lion-Headed Lord (N male **ancient titan**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 380)

Important Personages: Bhukasta, Vizier to the Mulopwe (LE male **rakshasa**); Azanga and Elie, twin champions of Lopwe's Fang (CN male and female human **gladiators**); Etula, High Priest of the Lion Kingdom (NG female human **apostle** of Gamka; see page 281); Bengana, Huntmistress (LN female nkosi **scout**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 306); Tombolo Bakwa, Commander of the Vizier's Guard (LE male human **veteran**); Mongali Mazengo, rebel leader of the Jaga (CG male human **spy**)

Population: 217,300 (173,400 humans, 35,700 nkosi, 5,100 gnolls, 3,100 dwarves)

Capital: Makwane, population 23,700 (19,400 humans, 4,100 nkosi, 150 gnolls, 50 dwarves)

Major Cities: Ulumba (8,200), Kanoka (4,300), Bakuba (1,550)

Great Gods: Gamka (patron), Eshu, the Hunter, Ogun, Takhar

Trade Goods: hides, ebony, ivory, exotic animals, kola nuts, slaves

The three captains took their proposal to the half-dozen lesser captains. Ngumbau Long Legs objected, but when Daneska stabbed him through the heart with her cutlass, the others soon fell into line. Today the fifty-seven vessels of the Ships Unchained strike fear into merchant ships all along the length of the Corsair Coast.

lion kingdom of omphaya

Proud Omphaya stretches from the Gorgonkin Range in the east to the Aggesal Plains in the west. Long ago, as the mortal armies of the titan general Gamka Omphaya fled the burning city of Gala'ikos, their god's final admonition rang in their ears: "If you would call yourself a Lion of Omphaya, each of you must strive to be a true champion."

Three thousand years later, the human and leonine warriors of Omphaya prowl the grasslands and savannahs



of their domain, ready to prove their strength against any they encounter. Recent events herald great change in Omphaya. Eleven years ago, the titan Gamka strode out of his prison beneath the Gorgonkin Mountains, where he had been incarcerated by Veles, and returned to claim the Lion Throne as the seat of a reborn Glorious Umbuso.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

The Lion Kingdom's society is based on a fanatical drive for personal excellence; its people resolve serious interpersonal conflicts with challenges of the body or the wit. Omphayans believe that each conflict only makes an individual stronger, and many stories are told of lion warriors tracking down foes years after a defeat to reclaim their honor.

Citizens of the other Southlands kingdoms see the lion warriors as impossibly arrogant and elitist. The Omphayans simply consider themselves superior; after all, no other nation's titan has returned to lead its followers to greatness.

THE RETURNED TITAN

The ultimate ruler of Omphaya, and in his opinion the entirety of the Southlands, is the returned titan Gamka. Many of the day-to-day decisions of government rest in the hands of his vizier, the leonine rakshasa Bhukasta. Bhukasta's brutish Vizier's Guard stalks the streets, rooting out hints of rebellion while nkosi scouts prowl the countryside. Those who object too vocally to Bhukasta's cruel tactics disappear quickly and discreetly. As the rakshasa expands Omphaya's army, he regularly dispatches raiding parties to harass caravans and raid the lands of the trollkin. He even sends spies in the guise of trade emissaries to kingdoms hundreds of miles away, including the Spice Coast and Narumbeki.

While the people view Bhukasta nervously, Gamka has endeared himself to them by taking great delight in virtually every aspect of Omphayan life. The titan alternately toils in the fields, pumps the bellows for the smiths, and plays with his people's children.

Gamka's exuberance has energized his subjects, and many great building projects have been completed in Omphaya's cities in the eleven years since he returned, including the construction of a magnificent palace and the Hunting Grounds in Makwane.

Still, Gamka has his quirks. For instance, he has reintroduced some of the brutal customs of his lost culture, such as hosting gladiatorial games in the city and occasionally consuming those who displease him. The force of Gamka's personality has brought most Omphayans along with him, but as time has passed the games have

grown bloodier, and Gamka has spent less time helping in the fields. In the past year or so, he has become increasingly quick to anger—and to eat people—and the Omphayans are becoming more and more unsettled.

Gamka is a lion-headed ancient titan with 252 hit points and a bite attack (+12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit*: 30 [4d10 + 8] piercing damage) that he can use in place of one or both greatsword attacks. He also possesses the following legendary abilities.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Gamka fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Gamka can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Gamka regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Bite. Gamka makes a bite attack.

Lion's Leap. Gamka runs 10 feet, then makes a long jump of up to 40 feet.

Swat. Gamka swats a creature within 10 feet with his huge hand. The target must succeed on a DC 24 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or be pushed 15 feet and knocked prone.

Gamka's Spark

Gamka's return drove home an important lesson to Omphayans: what you sunder from yourself does not easily return. Unable to simply reclaim his spark without Veles's consent, the titan wears it embedded within the *Torc of the Triumphant Fang*, the vessel into which it was placed by Gamka's priests at the time of his imprisonment 3,000 years ago. The bone-and-gold necklace is made of the sharpened teeth of a hundred lions, granting the titan some—but not all—of the spark's power. Without the torc, Gamka does not have his legendary abilities.

During Gamka's imprisonment, Omphayan priests were able to use the spark to transform their greatest champions into nkosi. If someone wrests the spark from Gamka by stealing the necklace and attuning to it, they could change into the form of a **nkosi** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 306) or a **zwana lion** (see page 280) at will, and also gain the power to reroll a failed saving throw once per day. They do not gain Gamka's legendary abilities.

Dark Plots of Bhukasta

Although it's not common knowledge, Bhukasta is more than Gamka's herald—he is the reason the titan has returned to Omphaya. When Bhukasta freed Gamka from his eternal imprisonment under the Gorgonkin Range, he didn't do it out of the goodness of his heart; the rakshasa hoped to steal Gamka's divinity for himself one day.

When they arrived in Omphaya, Bhukasta began

manipulating Gamka with enchantment and divination spells until the titan became susceptible to the rakshasa's counsel. Now, Gamka promotes blood sports and consuming the flesh of fallen foes, believing such practices to be traditions of Glorious Umbuso. In truth, they are rites that reflect the evil nature of the rakshasa, and each day Omphaya falls more deeply under Bhukasta's dark influence.

THE VIZIER'S GUARD AND THE NKOSI

With the people's adoration decreasing, Gamka and Bhukasta are coming to rely on the Vizier's Guard and the nkosi to maintain their rule. Commanded by the vicious Tombolo Bakwa, the soldiers of the Guard act quickly on the slightest suspicion of rebellion, viewing travelers and foreign traders with equal disdain. Of course, the more often people see "rebels" being arrested or killed, the more unpopular Gamka becomes.

The nkosi patrol the wilds and wilderness of Omphaya, alert for any interlopers. They consider themselves to be Gamka's chosen people, and most react to threats to their titan with savage flurries of teeth and claws. Bengana, their huntmistress, thinks Bakwa is a tyrant and distrusts Bhukasta, correctly believing the rakshasa to be a bad influence on the titan.

Lopwe's Fang

The champions of Lopwe's Fang are the epitome of ultimate prowess, looked up to by all Omphayans. Only the most capable warriors are chosen to undergo the grueling trials on the Kimona Proving Ground (see page 177), and, of those, only the best survive. The current leaders of the Fang, the twins Azanga and Elie, fight to keep their independence against Bhukasta's desire to fold them into the greater Omphayan army. Worried by Gamka's increasingly bestial behavior, the twins have secretly met with Mongali Mazengo of the Jaga rebels to hear what he has to say. There are still members of the Fang who remain devoted to Gamka; if they find out about the meeting, the organization will be thrown into turmoil.

THE JAGA REBELS

Some Omphayans struggle with the fact that Gamka has returned. They are suspicious that the titan is not truly the Gamka of legend, and they do not like that a rakshasa has



the realm under his paw. Calling themselves the Jaga, these rebels operate as dozens of independent cells, which makes it hard for the Vizier's Guard to quash the burgeoning revolt.

Over the last 10 years, the number of Jaga cells has quadrupled as Gamka's acts of cruelty have increased. Once a loose collection of malcontents and anarchists, the Jaga rebels have grown into a much bigger threat to Bhukasta's plans. The charismatic and elusive bard Mongali Mazengo holds the cause together; he travels around between the villages and cities of Omphaya, speaking out against the titan's rule and loosely coordinating the Jaga cells in a given area. Naturally, Bhukasta badly wants him dead.

RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

Gamka's return to Omphaya also meant that he reassumed the mantle of the nation's patron. Since there is room for only one feline deity in the Lion Kingdom, the temple of Bastet in Makwane was turned into Gamka's new shrine. The goddess and her followers were largely driven from the kingdom, although some have found refuge among the Jaga rebels. Etula, the elderly high priest of the Lion Kingdom, presides over the temple. She is concerned by the titan's bloodthirsty impulses, but to date has kept her opinion to herself. Etula's domains are Hunting and War.

A number of other gods are worshiped in Omphaya, including Eshu, the Hunter, Ogun, and Takhar. As long as the priests of these deities acknowledge Gamka's preeminence, their faiths are tolerated.



COMMERCE

Omphaya trades hides, ebony, ivory, and exotic animals with the ramag and with Kush. Under Bhukasta's influence, Omphaya has begun selling its own people, from rebellious villagers to captured trollkin, to slavers whose ships drop anchor on the coast. The proceeds are used mainly to equip Omphaya's army with dwarven weapons from Narumbeki.

MAKWANE, CITY OF LIONS

Makwane's high walls, topped with red fangs, loom over the surrounding grasslands. Homes in the city are built as circular lodges of earth-colored stone with protected inner courtyards, topped with conical roofs. Gardens of irregularly placed boulders lie beneath wide acacia trees where the city's broad streets meet. Under the blazing sun, these shaded areas serve as unofficial gathering places for citizens of all social levels.

Gamka's palace sits on top of a large rock in the center of the city, overlooking the Hunting Grounds, a ring-shaped maze of boulders and foliage beneath the outcrop. Those who are deemed to have offended the titan are stalked by **zwana lions** (see page 280) through the rocky area below for the entertainment of Gamka and his court. Those who escape the lions are pardoned.

Duels and hunts are common entertainments on the streets of Makwane; at night, Makwane's people sometimes raid or settle scores among their clans and families—as they say in Omphaya, “The law by day, the claw by night.”

MAJOR SETTLEMENTS

Three smaller communities can be found in Omphaya. Bakuba, closest to Makwane, is little more than a village; its inhabitants harvest kola nuts in the nearby Nyenga Forest. Kanoka, around three times the size of Bakuba, is the starting point for caravans heading across the Aggesal Plains to Sebbek Sobor and Narumbeki.

Ulumba is the largest of the three. Nearly 250 miles from the capital, the town is believed to accommodate as many as twenty Jaga rebel cells. The Vizier's Guard patrols the streets in numbers and treats the population with suspicion and contempt; the soldiers' behavior makes it easier for the rebels to attract new recruits.

cattle queens of terrotu

A sprawling country of rolling hills and grasslands, Terrotu is an area of high and low pasturelands split by the Negele Mountains. Terrotu enjoys a mild climate that

allows for two growing seasons, and the nearby Tekeze River flows down to the Tethys Ocean.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

Terrotu is made up primarily of small, mobile communities led by the priests of Enkai. The only permanent settlements in the nation are Mazaber and the Temple of Onyx and Ruby, which together account for about one-eighth of Terrotu's population. The rest of the citizens follow the great herds of cattle, called **ankole** (see page 267), as the beasts seek new grazing areas. The Terrotu say that Enkai sent the ankole down to them from the heavens and charged the people with looking after all the cattle in the world.

The ankole provide for all the essential needs of the Terrotu, who eat their meat and drink their milk and, on occasion, their blood. In general, men care for the herds and conduct warfare, while women maintain households and serve as leaders, merchants, and healers. Although men ensure the safety of the cattle, the women usually own the animals.

Certain Terrotu have a special connection to the ankole and are able to draw upon their strength to power their magic; see the Ankole Bloodline sorcerous origin in *Southlands Player's Guide*.

THE CATTLE QUEENS

The matriarchal Cattle Queens, called Malkia by the Terrotu people, rule over the vast grasslands of their nation. The Malkia Makem, or Queen of Queens, lives in the roaming tent-capital of Enki-Hai. This grand procession of silk, gold, and ivory travels across Terrotu, visiting the camps of the other seventy or so malkia. These sojourns provide opportunities for the Malkia Makem to address her citizens and allow them an audience. The malkia of each camp the queen visits is expected to reaffirm her loyalty to the monarch, pledging to remain true until the next time Enki-Hai comes calling.

The malkias are competitive, engaged in numerous rivalries and entangling alliances. The Malkia Makem is elected upon the death of the previous ruler by the gathered malkias during a time when the city of Enki-Hai is camped at the site of the Temple of Onyx and Ruby. Enkai's divine spark passes to the new Malkia Makem once she has been chosen by her peers.

The current Queen of Queens is the venerable Akueto Kibra, a pious woman, known for her kindness to fools and children and for her ruthless demands for excellence from her retinue. Now, Akueto Kibra's mind has begun to deteriorate along with her physical health. The Queen of Queens and her retinue are en route to the Temple of

Onyx and Ruby, meaning that a successor might be chosen at the upcoming Muster (see “Red Years in Terrotu”, page 179).

THE TRAMPLERS

The Trampers (LG or LN human **tribal warriors**) are Terrotu’s soldiers, the fighters who watch the borders. They practice a form of martial arts that stresses teamwork and fighting as a unit. Junior warriors train for five years or more in camps away from their families before taking part in a ceremony that marks their new status as Trampers. The adamu, or “jumping dance,” is performed on these occasions; each warrior demonstrates their strength and coordination by jumping as high as they can.

The Trampers regularly clash with raiding bands from the Webworks of the Skittering Ones (see page 195) and the tosculi of Titan’s Hive (see page 206); both groups frequently try stealing ankole and kidnapping the Terrotu for their own purposes. Occasionally, a squad of Trampers is sent on a punitive or retributive mission, ordered to assault a tosculi hive or to crush a village of the Skittering Ones.

Every few years, a company of Narumbeki warriors comes to Terrotu to train with the Trampers, while a group of Trampers takes their place with the legions. This tradition celebrates the victory the two nations won against the Enlightened Empire of Morreg more than 1,000 years ago.

RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

The Terrotu worship Enkai, a towering female titan with curving, ankole-like horns. Enkai created the great cattle for her chosen people and gave them dominion over all the cattle of the world. But she has a dual nature; Enkai Narok, or the “Black Goddess,” is benevolent, representing rich, bountiful lands; while Enkai Nanyoki, or the “Red Goddess,” is vengeful, embodying bloody slaughter. Enkai’s alignment is chaotic neutral, and her divine domain is Tempest.

In the last days of the titans’ war, Enkai was entombed beneath the Temple of Onyx and Ruby, where it’s said that she still struggles against a demon called Nenaunir, who is trying to possess her form. The Terrotu people believe that this battle is reflected in the land’s fertility, which fluctuates based on the season but also depends on whether Enkai or the demon currently has the upper hand. If the demon is winning, Enkai Narok changes to the more aggressive Enkai Nanyoki to fight back. It is unclear if Enkai is truly at risk of becoming possessed, or if she is merely suffering from the same illness that destroyed Glorious Umbuso.

Although Enkai is their patron, the Terrotu also pay homage to Eshu, Mbanu, Ogun, and Xevioso.



TERROTU

Ruler: The Malkia Makem, Akueto Kibra (LN human female **mage**)

Important Personages: The Malkia Mazaber, Aussa Mudiato (LG female human **mage**); Kedafu, Commander of the First Banner, Lord General of the Trampers (LN male human **knight**); Namelok, Malkia of the Temple of Onyx and Ruby (CG female human **apostle** of Enkai; see page 281)

Population: 408,000 humans

Capital: Enki-Hai (population 5,100)

Major Cities: Mazaber (46,000), Temple of Onyx and Ruby (10,200)

Great Gods: Enkai (patron), Eshu, Mbanu, Ogun, Xevioso

Trade Goods: cloth, leather, grain, horn, ivory, ostrich feathers

Temple of Onyx and Ruby

As she was being sealed beneath the Temple of Onyx and Ruby, Enkai issued one final, world-changing directive: there should be few permanent structures built thereafter in Terrotu. As a result, the temple became the only physical remnant of the ankole titan’s legacy. There is no holier site, and even the humblest cowherds and tanners revere the place.

An elite group of warriors devoted to Enkai, known as the Holy Trampers (see *Southlands Player’s Guide*), stands guard over the Temple of Onyx and Ruby. The most powerful of these champions can shapechange into beasts and even into horned giants in order to defend the temple.

MAZABER

The Terrotu trade with merchants from ramag territory, the Spice Coast, Zanskar, and the Free Islands through the coastal city of Mazaber, their one other stationary community. In addition to ankole leather and horn, the Terrotu trade cloth, grain, ivory, and ostrich feathers with visitors.



Mazaber's houses have a utilitarian, solid design that's notable for its so-called "monkey heads" of supporting timbers, which stick out at joints and corners. The Terrotu decorate these beams with symbols and often carve the ends to look like faces.

perilous sites of the corsair coast

The islands, coves, and shores of the eastern coast of the Southlands are rife with danger. Below are some of the most notorious locales.

BEHTU-NARI

This volcanic island is home to a tribe of 3,500 **behtu** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 34), small ape-like humanoids with demonic blood in their veins. These cannibalistic creatures revere **Mechuiti**, Demon Lord of Apes (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 88) and use flame-red **giant lizards** as war mounts. Around 300 gnolls also live on the island.

In the earliest days of civilization, Mechuiti was coughed out of a volcanic portal from Urgennos, the Hell of Fire and Sulfur, into the caldera of Ibu Perape ("Mother of Demons") on the island of Palau Kelaparan in the Western Ocean. While imprisoned within the volcano, the demon lord has spread his influence to other remote islands such as Behtu-Nari through his demonic minions: tieflings, fiendish beasts, and behtu.

The behtu live in treetop villages scattered around Behtu-Nari; the greatest concentration is close to the Fane of Mechuiti at the center of the island. Here, at the summit of a craggy hill, the chief priestess Ibu Daripangan, an undead behtu with the powers of a vampire, conducts foul ceremonies to her demon lord.

Ibu Daripangan is the keeper of the *Black Horn of Mechuiti*. Made of twisted cold iron, this artifact in the shape of a ram's horn is embossed with demonic ape faces. It has the powers of a *horn of blasting*, and it can be used to summon an **apau perape demon** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 75) once per day.

The fane stands at the highest point of the island, atop a mound of earth and stone. Here, a ring of megaliths carved in the demon lord's likeness surrounds a pool of molten lava 40 feet across. These loathsome stone heads occasionally weep demon's blood, which is collected in stone bowls by the behtu and used in their ichorous infusions. Any non-behtu entering the fane must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned by the sulfurous fumes for as long as they remain inside, and for 1 minute after leaving. Characters who survive the guardians and the fumes of the fane—and can protect

themselves from fire—can use the lava pool to travel inside the caldera of Ibu Perape.

GORGONKIN RANGE

On the northern border of Omphaya is the mountainous hunting ground named for the gorgonkin, a rare clan of trollkin. Covered in plates of natural armor, these foul-tempered humanoids are aggressively territorial, and they go far out of their way to confront interlopers.

The lion warriors of Omphaya consider it a rite of passage to hike up into the Gorgonkin Range and hunt and kill a member of the gorgonkin in single combat. For their part, the gorgonkin fiercely guard a set of odd, square-sided cave entrances into the mountains at the northern end of their territory that they have claimed for themselves. The Omphayans believe that these passages lead to the location of Gamka's 3,000-year-long entombment.

Gorgonkin use the statistics of **trollkin grunts** (*Creature Codex*, p. 357) with the following additional ability:

Petrifying Breath (Recharge 6). The trollkin exhales petrifying gas in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a target begins to turn to stone and is restrained. A restrained target must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a successful save, the effect ends on the target. On a failed save, the target is petrified for 24 hours.

HOOK ISLAND

Surrounded as they are by shoals and reefs, Hook Island's secluded bays and coves have long been used by the pirates of the Free Islands to hide from pursuers. Merfolk live among the coral and are willing to guide ships safely through the reefs in exchange for a portion of their loot.

By long-standing tradition, Hook Island is a place of sanctuary—no pirate can draw a blade against another here. The last person to violate this agreement and escape the island alive was brutally murdered on the docks in Mhalmet soon afterward.

ISLE OF BONES

The easternmost of the Free Islands, the Isle of Bones is a broad, mound-like atoll surrounded by dangerous shoals. The unpredictable winds and currents often make travel in these waters treacherous, and over the years many vessels have broken against the coral. Roughly 20 years ago, a pair of slave transports crashed near the shore, and passengers and crew swam to the island. Few creatures inhabited the crushed coral hills except sea birds, so the survivors were free to salvage what they could from the wrecks and build a primitive village.

ISLE OF RUKHS

A high, rocky promontory in the northern arc of the Free Islands remains untouched by the various pirate and freebooting crews. The shoreline of the Isle of Rukhs seems inviting enough, and lush growth covers the steep hillsides. But this pastoral scene is ruined by the thunderous cries of hunting rukhs (**rocs**), the island's namesake, that fill the air. At least a dozen of the gigantic birds nest on the island, swooping down to seize large fish, small whales, and even modest fishing vessels in their talons and carry them to their lairs to devour.

The remains of ships litter the area surrounding each nest, along with the occasional pirate's booty, scattered among the bones and droppings. A few daring scavengers have tried to recover some of those spoils, often by using magic to remain undetected. According to reports from the few treasure-seekers who escaped the island, at least one rukh seems able to see invisible intruders, and several other members of the flock respond immediately when one cries out in alarm.

KIMONA PROVING GROUND

At the northeastern border of Omphaya, a low stone wall marks the site of the Kimona proving ground. This is the chapterhouse and barracks for the champions of Lopwe's Fang and the place where prospective members are tested. The proving ground features various physical challenges such as an obstacle course, a maze, a mock village, and traps, both mechanical and magical.

Every three months, a group of young warriors can attempt to become members of Lopwe's Fang. After watching all the hopeful candidates spar, the heads of the order choose the warriors who will progress to the next stage. Those chosen few undergo ten challenges while the current members of the order look on. Each of these grueling physical and mental tests ends with single combat against another candidate. An aspirant who overcomes all ten challenges and defeats all ten foes has earned their lion fang torc. Those who fail are sent home in disgrace.

Though typically only Omphayan warriors attempt to join the order, membership is open to all comers. Although such occurrences are rare, the order has seen Narumbeki, Terrotu, and even dwarf champions.

MOUNT ERBAI

A mated pair of **rocs** with feathers of shining gold and imperial purple nest at the top of this 6,000-foot-tall peak in the center of Shibai. The Sultan of Shibai is offering a blue diamond the size of his fist to the first person who brings him an egg from these magnificent birds.

NAZANTL, CITY OF THE SAHUAGIN

In the Straits of Zawra, in a deep sea trench between the southernmost Free Island and the Cape of Golden Dreams, lies the sahuagin city of Nazantl. Nearly two thousand of the undersea creatures live and hunt here and in the nearby depths. They regularly assault ships that pass through the straits at night. Their typical term of reference for non-sahuagin of any kind is "food."

Sometimes, the sahuagin raid smaller coastal villages, looting and taking anything slain for consumption later. Fortunately for their victims, they never burn settlements in their wake, unlike many pirates. The sahuagin scavenge wrecks and recover flotsam lost to storms, so they have a great deal to trade for those who dare to enter their territory. They keep many beds of great oysters and clams, consuming the meat, making armor and weapons from the shells, and using the beautiful, slate-gray pearls for jewelry and ornamentation. They trade these treasures of the sea for manufactured goods or magic items, but such exchanges end in bloodshed as often as they end equitably.

PRIMORDIAL PORTAL

In the center of the Nyenga Forest on the Ramag's Bond ley line, a small stone plinth decorated with semiprecious gems peeks out of the tall grass. Touching the plinth opens a one-way portal nearby that leads to a random location in the Southlands. It bears no markings of any culture, and if magic is used to speak with the stone, it reveals only that the structure predates Glorious Umbuso. Perhaps because of the relic's age, the portal never leads to the same destination twice.

SUNKEN GIANT

A portion of an enormous statue—likely one of the titans—protrudes from the waters of the Dark Mangrove, the vast area of mangrove swamps lying southwest of the Spice Coast settlements. The statue is missing its head and limbs; only its 50-foot-long torso remains here.

Explorers from nearby Badrani who have braved the **glass gators** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 288) living in the swamp report that the statue is part of a much larger submerged ruin. A ravenous **bukavac** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 47) makes its home beneath the water's surface.

TITAN'S SPINE

One of the long-forgotten monuments of the titans, this range of mountains was once carved with a procession of stern-faced rulers. But millennia of natural erosion have worn down this monument, exposing two sealed metal doors that apparently lead inside the mountains.



history of the corsair coast

In ancient times, Ishadia was ruled by its celestial gods, who walked among—and slept with—their mortal worshipers, beginning the divine bloodlines that still exist today. Nuria the Eternal held the lands to the west, while the mighty titans of Glorious Umbuso ruled everything south of the deserts. Lion-headed Gamka sat on the throne of Omphaya, while ankole-horned Enkai governed Terrotu. When the titans succumbed to madness, Enkai ordered her followers to entomb her beneath the Temple of Onyx and Ruby. Gamka fought the other titans at Gala'ikos and was imprisoned under the Gorgonkin Range following his defeat.

Around 2,500 years ago, a dynastic marriage joined the Ishadian kings with the queens of Aksaba on the Southlands' eastern coast. The union founded two strong lineages: the Azadim and the Makudai. Together, the united crowns formed an empire that dominated the Tethys Ocean for generations.

This golden age came to an end 1,050 years ago when the Azadim usurper Harnoch-Khedan seized the throne, backed by a contingent of bound demons. The coup led to decades of bloody violence as the new ruler and his demonic allies fought against Makudai rebels and foreign invaders and established an empire that was feared throughout the south. Under Azhanzar the Proud, Harnoch-Khedan's successor, the Aksaban empire's territory expanded as the dynasty became consumed by internecine feuds and wicked decadence. Disgusted by himself and his family, the dying Azhanzar summoned his corrupted heirs to Sar-Shaba and sealed them inside the city for all eternity.

In the aftermath, the empire collapsed. Ishadia went into decline, falling under Nurian control for several centuries, until the inevitable dynastic squabbles allowed it to shake off the River Kingdom's rule and become an independent kingdom again. As Ishadia recovered, its wealthiest merchants established a colony on the island of Shibai in the Tethys Ocean to take advantage of the newly opened Showka Passage leading to Cathay, and built the first communities on the Spice Coast.

Nearly 350 years ago, the dragons of the Dragoncoil Mountains formed the Mharoti Sultanate. During a century of expansion, they seized territory from Sephaya to Nuria Natal and destroyed the minotaur cities of Roshgazi and Cindass. A little over 200 years ago, the Mharoti took Prezhan and the surrounding territory from Ishadia. War continued off and on for another century. Then, 115 years ago, the dragons destroyed the dam at Khazephon, flooding the City of Jewels. The last king to sit on Ishadia's Phoenix Throne drowned in the deluge.

On the Spice Coast, the reign of the Saffron Rajah of Kesara began 100 years ago. Sixty years ago in the south, the Cattle Queens of Terrotu launched a crusade against the tosculi, following omens from Enkai. The fighting went on for 5 years, ending after the murder of the Terrotu army's leader, the Red Priestess Anlais.

Meanwhile, Shibai's power and influence grew rapidly, prompting the island to declare itself a sultanate, independent from Ishadia. Thirty years ago, with piracy on the rise in the Tethys Ocean, the five beys who rule Shibai began offering sizable bounties for the most notorious pirates of Mhalmet and the Free Islands. Seventeen years later, Shibai and Ishadia clashed over the slave trade and dominion over the Showka Passage, and dozens of ships were burned and sunk.

Some 20 years ago, the Aksabans seized control of part of Sar-Shaba in the bloody aftermath of the Battle of the Western Gate.

Eleven years ago, the titan Gamka Firemane returned to claim the Lion Throne of Omphaya as the seat of a reborn Glorious Umbuso.

current events

The last 10 years have been eventful ones for the Corsair Coast and the islands of the Tethys Ocean.

DEFEAT FOR THE DRAGONS

Five years ago, the dragonkin of the Mharoti Empire were defeated by the united armies of Ishadia and Khandiria, leading to a moratorium in the fighting. During the Battle of Wheeling Angels, a powerful celestial summoner rained holy fire on several true dragons, knocking them from the sky while vast numbers of Khandirian oliphants and juggernauts overran the Mharoti gnolls, edjet, and kobold levies.

SHIBAI SLAVE REVOLT

A few months ago, the lucrative slave trade was dealt a crippling blow by the Istagal Raiders. The pirate captains, all former slaves themselves, triggered a full-blown riot in the slave market of Mosylon's Crossroads Souk with a daring plan involving pirates planted among the crowds, summoned sea fog, and cageloads of berserk mandrills. The raiders freed and armed the slaves, who began fighting their way out of the market into the city. Several of Mosylon's over-elaborate towers were set on fire, and two of Shibai's amirs were killed in the rioting.

More than four hundred slaves escaped, swelling the ranks of the raiders, and making the Showka Passage a perilous undertaking for slave traders for months to

come. Sultan Hyfad al-Khanlar was under pressure to step down by the surviving amirs, and large bounties have been placed on the heads of the raiders.

RED YEARS IN TERROTU

Every seven years, Enkai's priests and representatives of each mobile community gather at the Temple of Onyx and Ruby in Terrotu to discuss important matters during a festival-like, two-week gathering known as the Muster. The aged Queen of Queens, Akueto Kibra, is dying; she and her attendants are currently en route to the Muster so that her successor can be chosen. She is expected to arrive within the month.

The Muster opens with a divining ceremony conducted by Namelok, the Malkia of the Temple, in which stones are cast from an ankole horn. This reading determines if Enkai is winning her battle against the demon Nenaunir and whether the next seven years will be "red years" or "black years."

The last seven years have been red, as predicted at the last Muster—the rains have been too infrequent, and many ankole have succumbed to disease. Although a prediction of red years does not necessarily indicate seven years of poor weather, Namelok is concerned. If red years are foretold again, the demon is threatening ultimate victory, and something must be done to help Enkai. She believes that a champion wielding the legendary *Resounding Torus of Terrotu* might be able to cause a large enough earthquake beneath the temple to stun Nenaunir, allowing Enkai to regain control of the battle. For this plan to be attempted, someone would need to recover the torus from the Imperial Treasury in Sar-Shaba (see page 159).

adventure seeds

Many opportunities for adventure exist along the Corsair Coast for the bold and foolhardy willing to seek them.

DREAMS OF SKULL ISLAND

The characters have come to Mhalmel to track down Ashgar, the indolent son of an Ishadian noble, who has gone missing. The wastrel has been frittering away his generous allowance in the City of Freedom's upscale salons, gambling dens, and drug houses. When the characters track him down, he tells them of a vision he experienced while under the effects of dream smoke: a tiny tropical island with a distinctive skull-shaped rock formation that concealed a pirate's treasure hoard. Ashgar has drawn a crude map showing the surrounding

islands—which he claims to have flown over like a bird in his dream—and is willing to split the proceeds evenly with the characters if they will take him there.

Perhaps surprisingly, the island and the skull-shaped rock formation do exist, but there is no pirate treasure here. Instead, an **ancient titan** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 380) named Gwazi sleeps in a large cavern beneath the rock.

Gwazi has been asleep for 170 years after an attempt to become reunited with his titan lover Khule ended in tragedy. He sought refuge in the islands during the titans' war and traveled to Khule's tomb in the Abandoned Lands to wake her up. When he did so, he discovered that Khule was still suffering from the madness of the titans, and she flew into a murderous rage. Gwazi was forced to kill his lover and returned to the Tethys Ocean broken-hearted.

If Gwazi is awakened, the characters will need to do some fast talking to avoid his wrath. He demands to know what he has missed in the years he's been asleep, in particular news of his fellow titans. While he slept, Gwazi dreamed of the other titans in their cocoons at Gala'ikos (see page 192) and might ask the characters to travel there to determine if any of the others have awakened.

LOST DIAMOND MINE

A group of caretakers stumbles back into town somewhere along the Spice Coast, badly wounded and feverish but bearing three fist-sized black diamonds. They claim that somewhere deep in the jungle, at the heart of a city of white apes, lies a lost titan-crafted mine where similar enormous stones simply fall from the walls.

If the characters can persuade the caretakers to reveal the mine's location, they could earn rich rewards. Monsters prowl the mine tunnels, and rivals are certain to dog the party as they delve into the jungle, following the rough directions the delirious survivors scratched out.

WITHIN THE VERDANT CATACOMBS

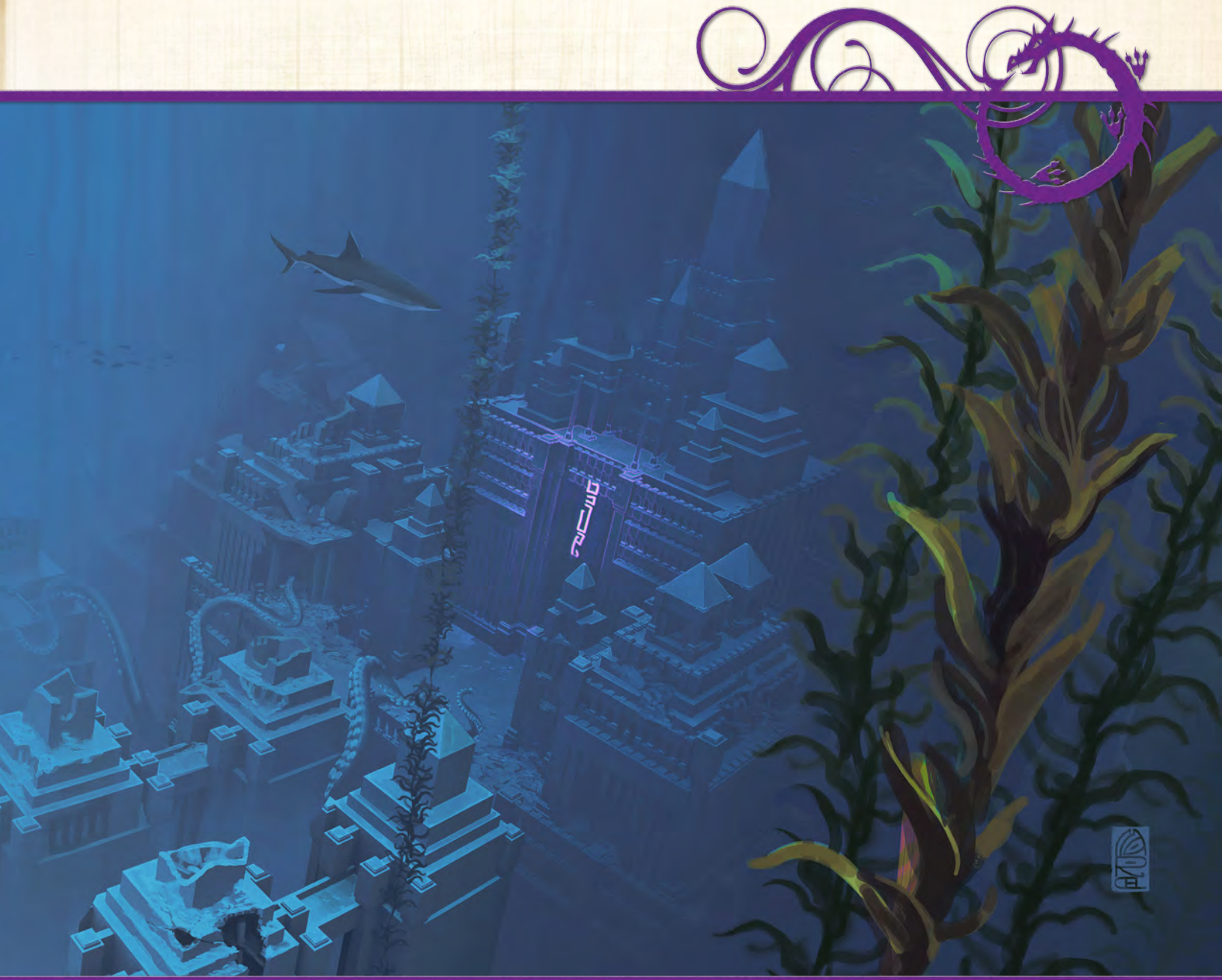
In the center of the Nyenga Forest, an unnaturally large baobab tree serves as a living mausoleum for the remains of generations of jali—bards who have learned the art of combat divination. Now, something dark has come to inhabit the woody corridors and chambers inside the ancient tree. The Omphayans are looking for someone to investigate the recent disturbance before the upcoming interment of a beloved performer. On two occasions, a disembodied voice has been heard to whisper from the shadows, claiming that "A thief has stolen my songs and stolen my love." Can the owner of that voice be trusted?

the abandoned lands



The vast central expanse of the Southlands, the former homeland of Glorious Umbuso, is barely inhabited by humans and their allied races, but it is occupied by titanic monsters, magical sites, and oddities such as a city upon a lake. Despite its great area, this region holds only two major nations: Ramag, whose scattered people are inimitably tied to their primal magical lands, and the land held by the tosculi, a vicious insectoid race that overruns everything in its path, described in chapter 9.

These reaches are known as the Abandoned Lands—at once dangerous and, for those brave enough, hypnotically inviting. It's risky to try to steal the treasures of the past from a forbidden ruin, but the promise of riches stirs a few adventurers to mount expeditions every year.



geography

The Aggesal Plains dominate the central portion of the Abandoned Lands. Ringed by the far-flung districts of Ramagani, the Ramag capital, these dry grasslands and rugged foothills are prone to weird weather and unusual physical phenomena caused by eldritch energies. Fearsome beasts, including towering dinosaurs, mighty megafauna, and twisted aberrations, live on the plains; travelers often attest that these monsters seem to appear out of thin air.

In the middle of the Aggesal Plains lies Lake Debari, the largest freshwater lake in the Southlands. Relatively shallow along its shore, the lakebed quickly slopes down to an unmeasured depth of crystal-clear water. Some legends describe

Deep beneath the surface of Lake Debari lies Ammalsine, ruined city of the marids, where the Lukwata lies sleeping.



Debari as bottomless, but this is not the case. At the center of the lake bottom is a stable portal to the Plane of Water, ringed by the ruins of an ancient marid city. Here, a terrible behemoth lies in a deep slumber.

The expanses of grasslands in this region show the marks of ancient settlements, but all that remains of civilization today is the trollkin kingdom of Nmabi and the villages and shrines of the Mafri. Otherwise, the land is the domain of giraffes, wildebeests, antelope, and vast herds of other grassland animals.

aftermath of the broken web

When Glorious Umbuso was at its height, the titans' human servants, the ramag, built a series of monoliths to control the flow of the ley lines across the Southlands, focusing and refracting them into a lattice across their masters' territory known as the Great Web. This ley line web provided ready access to rivers of magical power and fueled the development of the myriad wonders of the empire, allowing the titans to shape and channel pure magical essence to control rainfall, illuminate magical roadways, and track hostile creatures.

When the titans' empire collapsed, the web broke apart. Today, the titanic ley line known as Ramag's Bond still connects Ramagani's districts, but within its diamond-shaped boundaries the ley lines flow haphazardly across the Abandoned Lands, occasionally linking, breaking, and forming new connections with other loose lines.

This broken web bathes the entire region in primal magic: wild, unpredictable magical essence in its rawest form. As a result, the Abandoned Lands are filled with bizarre terrain effects, rampaging aberrations, and mutated beasts. As if all that were not dangerous enough, spellcasters must contend with the changes wrought by a primal magic event whenever they ply their trade.

WEIRD WEATHER AND TWISTED TERRAIN

The Abandoned Lands are subject to freakish weather events. Great storms pummel the countryside with an immense number of lightning strikes, as many as three to five per minute. Small, yet potent earthquakes rend the land like pottery being crushed in a giant's palm. Impromptu geysers of sand, water, or hot mud might drench an area for as little as a minute or as long as an hour, leaving pools of poisonous water or clouds of caustic gas lingering in their wake. Sometimes, one of these events might trigger a second one, such as an earthquake generating a flurry of geysers, or a lightning storm preceding several earthquakes.

ABERRANT MONSTERS

Adventurers who explore the Aggesal Plains and the surrounding hills and valleys will encounter all manner of abnormal beasts in addition to the wild animals typically found across the southern half of the continent. Dinosaurs and megafauna of all types roam the plains, swim in the rivers and lakes, and soar in the skies above. In addition, eldritch energies from the broken web have brought alien creatures to the area from the Void and other planes, and have warped much of the indigenous wildlife. **Tusked skyfish** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 391) waft through the air like horrid balloons, nightmarish **sathaq worms** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 337) lurk beneath the earth, ready to swallow the unsuspecting, and ethereal lions, the elusive **mngwa** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 293), stalk their prey through rocky terrain. Ugly but unaggressive warthogs have mutated into terrifying **rift swine** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 326), and crocodiles have been transformed into land-dwelling **gbahali** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 209) with chameleon-like powers of camouflage.

PRIMAL MAGIC EVENTS

When a creature casts a spell in the Abandoned Lands, the intended effect might be replaced or enhanced by a primal magic event. This is more likely if the caster is close to a ley line or a ramag monolith. Assume the caster has a 20 percent chance of being sufficiently close to a broken ley line (this can also be determined at the GM's discretion). When someone casts a spell in the Abandoned Lands, the chance of that act triggering a primal magic event depends on the caster's location:

PRIMAL MAGIC TRIGGERING

Location	Chance of Event
Within 1 mile of a ramag monolith	50%
Within 1 mile of a ley line	25%
Anywhere else in the Abandoned Lands	5%

When a primal magic event occurs, roll on the Primal Magic Events Table below. A primal magic event has an intensity equal to 10 + the level of the intended spell. The event affects one or more creatures, or an area, which is typically a radius of 10 feet × the intensity of the effect, centered on the spellcaster. An event can last for minutes, hours, or even days, and can be dispelled by *dispel magic* or similar spells. Unless otherwise noted, creatures do not receive saving throws against primal magic events.

PRIMAL MAGIC EVENTS

d100	Effect
01-10	Larcenous Anomaly: A magical force, located 10 feet × the intensity from the spellcaster, pulls held objects from all creatures' hands within a 100-foot radius. A creature can resist the effect with a successful Strength saving throw against a DC equal to the intensity.
11-25	Dimensional Hiccup: All creatures in the area must make a Wisdom saving throw with a DC equal to the intensity. On a failed save, a creature is teleported to a random location elsewhere in the area, as if by <i>dimension door</i> . If this effect puts a creature in a space too small for it, it instead appears in the nearest space that can contain it.
26-40	Weal or Woe: Positive or negative energy affects a number of creatures up to the intensity. Roll a d6; each of these creatures is affected by a <i>heal</i> spell (1-3) or a <i>harm</i> spell (4-6). A creature that makes a successful Constitution saving throw (DC equal to the intensity) takes half as much damage.
41-60	Wondrous Chaos: Randomly pick one creature in the area to be the wielder and one to be the target. Roll on the table in the <i>wand of wonder</i> description to determine what occurs involving these two creatures.
61-85	Fortune Flux: The damaged laws of reality affect the luck of all creatures in the area for a number of rounds equal to the intensity. All creatures must roll a d6 before making a d20 roll. A result of 1-3 indicates the d20 roll is made with disadvantage. A result of 4-6 indicates the d20 roll is made with advantage.
86-98	Unintended Casting: The spell being cast is exchanged for a different randomly chosen spell that the caster knows. The caster does not need to have the spell prepared or have an appropriate spell slot available to cast the new spell.
99-00	Double Down: Roll twice, ignoring further results of 99-00. Both events generated by these rolls occur simultaneously.

the shattered roads

One of the great accomplishments of Glorious Umbuso were the wide, stone-paved roads that reached out from the capital and connected to smaller cities and towns. Magically enhanced to speed travelers along, the roads allowed for rapid commerce and communication. After the empire disintegrated, though, the roads fell into disrepair and succumbed to the ravages of time, weather, or outright destruction.

Now, only sections of these roads remain; some are only a few miles long, while others stretch for 100 miles or more. The enchantments on the shattered roads have become erratic and even hazardous. Groups traveling on one of these roads have a 70 percent chance on any given day of doubling their speed for 8 hours, and a 30 percent chance of experiencing one of the effects described on the following table.

SHATTERED ROAD EFFECTS

d8	Effect
1	The travelers are randomly teleported to another shattered road elsewhere in the Abandoned Lands.
2	The group's speed is tripled instead of doubled for the next 8 hours.
3	The travelers are cursed (as the <i>bestow curse</i> spell) for 8 hours or until they leave the road, whichever comes first.
4	The travelers gain 1 level of exhaustion for every 1d3 hours they spend moving on the road.
5	The group is imbued with bravery (immune to being frightened, gain 5 temporary hit points, as the <i>heroism</i> spell) for 8 hours or until they leave the road, whichever comes first.
6	The travelers make no progress on the road today. After 8 hours, they have returned to their starting point.
7	After 8 hours on the road, the group ends up 1d20 miles away from their starting point.
8	The group experiences a random encounter every 2 hours.



ramag

In the distant past, the tribe of humans known as the ramag were allied with Glorious Umbuso. Its people served the titans as stewards, using their aptitude for manipulating ley lines to construct the vast magical web that helped the titan empire build its great wonders. When madness gripped the titans, though, the ramag barricaded themselves inside the scattered districts of the magnificent city that served as their capital.

Called Ramagani, “home” in their native tongue, the ramag capital is separated into nine major districts that are spread across the Abandoned Lands and beyond. These far-flung neighborhoods are connected to one another by portals that are powered by enchanted stone monoliths. The ramag consider their capital to be one city; bewildered outsiders typically refer to each node simply as Ramagani and leave it at that. Although it is possible to travel overland between two districts, few do so; those who wish to trade with the ramag simply visit the nearest district to their homes.

Smaller nodes are all over the continent. Several streets in Per-Bastet might once have been connected to Ramagani’s districts, and it is entirely possible that other quarters, squares, piers, or sections of Ramagani exist, their monoliths hidden, as secrets known only to some of the ramag. Inactive monoliths have also been found in many places throughout the Abandoned Lands; the best known are in the ruined Ramagani district of Thakathi (see page 188).

Over time, the primal magic leaking from Glorious Umbuso’s shattered ley line web warped the physical forms of the ramag. Their limbs became long and lanky, and their torsos grew smaller and more compact. As a result, they appear angular and spindly compared to humans, as if their bodies were both stretched and compressed at the same time. See *Southlands Player’s Guide* for more information on the ramag.

The ramag have never been a particularly fecund people, so when the arcane wasting disease raged through Morreg and Black Lotus Mesa, it could have driven them to extinction. Recognizing the threat, the ramag abandoned the district of Ramagani on Black Lotus Mesa. To the ramag elsewhere in the Southlands, this was a terrible tragedy, as those citizens of Ramagani were lost to their kin, seemingly forever. Now, the lost ramag seek to rejoin their brethren by connecting the Pillared Stair on the mesa to the rest of Ramagani.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

Ramag culture centers on the care and maintenance of the magic monoliths that allow passage between the districts of their city. These diamond-shaped stone obelisks are between 20 and 50 feet tall and are scattered throughout each district.

Ramag mages maintain the existing monoliths and create new ones with a two-step process. The first requires an incantation that all ramag learn as a rite of passage into adulthood; it binds an individual’s soul to the stone, even in death. The second step takes place after death, when the individual is entombed in the monolith to complete the incantation begun many years before. Each monolith is used to entomb a generation of ramag from a single family, but after a while the residual magic fades away and the monolith is no longer powerful enough to maintain the portal network. Newly completed monoliths replace old, malfunctioning ones, ensuring that the ramag always have reliable connections between each Ramagani node. If the wrong monoliths fail, entire districts of the city could be cut off from the rest of their race for unknown stretches of time.



RAMAG

Ruler: Zinchekra, The King of the Luminous Roads (LN male ramag **archmage**)

Important Personages: Hayat, Elder of the Port (LE female ramag **mage**); Jadelisifa, Master of the Gates (LN female **ramag portal master**; *Creature Codex*, p. 313); Matkhendush, First Speaker of the Merchants (N female ramag **mage**); Uan Muhaggyg, the Scaled General (NG male ramag **field commander**; see page 282)

Population: 109,100 (104,000 ramag, 3,100 humans, 1,000 halflings, 1,000 tieflings)

Capital: Ramagani, population 98,000 (93,000 ramag, 5,000 myriad other races, no one dominant)

Great Gods: Ninkash, Rava, Sabateus, Veles, Xevioso

Trade Goods: goods from all across the Southlands



Miles 0 100 200 300 400 500

NYENGA FOREST

OMPHAYA

TIKANI'S SPINE

TIKANI'S ROAD
AGGESAL PLAINS

VIUNGO JUNGLE

RAMAG'S BOND

THE KIPATI PROMISE

THE ABANDONED LANDS

CHANDO MOUNTAINS

KIMVAI CANYON

UTUNGA MOUNTAINS

BROKEN DUNES

LAKE DEBARI

DARK MANGROVE

Sunken Giant

DEBARI'S TEARS

RAMAG'S BOND

TITAN'S HIVE

LAKE TRIGOLA

WEBWORKS OF THE SKITTERING ONES

BAKUBA

MAKWANE

KANOKA

ULUMBA

Gala'tos

Ruby Spire

Ammalsine

Munayo

Khulu's Tomb

Haven of the Outcasts

Titan's Hive

Thakathin

Twisting Tower

MKANGO Hills



The more powerful the spellcaster was in life, the stronger their monolith mausoleums are, and the easier it is for the city's mages to bind secondary effects to the structure. These effects include creating animated statues to protect the monoliths if the district comes under attack or imbuing them with *hallow*-like effects tailored to the local residents.

All together the monoliths support three or four archway portals in each district of Ramagani, thus creating an enormous, ring-like city surrounding the Abandoned Lands. One portal in each district always leads to and from Port Monolith, the city's primary hub, located on a small island off the southeastern coast of the Southlands. Every ramag citizen wears an amulet keyed to the monoliths that allows them to pass through the portals between districts, bringing up to six companions with them.

Although outwardly taciturn, the ramag excel as traders, explorers, and inventors. They know many of the old titan empire's sites from 3,000 years ago, and they still train their scholars in the titans' language and their magic, both forgotten elsewhere. As a people, they maintain a strict sense of civic self-preservation, always protective of their city and culture. Nothing is more important to the ramag than the survival of Ramagani.

The ramag allow a few outsiders to live among them. By Ramagani's laws, an outsider can never serve as a city official and can travel through the portals that connect the city's nodes only when accompanied by a ramag. They are still considered citizens, however, and they are otherwise free to act as they please.

GOVERNMENT

A council of elders oversees Ramag, with a ceremonial King or Queen of the Luminous Roads chosen from among their number. When a ruler dies, he or she is entombed within a new monolith somewhere in the Abandoned Lands or in Ramagani. This powerful structure serves to replace a former monarch's fading monolith or to reinforce a portion of the ley line web. Elders are elected by the population and serve for the term of the monarch plus one year. After a former ruler is entombed, the new one is chosen from the current elders during New Year celebrations.

The current King of the Luminous Roads is the venerable Zincheckra, who has ruled wisely for 13 years. Zincheckra's health is failing, and the elders' thoughts are turning toward his entombment and successor. The likely candidates are Hayat, the Elder of the Port, and Jadalnisifa, the current leader of the portal masters (see "The End of the Luminous Road", page 196).

PORTAL MASTERS

The portal masters are a group of ramag spellcasters whose role is to safeguard the dormant portals in the Wall of Gates (see below). These ancient doorways sometimes come to life, reopening long-lost paths to the ruins of the titans and the vestiges of ramag settlements, such as Thakathi (see page 188). The portal masters serve as the first line of defense if foul creatures try to come through from the other side, and occasionally oversee expeditions through stable portals. In particular, they ruthlessly hunt down the source of any rumors of Void glyphs or Void speakers, to purge their taint from the world. Destroying these portals would be the best option, but the portal masters have been unable to discover a means of doing so without destabilizing the rest of the network.

LEY WARDENS

The ramag are not adventurers and most prefer to never leave their city. They do, however, maintain an order called the Ley Wardens, which seeks out ley lines that become "stuck." These looping, diverted, or congested ley lines can trigger dangerous primal magic events and, in so doing, disrupt the countryside. These Ley Wardens travel to these eldritch sites and perform incantations that untangle the ley line, preventing its unstable energy from ravaging the landscape.

About 500 Ley Wardens travel through the Southlands, seeking these malfunctioning ley lines and righting them. This is a never-ending job—the fragile web of ley lines goes awry frequently, and this is further exacerbated by ley lines burning out when spellcasters using them experience a backlash. Many Ley Wardens are geomancers; for more about this wizard arcane tradition, see *Midgard Heroes Handbook*, p. 88.

SCALED KEEPERS

Special houses with crystal roofs, which serve as natural incubators, are common in Ramagani. Maintained by a dedicated guild called the Scaled Keepers, these houses contain long rows of kongamato eggs (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 265). The hatchlings, once they reach maturity, are kept in large aviaries and used by the ramag as flying mounts and trained scouts. The creatures bond with their caretakers and trainers, becoming loyal and acclimated to humanoids. Sometimes, the ramag take to the sky on kongamato mounts to hunt down small groups of monsters or bandits that venture near one of Ramagani's districts. Uan Muhaggyg, the Scaled General, the city's military commander and a fearless flyer, often leads these expeditions.

ARCANE DEFENSES

A garrison of ramag guards watches the walls of each district of Ramagani. These arcane warriors operate lightning ballistae in defense of the city in the event of an attack by marauding trollkin or tosculi. Powered by the magic of the monoliths and fed by the ley lines, these siege engines give Ramagani's districts a decided edge—a lightning ballista functions as a standard ballista but deals an additional 5 (1d10) lightning damage with each hit.

RELIGIONS AND DEITIES

The ramag are not a particularly religious people. In the distant past they worshiped their titan masters and were so devastated when madness toppled Glorious Umbuso that few turned to new gods following its fall. Statues of the titans are still scattered around Ramagani. There are

temples to Ninkash, Rava, Sabateus, Veles, and Xevioso, but these mostly have human priests and worshipers.

COMMERCE

Trade houses and caravanserais stand outside the walls of each Ramagani node, familiar gateways to the districts of the city. Operated by outsiders who have been accepted into the fabric of Ramag society, these merchant houses serve as both Ramagani ambassadors and as its primary marketplace for foreign visitors. The ramag are grand facilitators of trade, bringing goods from across the continent to each market by shunting them through the hub at Port Monolith. The portals are wide enough for two wagons to pass through at the same time. The fastidious Matkhendush is the First Speaker of the Merchants, responsible for ensuring that the flow of goods is correctly managed, and that each merchant house vets



- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Palace of the Luminous Roads | 8. Barracks | 15. Alkush's Statue | 22. Temple of Rava |
| 2. Council Chamber of the Elders | 9. Hall of the Scaled Keepers | 16. Gamka's Statue | 23. Temple of the Starry Sky (Sabateus) |
| 3. Elder of the Port's Residence | 10. Kongamato Aviary | 17. Iwentaka's Statue | 24. Temple of Veles |
| 4. Shipyard | 11. Trade House | 18. Kambe's Statue | 25. Temple of Strife (Xevioso) |
| 5. Wall of Gates | 12. Mwari's Statue | 19. Enkai's Statue | 26. Monolith of Queen Makeba |
| 6. Citadel of the Portal Masters | 13. Mamiwata's Statue | 20. Well of Hope | 27. Monolith of King Sibonelo |
| 7. Tower of the Ley Wardens | 14. Amhara's Statue | 21. House of Merriment (Ninkash) | |



its representatives robustly. Matkhendush has become concerned about Hayat's seeming willingness to put profits ahead of Ramagani's security by increasing trade links with the demon-friendly sorcerers of Kush.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

The nine primary sites of the distributed city of Ramagani are scattered across the southern and central Southlands. The city's largest districts include two just south of Kush; one to the south of Omphaya and another near Kimvai Lake; one in the jungles of the Skittering Ones; one along the southernmost coast of Terrotu and another near its northwest border; and one in Mafri near the Eleyiti Mountains. The ramag have named these districts after the titans.

Port Monolith

Each district of Ramagani connects to Port Monolith, the city's commercial hub, which stands on a small island off the southeastern coast of the Southlands. The ramag have filled this remote island with docks and a shipyard, and they use it as the central nexus to easily move goods and people between all parts of the city. If Ramagani were in danger, this would be the refuge for its people—although its infrastructure is incapable of accommodating 100,000 ramag for long. Once everyone is safely inside the district, the ramag will seal the portals.

Wall of Gates

The Wall of Gates spreads across Ramagani's districts and is studded with ancient doorways that once led to former ramag settlements and titan cities across the Abandoned Lands. Occasionally the stars and ley lines align, allowing the ramag to reopen these old portals for a short period to visit lost settlements in search of forgotten lore. This magic is unstable, though, and these enchanted stone doors could easily trap—and, indeed, they have trapped—adventurous city folk in the titans' ruins for good. Some portal masters believe that the opportunity to discover arcane secrets, such as the means to destroy or permanently seal dangerous portals that endanger Ramagani, is worth the risk.

THAKATHI

Lying on the Ramag's Bond ley line on the eastern fringes of the Fendeel Jungle, the ruins of Thakathi were once a district of Ramagani. The node was lost to the rest of the city more than 300 years ago when a dimensional rift opened to the Void, enabling dozens of aberrant creatures to pour into the Southlands. Unable to hold back the blasphemous invasion by other means, the ramag

evacuated the district and severed the connection to the monoliths there.

Thakathi's monoliths and portals remain dormant today, so the only way to reach the ruins is by unsealing a portal in the Wall of Gates or by a long overland trek. The ramag are planning an expedition to Thakathi to battle the deranged cult of the Void living among the jungle-covered buildings, afraid that their leader intends to reopen the dormant dimensional rift, and they might enlist the help of adventurers as extra muscle. Some ramag even hope to return the ruined district to its former status.

A male ramag named Mpho Danai, a **void speaker** (*Creature Codex*, p. 408) with black holes where his eyes should be, leads the cult. Mpho is the son of Thabo Danai, a portal master who was corrupted by the Void when he came here on an expedition 30 years ago. Mpho took over following his father's death and directs several dozen human, heru, and ramag **void cultists** (*Creature Codex*, p. 407) in ceremonies honoring the dark gods of the Void and their unnatural servants. The cultists have scrawled Void glyphs on the walls of many of the buildings in Thakathi—bold spellcasters who want to learn new Void magic spells might be able to benefit from studying these if they can evade the denizens of the ruins for long enough. In addition to the cult, a variety of aberrations including **gibbering mouthers**, **nalusa falaya** (*Creature Codex*, p. 274), and **shantaks** (*Creature Codex*, p. 328) lurk here. Mpho Danai can call upon one of these shantaks to serve as his mount.

MUNAYO, THE FLOATING VILLAGE

An entire town floats on the waters of Lake Debari. Hundreds of fishing boats and flat-bottomed barges lashed together and interspersed with floating docks form the shifting, drifting community of Munayo.

The shape of the town's perimeter changes continually as boats go out daily to fish the lake; others have been docked for decades. Munayo's oldest inhabitants claim to have lived their whole lives on Lake Debari, having sworn never to set foot on solid ground, because they guard against a terrible threat that sleeps on the lake bottom.

The people of Munayo have lived on the lake since it first formed thousands of years ago. At that time they paid tribute to the marids of the underwater city of Ammalsine (see page 192) on the bottom of the lake, built around a portal to the Plane of Water 500 feet below the surface. Tales conflict about whether the portal appeared after the lake formed, or if the portal was responsible for the creation of the lake.

The earliest Munayans worked hard and did what they could to serve their otherworldly masters. Eventually, as Glorious Umbuso rose to prominence, the townsfolk came to revere the titans as deities who had come to walk the earth, and in turn the titans protected them from the dangers of the Southlands.

When the titans' civilization began to collapse, a behemoth known as the Lukwata emerged from the portal at the lake's center and rampaged through Ammalsine, slaughtering nearly all who lived there. The Munayans, shaken by the great waves roiling across the lake, begged the dying titans for help. The titan Kambe tried to banish the destructive behemoth, but her confused enchantment succeeded only in forcing the creature to fall into a deep slumber.

Some of the townsfolk fled the lake and sought shelter on the land. After living for generations on the calm waters of Lake Debari, the refugees were ill prepared for the madness sweeping through the surrounding territory as the rival titans battled each other. They all perished in a matter of months.

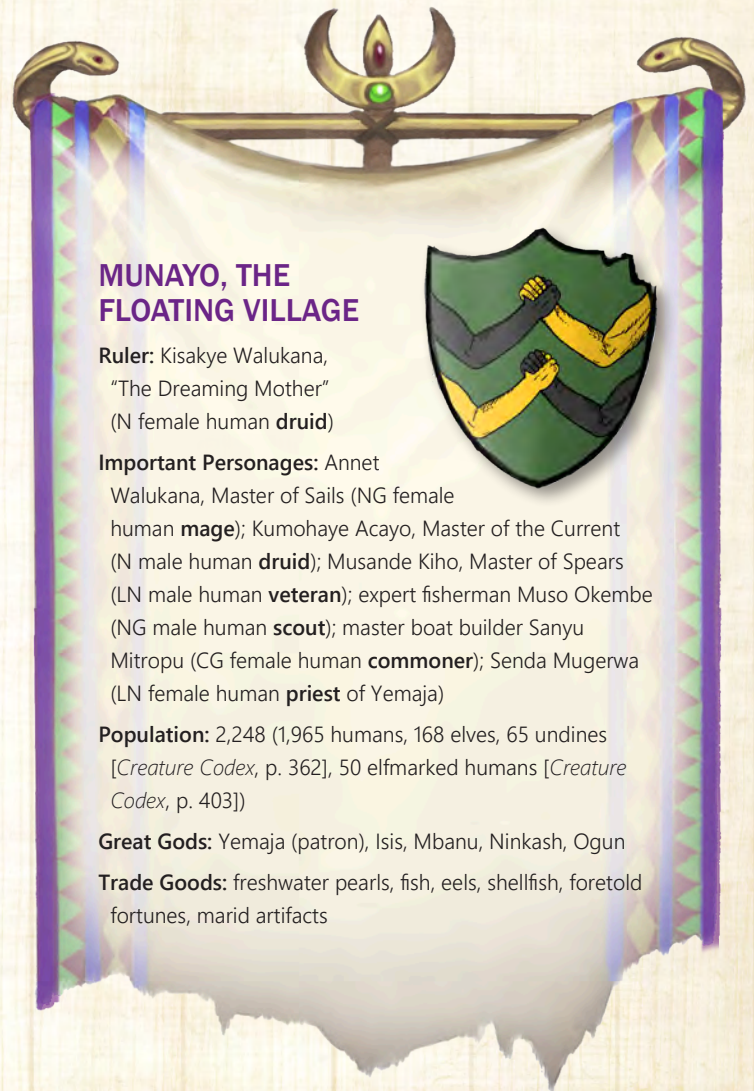
Those who remained behind swore to never leave the waters of Lake Debari while the Lukwata remains a threat. The elders of Munayo say that one day Kambe's spell will begin to weaken, and the Lukwata will stir—perhaps to awaken to a new opportunity for destruction.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

The people of Munayo, mostly humans of the Zwana ethnicity, are hardy and resourceful folk. Known to be strong swimmers and excellent divers, they can hold their breath for extended periods, and their bodies can withstand depths that would harm other humans. They use spears and nets expertly in their day-to-day life as fishers, and those who have clashed with the Munayans in combat know that they wield these items as weapons with just as much prowess. Though they rarely have to fight to maintain their dominion over the lake, the people of Munayo regularly train under the purview of Musande Kiho, the Master of Spears, to remain ready for the day when they must fight the Lukwata and drive it from Lake Debari.

The living conditions in Munayo demand that community concerns are paramount. There is a saying among the townspeople: "As our boats are bound, we are bound. We are only as strong as the ties that lash us together." The people of Munayo put this belief into practice daily. Many are experts in a trade or skill, and they share that knowledge with any who want to learn, for the sake of a stronger community.

All the bounty of Lake Debari plays a key role in the daily life of Munayo. The people fish for perch and freshwater



MUNAYO, THE FLOATING VILLAGE

Ruler: Kisakye Walukana, "The Dreaming Mother" (N female human **druid**)

Important Personages: Annet Walukana, Master of Sails (NG female human **mage**); Kumohaye Acayo, Master of the Current (N male human **druid**); Musande Kiho, Master of Spears (LN male human **veteran**); expert fisherman Muso Okembe (NG male human **scout**); master boat builder Sanyu Mitropu (CG female human **commoner**); Senda Mugerwa (LN female human **priest** of Yemaja)

Population: 2,248 (1,965 humans, 168 elves, 65 undines [*Creature Codex*, p. 362], 50 elfmarked humans [*Creature Codex*, p. 403])

Great Gods: Yemaja (patron), Isis, Mbanu, Ninkash, Ogun

Trade Goods: freshwater pearls, fish, eels, shellfish, foretold fortunes, marid artifacts

eels, and they dive for mussels in places where the bottom of the lake is only 100 feet deep, using the flesh for food and any pearls they harvest for trade and jewelry. They use the mussels' iridescent shells to make spoons, bowls, buttons, and other implements. Some shells are ground up and incorporated into pottery fired in low-heat kilns. Some artisans even fashion heat-hardened mussel shells into scale mail armor.

Living on the water requires resourcefulness. Boat builders in Munayo designed barges that can hold 3 to 4 feet of soil and thus serve as floating gardens. Villagers tend these crops to add vegetables to their diet. The one resource that the people of Munayo must trade for is wood. Boats are essential to their livelihood, and there is always a need for lumber. A few small islands in Lake Debari have trees growing on them, but not nearly enough to support Munayo's boat-building needs.

At times, people from the Southlands and beyond come to Munayo to join the community. According to village



law, guests can stay for no longer than three days in a single season, but those who choose to “leave behind the land” can become full citizens. To be accepted into the community, someone must dive down 100 feet without the aid of magic to one of the ruined towers of the marids and retrieve a tile from the roof. Outsiders who complete the trial are welcomed into the community. Their new status is celebrated with a week-long feast during which the oral history of Munayo is shared with them.

Diving down to Ammalsine to recover relics of the marids is a rite of passage for the people of Munayo. Not all who live among the boats are required to do so, but those who wish to make a name for themselves often take up the challenge. They achieve varying degrees of success, but anyone brave enough to attempt the task earns the village’s respect.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Because its buildings and boats are constantly shifting places, any map of Munayo is necessarily inaccurate. Even so, important sites remain in the same general locations, for the most part.

1. Rudder House

The Rudder House controls the course of the floating village. The council of elders must meet at the Anchor House to agree on the course before the Master of the Current, Kumohaye Acayo, is empowered to steer the flotilla. Most of the time Munayo floats along with the current on a roughly circular path around the southern part of the lake.

2. Rising Spear

This barge is where the Master of Spears, Musande Kiho, trains the town’s warriors. Musande principally teaches how to fight with a spear and net, and how to hold one’s breath underwater while fighting.

3. Hospital Boat

Drifting behind the village on a long rope, this large boat serves as a quarantine site for sick villagers. Overseen by Senda Mugerwa, the boat’s workers provide healing to any in need.

4. Sanyu’s Boatbuilders

The finest boat designer in the village, Sanyu Mitropu, learned the craft from her mother and her grandmother. The prices for her boats are fair, but outsiders can expect to pay nearly twice as much as a resident of Munayo would.

5. Anchor House

Easily the largest structure in Munayo, this wooden building is the central hall of governance where the elders hear disputes and manage the village’s day-to-day

operations. One of the most important decisions made in the Anchor House involves when to halt the movement of the village. This is done only when severe storms are anticipated and thus it would be dangerous for the village to continue to drift. The Dreaming Mother, the Master of Sails, the Master of the Current, and the Master of Spears must all agree on where and for how long Munayo is moored. The larger boats all have their own anchors and drop them when the Master of the Current gives the signal that the village is in position. The southern part of the lakebed can be up to 200 feet beneath the surface, so long anchor chains are needed.

6. Floating Fields

Many barges in Munayo are loaded with soil excavated from islands in the lake and mixed with composted waste from the community. Growing all over these fertile surfaces are rows and rows of vegetables to supplement the village’s diet.

7. Public Fishing

Surrounded by wide floating platforms that make up Munayo’s central square, these docks are set aside to provide comfortable fishing spots for people too infirm or too young to go out on the boats, so that they can still contribute to the community.

8. The Shelled Scales

Operated by a careful and scrupulous merchant named Matsiko (LN male human **commoner**), the Shelled Scales gets its name from the set of scales made from a giant mussel shell that he uses to weigh fish. Matsiko has a smaller, more delicate scale for weighing and pricing the freshwater pearls that are brought up from the depths daily. He is also a master jeweler, with exquisite examples of his handiwork on display in his shop—all for sale or trade. Prices start at 100 gp for a pair of pearl earrings.

9. Open Diving

This section of the docks is where villagers dive for mussels if the water is shallow enough at the village’s current location. Most of the fishermen head out on the lake with their boats, but some who live in Munayo have had their boats locked into the middle of a cluster for years and choose to do their diving from this location instead.

10. Eye of the Deep Blue

The Dreaming Mother, Kisakye Walukana, and her daughter Annet, the Master of Sails, live on this splendid boat. The position of Dreaming Mother is hereditary, so Annet will take over when her mother grows too old to lead. Brightly painted and marked with occult runes, this vessel is among the largest in the village; the residence is passed down to each new ruler. Over time the boat has

collected hundreds of personal touches such as statuettes, ivory carvings, bronze plaques, painted scenes, and colorful netting.

Kisakye regularly speaks to a ghostly marid trapped in the ruined city beneath the lake, and it's believed that the Dreaming Mother receives the benefit of one *wish* spell a year from this mysterious entity (see "Oracle of the Lake", page 197).

11. Dance on the Lake

This dance hall and restaurant is where the people of Munayo come to celebrate special events or spend an evening dancing away their troubles. Run by a female elf named Solantu (CG female elf **commoner**), the place serves steamed mussels, smoked eel, and grilled fish on overflowing platters, accompanied by mugs of beer brewed from wild rice and cups of strong hyacinth wine. Solantu makes sure to keep a few boats ready so that visitors can have a place to sleep while in the village.

12. The Mast

Even though boats and barges make up most of the village, Munayo is built out from a flexible frame that connects the

Rudder House, the Anchor House, and the Mast. Great sails can be raised to move the village in the direction of the wind, if the elders allow such activity. The Master of Sails, Annet Walukana, and her crew are responsible for keeping the sails trimmed and in good repair.

13. Muso's Fleet

Descended from a long line of skilled fishermen, Muso Okembe leads a large fleet out on the lake every morning before the sun lights the water's surface. The fleet returns before sundown with the day's catch of lake perch, freshwater eels, and other fish that feed the people of Munayo. Muso is also a skilled warrior, and tales are often told at Dance on the Lake of the two plesiosauruses he defeated when they threatened the town.

14. Kingfisher's Emporium

In this area, foreigners can approach and dock their boats when they come to trade for fish and shellfish, or artifacts salvaged from Ammalsine. The Munayans mainly barter, though the standard currency for the village is freshwater pearls when dealing with outsiders. Gold and other coins have little value to the people of Munayo.





Gala'ikos, seat of the titans

From a distance, the abandoned titan capital of Gala'ikos appears mostly intact and unmarred by neglect or time. Its towering spires of crystal and glass reflect sunlight down onto streets of featureless black flowstone, and several floating palaces still orbit the city's perimeter, accessible only by flying or teleportation. Visitors who enter the ancient metropolis can infer the titans' fate from the ravaged buildings. A close look at this blasted city reveals evidence of the madness that consumed Glorious Umbuso, for the walls of Gala'ikos are still marked with bizarre sigils written in blood or hammered out with crude tools.

In a city built for 70-foot-tall creatures, the features of the buildings are colossal. The individual risers on stairways, for example, are 5 feet high. But because Gala'ikos was also occupied by the titans' human followers, most structures have separate human-sized entrances, doorways, and stairs.

The original titan inhabitants are long gone (or sleeping; see below), but around a hundred of their devolved descendants still haunt Gala'ikos. These miserable creatures mount hunting expeditions into the surrounding countryside, but will happily eat any living thing they can find in the streets. The fiercely territorial tribes of **degenerate titans** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 381) tolerate no incursions into their domain, and they worship the city's magic devices as if they were gods. Their lairs are filled with items scavenged from the city; these "collections" tend to be completely haphazard, since the creatures are not intelligent enough to reliably discern treasure from trash.

ELDER'S CONCLAVE HOUSE

As the seat of government, the Conclave House once served as the titans' parliament, treasury, high court, and armory. A white marble minaret festooned with noble statues marks the site. Half of the once-beautiful structure has collapsed.

FLOATING PRISON

The city's floating prison held a few titan criminals, but it was primarily used for prisoners from other planes who committed crimes against Glorious Umbuso. During the empire's fall, the inmates escaped, and the prison remained almost empty for centuries—until a group of **vrocks** claimed it. These demons now hunt the degenerate titans in the city below. The vrocks do not realize that a trio of dark gods, imprisoned in a hidden chamber near the center of the floating prison, are influencing them by

insidiously planting suggestions in their subconscious minds. The gods hate the titans for imprisoning them and are using the demons to take revenge on their debased descendants.

NEXUS SPIRE

The ley line web the titans constructed was anchored in a node of ley magic located above a crystal tower at the heart of Gala'ikos. Although this web has long since degraded into tattered fragments and flickering ramag monoliths, a powerful and determined wizard could reignite the titanic ley lines with proper rituals and arcane craft at the heart of the spire. If the broken web can be restored, this would reduce the amount of primal magic events and weird weather ravaging the Abandoned Lands, and also reconnect lost nodes of Ramagani with the rest of the city.

THE SLEEPING GODS

Ringed the collapsed towers of the city's arcane academy, six cocoons of crystal float 50 feet off the ground. Each one contains the comatose form of an **ancient titan** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 380) who once inhabited the city. One of the sleepers is the tiger-headed titan Alkush, divine patron of Kush. He has been dreaming of the Green Walker for the last few months, and is somehow sharing his dreams of how the abomination can be defeated with Ufuoma Malangu, a young druid in the Circle of Orchids (see "Return of the Druids", page 120). In addition, bird-faced Iwentaka (see "Ruby Spire", page 194), and the titan Kambe, who saved Munayo from the Lukwata (see "Ammalsine," below), are among the other five sleeping here. Somewhere within the academy ruins lies the knowledge of how to awaken them.

perilous sites

Many tribal societies, lost cities, and other fantastic locations await intrepid explorers in the heartland of fallen Glorious Umbuso. These locales often attract the curious or the greedy in search of secrets and the titans' lost wealth.

AMMALSINE

Deep beneath the surface of Lake Debari, the ruins of the ancient marid city of Ammalsine surround a portal to the Plane of Water. Tales are told throughout the Southlands of the fabulous lost treasures of the genies that supposedly rest here.

Ammalsine was built thousands of years ago by marids exiled from their home plane for angering Saliandla, the great Pasha of the Pearl Fane. Their leader, Vali Yehlahssiel the Illustrious, ordered the construction of splendid domed buildings and elegant spires on the bottom of the lake, creating an underwater city of gleaming shells and coral, wondrous to behold. The marid ruler and his court accepted tribute from the people of Munayo who lived on Debari's surface, and in return, allowed the mortals to fish the lake and dive for pearls.

Around 3,000 years ago, disaster struck. The Lukwata, a behemoth over 100 feet long, emerged from the portal and attacked Ammalsine. Although the marids fought back, only a few escaped with their lives as the leviathan destroyed many of the city's domes and towers. The Lukwata's rampage was finally stopped by the titan Kambe, who put the leviathan to sleep. Today, the mighty creature still slumbers at the center of the portal in the deepest part of the lake.

Several of Ammalsine's tallest minarets survived the onslaught; the tops of these towers come within 100 feet of the surface of the lake, clearly visible from boats above. Those who want to explore the ruins should avoid angering the handful of surviving **marids** living in the ancient city with their **undine** servants (*Creature Codex*, p. 362) and pet **hunter sharks**. A few buildings are still intact; these are protected by powerful magic wards. Many of the structures are shrouded by forests of freshwater kelp, making navigation difficult.

Adventurers who want to use the portal 500 feet below the surface of the lake to reach the elemental planes must get past the sleeping Lukwata—a double-sized **isonade** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 257) with 336 hit points. The people of Munayo will do whatever it takes to discourage anyone planning such an expedition.

BROKEN DUNES

Midway between Lake Debari and the Utunga Mountains is an area of badlands filled with sandstone domes, slot canyons, and natural arches and bridges. The colorful rock formations of the Broken Dunes are thousands of years old, scored with cross-hatched patterns created by centuries of erosion.

A tribe of **kryt** (*Creature Codex*, p. 243) live in a series of caves in the area and are known for their ability to see into the future by reading sacrificial entrails. Persuading them to reveal their findings without becoming part of the sacrifice is another matter.

CLIFF MONASTERIES OF KIMVAI CANYON

More than a score of ancient ruins lie scattered throughout the rift canyon of Kimvai. Humans and heruti carved these dwellings high into the canyon walls. The large, cavernous structures seem scaled for titans, although the titans' traditional iconography is mixed with scenes of terrible madness and bloodshed. Flocks of heruti, human tribes, and mixed groups occupy these precariously situated dwellings; some are worshipers of dark gods. Those in the southern half of the valley overlook the river that feeds the great Kimvai Lake at the canyon's outflow. The river pours from a gigantic, ancient aqueduct at the valley's midpoint, and it stretches back into the Chando Mountains.

A few heru-dominated communities live in the southern portion of the valley, fishing from the lake. These monasteries only receive visitors once they have been questioned by the council of elders. Those who are deemed acceptable (by succeeding on a DC 20 Charisma check) can meet the heruti inside the monastery, and those who are not must wait or perform favors for the flock before being considered again. In extreme cases, those who anger the elders are cast to the stones below.

Three of the cliff monasteries are occupied by humans who swear to truly be titans. They claim to have been magically reduced to the stature of humans. To date, no investigation has conclusively proved the truth of these claims, but it is a fact that these humans' scribes can decipher the ancient titan scripts. Others require magic to do the same.

MANADAI

This settlement of sorcerers on the northwest coast of Lake Debari is insular and well protected. The sorcerers live in a fort-like tower, where they conduct experiments that involve mixing samples from the lake with mystical Urd water, which they travel to Nangui annually to obtain. They do their work at the behest of their leader, the imperious First Occultist Rilnor Mavru (NE male human **mage**), who has designs on expanding his influence throughout the Abandoned Lands.

The sorcerers' latest experiment requires ten gallons of water brought back from the Plane of Water. They have considered trying to use the portal at the bottom of the lake, but they are wary of the Lukwata sleeping nearby. If only they could find some ambitious (and expendable) adventurers to make the attempt ...



NMABI, TROLLKIN KINGDOM

In the hills east of Morreg is the up-and-coming Kingdom of Nmabi the Wise, founded by Nmabi Makumba, who was an adventurer from Kush before he had the unfortunate luck to die and be reincarnated as a zimwi-kin. The experience drove the charismatic Nmabi insane. Believing himself to be a divine king, he convinced nearly 2,000 other trollkin to join him, becoming his devoted subjects. King Nmabi uses the statistics of a **trollkin reaver** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 390), with the following additional trait, common to all zimwi-kin:

Fierce Leap. If the trollkin moves at least 10 feet toward a creature and hits it with a melee attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is knocked prone, the trollkin can make a bite attack against it as a bonus action.

Over the past 10 years, King Nmabi and his followers have constructed the fortress-capital of Ptolem on the edge of the Abandoned Lands. With his base secured and growing numbers of trollkin flocking to his banner, Nmabi is ready to expand his realm's borders. He has set his sights on the city of Adulis and has led several raids into Morregi territory astride his trained war mount, a **ngobou** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 115). So far, these attacks have been anticipated by Morregi divinations and ultimately repelled by the nation's well-trained warriors. Nevertheless, the trollkin have inflicted significant casualties on the enemy.

POLINKAI

A former ramag settlement that was a lesser node of Ramagani, Polinkai lies in ruins after it was destroyed around 50 years ago by an **adult wasteland dragon** (*Creature Codex*, p. 119) named Teskhalera. The dragon now lairs in the ruins, and has assembled a hoard of curious devices, magic items, and ancient coins from the days of Glorious Umbuso. Teskhalera enjoys experimenting with these artifacts, which sometimes produce unusual effects that extend throughout the ruins; roll on the Primal Magic Events table on page 183 to determine what happens. Visiting explorers might also witness a battle between two ghostly titans and their minions or hear the incomprehensible mutterings of alien beings from beyond the Void.

Teskhalera has been known to spare the lives of intruders if they agree to fetch him new items to add to his collection. Avaricious and paranoid, the dragon is unwilling to leave his hoard long enough to gather his own loot.

RUBY SPIRE

Built on top of a mesa overlooking Lake Debari, this 300-foot-tall tower of red crystal is visible from many miles away, glinting brightly in the sunlight. The Ruby Spire was once occupied by the bird-faced titan Iwentaka, who ruled over a large swath of territory in the northern part of what is now the Abandoned Lands, and it was said to allow her to control the weather on the Aggesal Plains.

The spire has no visible entrances. *Dimension door* might provide access, but no one who has used the spell recently to travel inside the tower has since reappeared.

TREEHOMES OF THE MAFRI

Roughly two dozen villages of the Mafri tribe hang suspended in the jungle canopy to the east of Lignas. The Mafri are people of Morregi descent—fierce jungle hunters who keep sacred snakes as bonded companions. The tribe allows snakes to roam its communities unmolested, believing that the serpents provide fertility and longevity to its members. Mafri hunters who bond with a serpent companion learn snake-like talents and eventually can assume serpentine form themselves.

Mafri origin tales speak of a rain of stone, metal, and fire that drove the tribesfolk from their original lands to take refuge in the cavernous sinkholes that littered the landscape, where the great serpents of the earth protected them from devastation. In gratitude, the Mafri worshiped the eldest serpents, and out of respect they took to the trees, believing that their new gods deserved to have the ground to themselves.

The Mafri maintain shrines in caves and sinkholes, and they come down to earth to worship at them. These shrines are decorated with statues of snake-headed humans, snakes with human arms, and snakes erupting from the bodies of humans.

Serpentfolk of Yig (*Creature Codex*, p. 324) live deep in the sinkholes, masquerading as the gods of the Mafri. They consider the humans to be their personal, tamed herd of surface people, who bring them whatever they desire and serve as a buffer against enemies.

TWISTING TOWER

Like a tumorous growth on an otherwise unremarkable stretch of grassland, the Twisting Tower seems as out of place as it is ominous. This 250-foot-tall conical tower's highest windows shine with an eerie luminescence. Formerly an isolated retreat for a reclusive titan archmage, the three-story tower was where he conducted his most dangerous experiments.

As the tower's master succumbed to the plague of

madness, he abandoned his body, sending his mind into the stones of his former home. Quite insane, the now-sentient tower reshapes its stone walls to crush any would-be thieves who dare enter.

The basement holds the titan's storehouse of ancient knowledge and arcane devices, including the secret to sealing his crazed mind back inside his skeletal remains, which are lying on the top floor.

WEBWORKS OF THE SKITTERING ONES

The dark rainforest here is the domain of monstrous creatures known as the Skittering Ones. They were once simple humans, but long ago they made a pact with the inscrutable spider demon lord, Nash-Sed-Caki. When that pact went awry, they were transformed into hideous spider-like humanoids with demonic blood.

These evil humanoids and their giant spider allies weave their villages high in the branches; the strongest settlements are led by spellcasters with lesser demons as their lieutenants.

A few unscrupulous merchants pursue a grisly silent trade with communities of Skittering Ones near the shore. These unsavory traders bring a chain of slaves to the edge of the rainforest. First, they leave one poor soul for the Skittering Ones. If the sacrifice meets with their approval, the spiders cocoon the individual and leave a quantity of valuable treated spidersilk in exchange. The



UNUSUAL TREASURES

d10 Item

- 1 A thin metal can with a small, resealable opening.
- 2 A mesh pouch filled with small nuggets of an edible substance that never spoils.
- 3 Folded squares of parchment that seem blank until touched in the center. They then produce an image of an unknown face, or of the bearer's face.
- 4 A metal ring that, when slipped over an object, turns it a bright primary color for a day.
- 5 A short length of cable, 6 feet long, with a small knot on either end. The cable is immensely strong and durable (AC 21, 20 hp, resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from nonmagical weapons), but it is otherwise unremarkable.
- 6 A small rod with a crystal on the tip and a button; it hums when the button is pressed but seemingly does nothing else.
- 7 A palm-sized, rectangular box made of horn with no openings and two buttons. Pressing one button causes the box to say something unintelligible and then cry out.
- 8 An egg-shaped container filled with a lump of viscous, malleable material the size of a baby's fist. If struck with a *shocking grasp* cantrip, the material holds its shape for 6 hours and becomes very durable (AC 19, 18 hp).
- 9 A charcoal lozenge about two fingers wide and long, hanging from a leather cord. Twice per day, if immersed in up to 5 gallons of water, it removes non-poisonous impurities from the liquid, even turning salt water to fresh water. If used more than twice in a day, it turns light gray and does not function for 1d4 + 1 days thereafter.
- 10 A featureless mask of shiny metal. When put on, it changes to display the face of the person who wore it previously.



process repeats until both parties are satisfied, whereupon the merchants take the bales of spidersilk back to their ships. This silk is expensive (100 gp per bale) but extremely popular with the wealthy families in Shibai, Ishadia, and all along the Spice Coast, who love to dress in fine clothes woven from the material.

Skittering Ones use the statistics of **ettercaps** and also have immunity to poison damage and to the poisoned condition. Their leaders have humanoid upper bodies and the abdomen and legs of a spider. They use the statistics of **driders**, except that the Fey Ancestry trait is replaced by immunity to poison damage and to the poisoned condition.

oddties in the abandoned lands

With the detritus of so many destroyed and once-overlapping cultures littering the landscape, characters will surely come across odd relics or mysterious bits of junk. The table below offers suggestions for detailing random items discovered in the Abandoned Lands. These small treasures might or might not have alchemical, extraordinary, or magical powers, at the GM's discretion.

history of the abandoned lands

Around 3,000 years ago, Glorious Umbuso collapsed as the titans descended into madness, and the Lukwata destroyed the underwater city of Ammalsine. The ley line web that had been constructed by the titans and the ramag unraveled, spilling uncontrolled magic into the wilderness, thereby creating the Abandoned Lands.

Shocked by the fate that had befallen their masters, the ramag shunned contact with the outside world as they battled to keep the connections between the districts of Ramagani intact, while simultaneously avoiding the chaos spreading through the broken lattice of ley lines. Most of the titans' human subjects fled to the edges of the empire to escape the devastation. Some refugees from the lake-town of Munayo sought new homes on dry land, but, ill prepared for the madness that greeted them, they perished. The Mafri fled westward and settled in the tree-covered hills to the east of the Olu Jungle.

In the centuries that followed, most humans and other mortal races shunned the Abandoned Lands—but not all. Around 800 years after the collapse, a race of sorcerers called the Xangui-Xa built a great city in the Olu Jungle. Here they performed powerful incantations, diverting the shattered magical roads of the titans so they led to new destinations. Xangui-Xa lasted for 200 years until the sorcerers succumbed to the arcane wasting disease and died out, leaving their white ape servants behind.

Five hundred years ago the ramag reopened their city to the outside world, establishing trade houses to deal with merchants and docks in Port Monolith to accommodate foreign ships. Tragedy struck 200 years later when a dimensional rift to the Void opened in the district of Thakathi, unleashing hordes of aberrations. Unable to defeat the creatures, the ramag were forced to evacuate the district and close the connection to its monoliths.

To defeat their enemies, the Cattle Queens of Terrotu, the tribes of the Mbalenhle Forest made an ill-advised pact with the spider demon Nash-Sed-Caki 400 years ago. Those tribesfolk became the Skittering Ones, a race of spider-like humanoids.

Three hundred years ago, the arcane constructs and wards maintaining the Hall of Creatures in Gala'ikos began to malfunction, unleashing dinosaurs, megafauna and other strange beasts into the surrounding lands.

The ramag were forced to abandon another node of Ramagani, the district on Black Lotus Mesa, 110 years ago to curtail the spread of arcane wasting that had swept through the city. Then, about 50 years ago, the minor node of Polinkai was destroyed by the wasteland dragon Teskhalera. Twenty years later, the ramag portal master Thabo Danai led an expedition to Thakathi and became corrupted by the Void. After slaughtering his fellow portal masters, Thabo established a cult in the ruins, today led by his son Mpho Danai.

Twenty-two years ago, the zimwi-kin Nmabi Makumba founded a new trollkin kingdom on the western edge in the unclaimed lands to the west of Lake Debari.

Thirteen years ago, the Ruby Spire was visited by a group of normal-sized people from Kimvai Canyon claiming to be titans. The tower glowed brightly every night for a month after they disappeared inside.

current events

The broken ley line web makes life unpredictable in the Abandoned Lands. Recent events of note concern new dilemmas and threats facing both Ramagani and Munayo.

THE END OF THE LUMINOUS ROAD

Zinckkra has ruled the ramag for 13 years, and his health is beginning to fail, so it will soon be time for a new King or Queen of the Luminous Roads to be chosen. The outgoing king wants to be entombed in one of the inactive monoliths in Thakathi, with a view to reclaiming the ruined district if the threat of the void cultists can be dealt with. Meanwhile, the lost ramag of Black Lotus Mesa are also seeking to reopen connections with the rest of Ramagani (see "Ramag Reunification", page 120).

The front-runners to succeed Zinchekra are Hayat, Elder of the Port, and Jadnalisifa, current leader of the portal masters. Hayat has increased Ramagani's wealth through the expansion of the docks at Port Monolith, and she wants to open the city to more lucrative foreign trade. She is particularly keen on increasing trade with the sorcerers of Nangui, the demon-friendly Kushite capital, and advocates reclaiming the lost districts. The more conservative Jadnalisifa is renowned for sealing three portals that posed a danger to the city. She counsels against exposing the ramag to unnecessary risks through closer ties with the sinister Kushites, and she will not look favorably on reestablishing connections to either of the lost districts if elected.

RIPPLES IN THE LAKE

The Lukwata has been lying dormant on the bottom of Lake Debari for 3,000 years, ever since the titan Kambe put an end to its rampage through the marid city of Ammalsine. In recent years, though, signs have appeared that the great behemoth is beginning to stir. The first incident occurred three years ago when the creature flicked its tail in its sleep, bringing one of the city's still-standing towers crashing down. Ten months later, the Lukwata showed signs of life again; this time, its movement sent waves across the surface of the lake big enough to capsize fishing boats.

Now, the occurrences are growing closer and closer together and the elders of Munayo are debating what to do. The Dreaming Mother has suggested an expedition to Gala'ikos in case they need the titan's help again.

adventure seeds

The unique heritage of the Abandoned Lands—from Glorious Umbuso and beyond—and its perils mean that the region is ripe for adventurers to explore, whether they're in search of lost treasures or simply hoping to become heroes of legends.

BREAKING THE CHAINS

A mad ramag sorcerer named Mhendelen the Scarred means to release the three dark gods imprisoned in Gala'ikos from their titan-forged manacles and harness their power for his own. He has struck a bargain with the rocks, who were awed by the flock of albino heruti who serve him. The demons now search the ruins for the keys to unlock the gods' chains. The characters have been warned by the doom-mongering kryt (see "Broken Dunes", page

193) about what will happen if Mhendelen's schemes come to fruition and the dark gods are unleashed. They travel to Gala'ikos to keep the keys out of the demons' talons, while simultaneously avoiding the degenerate titans marauding through the ruined city.

HUNTING PARTY

A group of wealthy and not very bright thrill-seekers hires the adventurers to lead them on an expedition into the Abandoned Lands in search of big game, the bigger the better. Can the characters keep their idiotic patrons alive long enough for them to bag a dinosaur or an oliphant? Or will their patience run out and let them get chomped?

ONE GOOD TURN ...

The characters have heard rumors of an ancient site where a divine spark is waiting to be claimed, and they need permission from the portal masters to use the Wall of Gates. The ramag are willing to oblige, but they insist the party first help the Ley Wardens repair a broken ley line or join a Scaled Keepers aerial patrol.

ORACLE OF THE LAKE

The characters hear that an oracle who lives in the floating village of Munayo is skilled in divination and talks of threads that extend beyond the worlds. When they arrive in Munayo, they learn that the Dreaming Mother regularly speaks to a ghostly marid who is trapped in the ruined city of Ammalsine beneath the lake.

Recently, a villager has claimed that the voice in the deep is not a benevolent one, and that the Dreaming Mother is jeopardizing the people of Munayo by maintaining contact with the entity. Exiled for his accusations, he asks the characters to visit Ammalsine to determine the marid's true motivations. The ghostly marid's most recent advice to the Dreaming Mother has been to awaken Kambe, but doing that may not be a good idea if the sleeping titan is insane ...

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Traders have bartered with the Skittering Ones for a long time, but several merchants of Shibai have grown weary of the dealings and want to possess their own spidersilk producers. They organize an expedition to enter the jungle and capture several of the spiders that create the silk. Can the adventurers complete the mission without causing an uproar among the Skittering Ones, or will they be chased all the way back to their waiting ships?

hives of the tosculi



The tosculi are a race of winged humanoid wasp-folk, bent on overrunning and consuming any culture in their path. Their sculpted mud hives and bulbous towers are a dark omen in all the Southlands, particularly in the Abandoned Lands, and when the tosculi threaten to expand into neighboring territories, all creatures and races involved set aside their differences to thwart their common enemy.

Thousands of tosculi live in each hive, ruled by a **tosculi hive-queen** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 384), who is attended by **tosculi jeweled drones** (*Creature Codex*, p. 355) that serve as her advisors and sometimes consorts. Each queen is certain that her way is best, so the major hives are widely separated (both physically and psychologically) and rarely cooperate with one another. If the hivefolk ever start to work in concert to incorporate all the Southlands into their territory,



things would go very badly for the humans, dwarves, and other non-chitinous races. Six major hives are described in this chapter, but there are also at least a dozen lesser hives across the Southlands, each ruled by a hive-queen with her own lair actions and regional effects.

Following the designs of their arch-devil patron, Arbeyach, Prince of Swarms, the tosculi terrorize nearby communities by kidnapping living creatures to serve as hosts for their eggs. The tosculi's heavier, bulkier warriors bring paralyzed victims back to the queen's chamber, where the eggs are implanted. These eggs later hatch into hungry larvae that grow into **tosculi drones** or **tosculi warriors** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 386). The tosculi's most capable combatants undergo ritual transformations to become **spawn of Arbeyach** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 97).

A vast swarm of tosculi from Titan's Hive attacks the ankole-herding warriors of Terrotu.



The smallest tosculi raiding parties are “wings” of four or five drones led by a warrior sergeant. Such a group is usually seeking little more than a warm body to serve as a meal or a hatching ground for eggs: any goat, human, or antelope will do. Larger flying companies of twenty warriors under the command of a **tosculi elite bow raider** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 386) are often charged with a particular task, such as raiding a caravan or scouting a village.

Most formidable of all are the swarms. Numbering between 200 and 400 tosculi, a swarm includes drones, warriors, “swarm masters” (druids), and “flights” (flying drone scouts), led by a cadre of elite bow raiders. The largest swarms are capable of assaulting a village or a town and taking all the residents back to the hive to be used as egg hosts or food.

culture and customs

The tosculi are a disciplined and organized race, obeying the commands of their queens and continuously working to expand and perpetuate their race. Relying on their ironclad internal hierarchy, the tosculi work together to subjugate the landscape and the races around them. Capable of complex and long-term planning, their hardy nature and ability to survive in deserts, stony hills, and barren plains make the tosculi a serious threat to the future of all other Southlanders.

Even though the tosculi are a highly regimented, cooperative species, not everyone fits in. Some tosculi drones resist the orders of their queen and the thoughts of the hive mind. Others are physically unsuited to the tasks for which they were bred. Such nonconformity is not allowed in tosculi society, and these renegades must flee to avoid being killed. Tosculi shunned by society in this manner are called “hiveless” by the others—an insult often spat out at these outcasts as if it were an epithet. These outcasts must try to thrive in a world where they are feared and reviled, making their way as best they can. See *Southlands Player’s Guide* for more about the tosculi hiveless and playing a tosculi character.

religion among the tosculi

The tosculi are distinctly different from most of their neighbors physically and psychologically, but they also have gods and goddesses and a stolid, persistent patron who guides the queens of the hives and the warband leaders and gives comfort to drones and workers.

The pantheon begins with Arbeyach, the Prince of Swarms and the founder of the species. His spawn and servants are granted wide latitude, and his prophecies

are treated with utmost seriousness. No other god comes close to the reverence that Arbeyach commands among the tosculi.

Among the hives, though, there are needs that require attention that Arbeyach might not have time for. For that reason, two goddesses are also commonly worshiped in the hives. Wadjet, the Mother of Cobras and goddess of both prophecy and dooms, is revered for her knowledge. Selket, the Goddess of Scorpions, is favored for her ferocity in the hunt as well as her healing touch, which restores warriors and prevents illness from overwhelming a hive.

Competing male gods among the tosculi are all of relatively low status. The True Aten, the Lord of Light, is seen as a conquering hero and a sort of tosculi warlord, full of tricks and stratagems, as well as being a more active, fiery figure than Arbeyach, who is sometimes slow to act. The True Aten’s fiery nature sometimes brings glorious success, but just as often his rash actions lead to disaster, so his worshipers are seen as less trustworthy than those of Arbeyach and the female gods. Likewise of relatively



low status is Shu, Lord of Wind and Sky, who is seen as a master of archery and the law, and an even-handed, sober judge of right action.

Mot, the White Goddess, Set, the Hunter, and even Nakresh have adherents among the tosculi, depending on the predilections of the queen of the hive. If a hive is taken over by a new leader, the faith of the queen's subjects changes to correspond with the beliefs and attitudes of the queen. As a result of this dynamic, a tosculi temple long known to travelers as a sanctum of Selket might become a mortuary of Mot overnight.

great hive of arbeyach

South of Siwal, high in the hills, is a region that is within sight of caravan trails but avoided by all but the bravest travelers: the fused stones and towers of the Great Hive of Arbeyach, greatest of the tosculi hive-cities.

In their language, this place is called Crecretelock, and it was the first city to embrace the patronage of the arch-devil Arbeyach, Prince of Swarms. It is where Ia'Affrat, the herald of Arbeyach, makes his residence when he is not on one of his excursions. In the eyes of humans, dwarves, and other civilized races, it is an abomination that should not exist but which they have little hope of extinguishing.

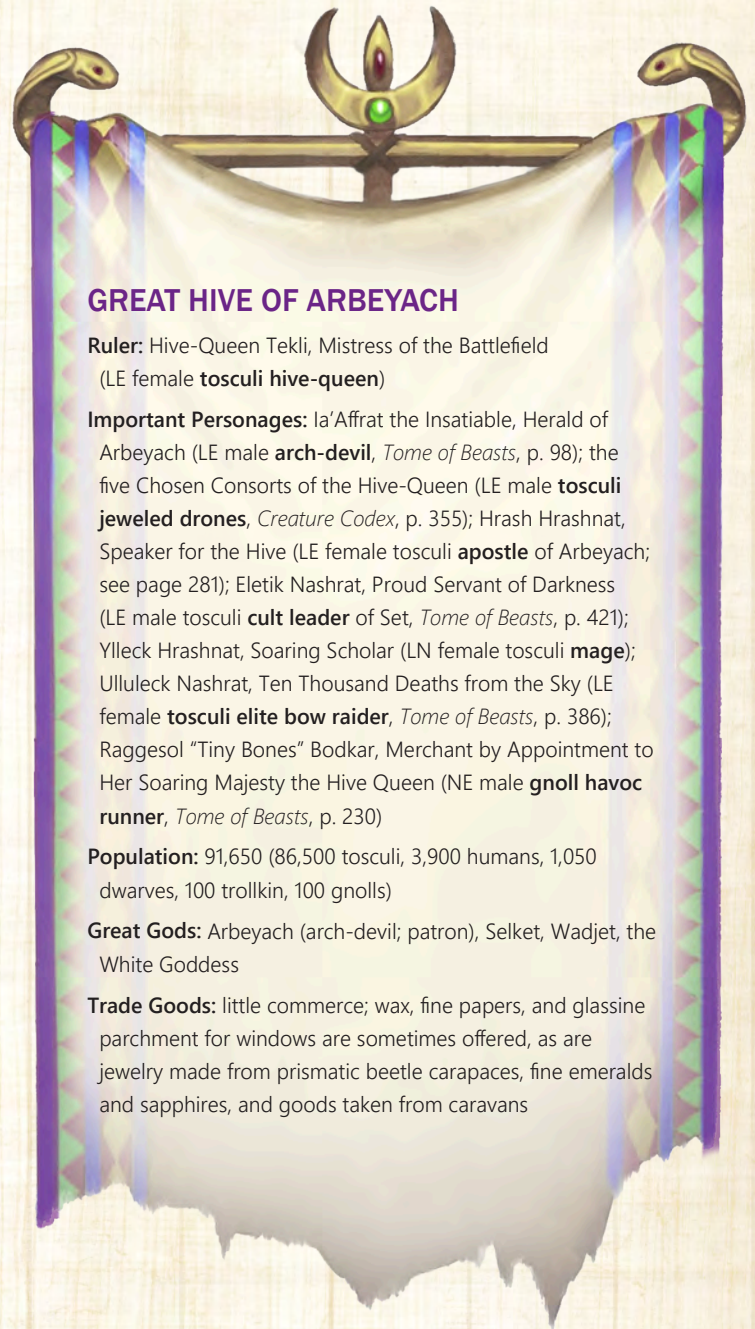
Though all tosculi are dangerous, the tosculi of the Great Hive are the most fanatical and organized of their kind; they have immunity to the frightened condition whenever they are within 20 miles of their hive-queen. They are always seeking hosts for their eggs and new sources of offerings for their dark lord, his spawn, and his herald Ia'Affrat.

The city is a mixture of small, dome-shaped hives and several much larger, chimney-like structures, some of them 200 feet tall. They contain dozens of hollow chambers connected by exterior spiraling halls and by ledges large enough to accommodate Small and Medium (but not Large) flying creatures.

HOME OF THE HERALD

The herald of Arbeyach, Ia'Affrat, a bullying creature who long ago shed his human form for a body composed of hellish wasp swarms, often roams the city. Ia'Affrat sees the tosculi as dirty and boring and ugly—and he wants to make them into something better. He considers them his personal servants and is fond of them in the way a cruel elder brother is fond of younger siblings; he abuses and chastises them, but woe to anyone else who is hostile toward them.

Ia'Affrat has ambitious plans to take over first the Spice Coast, then Siwal, Makuria, and more, but his schemes



GREAT HIVE OF ARBEYACH

Ruler: Hive-Queen Tekli, Mistress of the Battlefield (LE female **tosculi hive-queen**)

Important Personages: Ia'Affrat the Insatiable, Herald of Arbeyach (LE male **arch-devil**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 98); the five Chosen Consorts of the Hive-Queen (LE male **tosculi jeweled drones**, *Creature Codex*, p. 355); Hrash Hrashnat, Speaker for the Hive (LE female tosculi **apostle** of Arbeyach; see page 281); Eletik Nashrat, Proud Servant of Darkness (LE male tosculi **cult leader** of Set, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 421); Ylleck Hrashnat, Soaring Scholar (LN female tosculi **mage**); Ulluleck Nashrat, Ten Thousand Deaths from the Sky (LE female **tosculi elite bow raider**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 386); Raggesol "Tiny Bones" Bodkar, Merchant by Appointment to Her Soaring Majesty the Hive Queen (NE male **gnoll havoc runner**, *Tome of Beasts*, p. 230)

Population: 91,650 (86,500 tosculi, 3,900 humans, 1,050 dwarves, 100 trollkin, 100 gnolls)

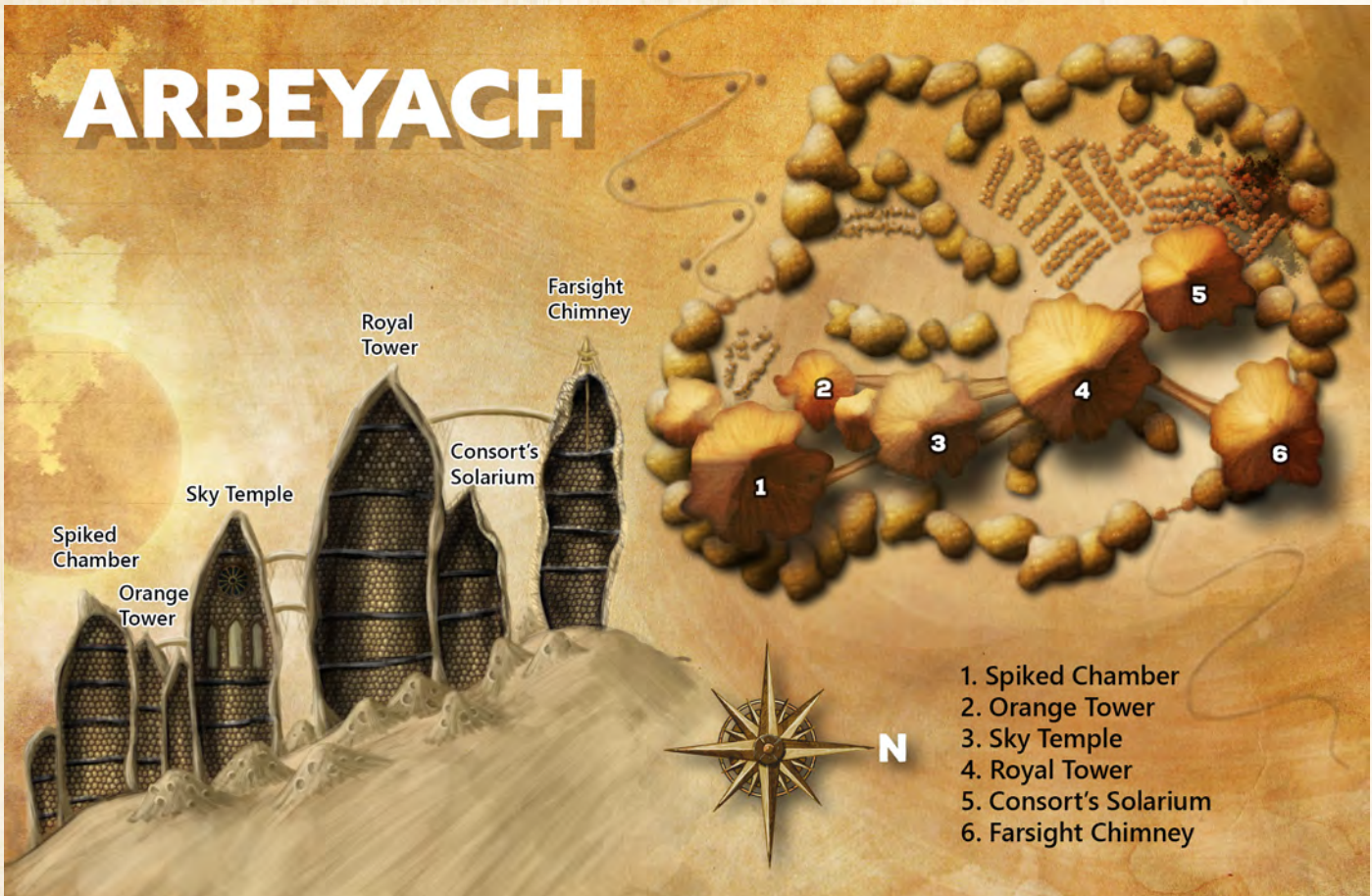
Great Gods: Arbeyach (arch-devil; patron), Selket, Wadjet, the White Goddess

Trade Goods: little commerce; wax, fine papers, and glassine parchment for windows are sometimes offered, as are jewelry made from prismatic beetle carapaces, fine emeralds and sapphires, and goods taken from caravans

rely on cooperation between the different tosculi hives. He is incensed that the other tosculi hives lack, in his mind, the necessary vision or the proper devotion to Arbeyach. Ia'Affrat does not rule anywhere, but he is rightly feared and has a way of showing up unannounced, inhabiting a different host body every time. In the past, he has gone out on vengeful excursions, stalking and killing tosculi who are outcasts, exiles, or heretics against Arbeyach. This time, to realize his dreams of conquest, Ia'Affrat is about to embark on a tour of the major hives to cajole each hive-queen into attending a great Conclave of the Swarm. See "Current Events," page 207, for more on Ia'Affrat's current schemes.



ARBAYACH



1. Spiked Chamber
2. Orange Tower
3. Sky Temple
4. Royal Tower
5. Consort's Solarium
6. Farsight Chimney

Ia'Affrat's chambers in the Great Hive are guarded by a dozen spawn of Arbeyach, and no one is allowed to approach him without permission. Arbeyach does not visit the Great Hive personally, instead relying on his herald to ensure that order is maintained and worship ceremonies are frequent.

The Great Hive was attacked about 70 years ago by a combined force led by the Eyes of Aten and priests of Aten, including Nurian spear troops, gnoll mercenary havoc runners, dwarf paladins, and other factions, all supported by sandships from Siwal, shabti-powered siege engines, and a great theurge of Thoth-Hermes. The effort collapsed several honeycombed chimney-towers and almost succeeded in taking the entire city, but the tosculi eventually drove back the attackers when the defenders were reinforced by warriors arriving from Corpsehive and Titan's Hive in answer to a summons from Ia'Affrat. The human and dwarven casualties during the invaders' retreat were heavy, and the tosculi murdered any who tried to surrender. The memories of this experience have so far dissuaded anyone from making another assault on Great Hive, but it's only a matter of time before another alliance of good folk tries to see the job through.

SECTORS OF THE GREAT HIVE

The hive-city is organized into specialized sectors, and it is highly vertical; most of its inhabitants can climb or fly without difficulty. The landmarks described below are the city's most significant features.

Spiked Chamber

This chimney is used as a marketplace, a storehouse, an armory, and the home of most of the hive's merchants and soldiers.

Mercantile Activity. The market area inside this chamber offers goods that include many incenses and items whose purpose is entirely mysterious to human eyes. Also sold here are chitin-scrapers (to keep your carapace shiny) and stringed instruments that produce dissonant sounds when played. More useful is tosculi paper (see page 209), made from pulped reeds mixed with tosculi saliva, then treated with alchemical reagents to give it water resistant properties; it is much in demand for wizards' spellbooks.

The successful gnoll merchant Raggesol Bodkar is one of the few non-tosculi based here; he sells goods plundered by tosculi raiders to gnolls, to the darker markets of Kush, and up and down the Spice Coast.

Merchants from Kush, usually attended by fiendish bodyguards, cultists from Aksaba, and emissaries of the Saffron Rajah are among those outsiders allowed into the hive to trade.

Warrior Barracks. The barracks in the Spiked Chamber are spotless, well ordered, and almost always overfull with warriors. Troops are housed in rooms that each hold up to thirty warriors; officers have their own quarters. The tosculi warriors often conduct raids against caravans, small villages, or nomads who drift into lands claimed by the Great Hive.

Green Raider's Hall. The most successful raiders of the Hive of Arbeyach are the Hive Queen's Own Raiders, a company of one hundred tosculi elite bow raiders. Each member is slightly larger and more scarred than other tosculi, and each wears a green silk band somewhere on its body as a mark of their status. Their commander is the archer and tactical genius, Ulluleck Nashrat. She is often referred to by her title, Ten Thousand Deaths from the Sky, or just "Ten Thousand."

Orange Tower

Made of a variety of clay that glows orange in the midday sun, this chimney houses a mishmash of inhabitants, including papermakers, jewelers, and other artisans, swarm-tenders, and other roles carried out by the drones.

Swarm Chamber. The tosculi keep dozens of swarms of wasps here in honor of Arbeyach, the Prince of Swarms. The tosculi sometimes release these swarms against enemies; at other times, the swarms are immolated in sacrificial ceremonies to please the arch-devil.

Wax Market. Waxes, oils, and unguents are traded here, as well as incense and incense burners, and tosculi jelly. Tosculi living items are also available in the marketplace; for more information on these items, see page 208.

Sky Temple

This chimney is devoted to Arbeyach, and it is where many of the warriors, waxmakers, butchers, and builders live. Most of this tower is used for residences; its exterior is marked with the symbols of Arbeyach and his spawn.

Offering Platform. The Sky Temple has a flat, open platform set with pillars and chains where animals, rebellious slaves, and captured soldiers are offered in sacrifice to Arbeyach (and less often, to Set, the White Goddess, or Kwansi; the Hunter, in contrast, accepts no chained sacrifices). Speaker for the Hive Hrash Hrashnat and Proud Servant of Darkness Eletik Nashrat can often be found here conducting sacrifices to their respective deities.

The Herald's Perch. A small apartment is set aside for the use of Ia'Affrat and the spawn of Arbeyach that accompany and guard him. It is a place of great status; the chambers

are said to be furnished in rich orange wood and golden and sapphire carpets and furnishings.

Royal Tower

This chimney is the hub of the hive's governance. Residing inside are the Hive-Queen, her many consorts, and an array of victims with tosculi eggs implanted in them.

Brood-Chambers. The chambers of the Hive-Queen Tekli are roughly circular in form, with sloping flat walls like the sides of a dodecahedron. Three of the walls in each chamber shine with orange light. The rooms include a lavish chantry, a somber reflection chamber, and a utilitarian sparring chamber; the Hive-Queen is fond of martial prowess and multiweapon combat. Rumors claim that she sometimes invites visitors to her Brood-Chambers merely to insult and then dismember them.

Pupae Halls. Tosculi eggs are implanted in living hosts that are housed here. The less said about these halls, the better; most who see inside the chamber do not survive the experience.





THE INSATIABLE WARBAND

Although no one wants to be dragged off to the Great Hive of Arbeyach to serve as hosts for the queen's eggs, there is at least a faint hope of survival or escape. There is no such hope if a village comes under attack from the Insatiable Warband, the elite fighting force of la'Affrat, Arbeyach's herald. It was the warband's complete annihilation of the Dachdaru oasis that provoked the Eyes of Aten and the combined armies of Nuria and Siwal into attacking the Great Hive 70 years ago.

The Insatiable Warband is composed of five companies of twenty **tosculi drones** and **tosculi warriors**, each led by a **tosculi elite bow raider** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 384). In overall command is la'Affrat's favored devotee Uzzjaarek, Swarm Master of the Circle of the Hive, who joyfully orders its troops to lay waste to wherever its diabolic master wishes. Uzzjaarek uses the **tosculi elite bow raider** stat block with the following changes:

- It has an Intelligence score of 14 and a Wisdom score of 16.
- It gains the following trait:

Spellcasting. The swarm master is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The swarm master has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft*, *poison spray*, *shillelagh*
 1st level (4 slots): *entangle*, *fog cloud*, *thunderwave*
 2nd level (3 slots): *pass without trace*, *poisoned volley**,
spike growth
 3rd level (3 slots): *call lightning*, *dispel magic*, *plant growth*
 4th level (2 slots): *blight*, *giant insect*
 5th level (1 slot): *insect plague*

*indicates a spell found in *Midgard Heroes Handbook* and *Deep Magic*

A **spawn of Arbeyach** is assigned to each company, capable of using its Hive Mind ability to communicate with the rest of the warband and ensuring every single member of the host is alert to potential dangers. la'Affrat is also aware of what the Hive Mind is thinking while he is within 5 miles of it.

Using the Insatiable Warband. The Insatiable Warband leaves obvious traces of its presence in its wake, and the characters might come across a settlement that has been wiped out—its inhabitants and livestock slaughtered, homes razed to the ground, etc. Next, they might run into one or two companies of tosculi, before witnessing the whole swarm in action. If they continue pursuing the warband, they might even encounter la'Affrat himself.

jet. The floor is always covered with a carpet of locusts, wasps, and beetles. Visitors can expect to have their carapace scoured by these vermin—an invigorating experience for tosculi, but painful for soft-skinned races. The Hive-Queen speaks little; most of her audiences are carried out through functionaries, ministers, and officers. Her voice is rarely heard, but said to be melodious and always half-song, half-arcane speech.

Consorts' Solarium

The Five Chosen Consorts of the Hive-Queen Tekli live short lives, as she tires of her consorts quickly. One of them is sacrificed to Arbeyach every other month or so, but for as long as they enjoy her favor, they feast, frolic, and amuse themselves in this well-lit, warm, and sweet-smelling chimney, where servants tend to their every whim. Bored with their confinement, they enjoy hearing news and tall tales from the outside world and often demand that non-tosculi be brought here to share gossip about human caravans and settlements.

Farsight Chimney

The Farsight Chimney is the farthest up the hilltop, and it serves as a lookout over all approaches to the hive. The watchers there are keen-eyed during daylight but can see only a limited distance with their darkvision at night, making a nighttime approach preferable for those seeking to sneak into the city.

other major hives

The hives described below are the largest and most feared of the other tosculi territories. Other hives exist elsewhere in the deserts, hills, and mountains of the Southlands, but these are smaller, younger colonies, numbering anywhere from two dozen individuals up to a few thousand.

BAHIMA AZAR

Located between the gnoll-controlled lands of Dabu Zavoa and Dabu Uhlza, Bahima Azar is the youngest and smallest of the major hives, consisting of a dozen or so columns hidden among the rock pillars and sandstone formations of the badlands. The hive lies on the Serpent's Path ley line and is built atop a portal to Bzeletalet, the Buzzing Hell of Insects, home to Duke Arbeyach himself.

Bahima Azar (population 28,000) was founded just over 200 years ago when Arbeyach's diabolic servants opened a portal from the Eleven Hells so that his tosculi foot soldiers might establish a new bridgehead in the Southlands. The portal is situated in an underground room close to the queen's chamber and still operates in both directions, although a key is needed to activate it.

Queen's Audience Chamber. Set with dozens of prisms, diamonds, sapphires, and other precious stones, this enclosure is dominated by a floating throne of carved

Occasionally an **automata devil** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 102) or an **ice devil** will come through with an entourage of lesser devils and sow discord among the gnolls or the Narumbeki until it is banished back to the Hells.

The tosculi of Bahima Azar have red markings on their black carapaces and are resistant to fire damage, as befits their infernal heritage. Their Hive-Queen, Zhurkezzik, shares a mental connection with her arch-devil patron that interferes with her ability to control the hive. The queen has found she can dampen down this connection by drinking the waters of the Pool of the Sky (see page 94), and dispatches one or two squads of warriors to the pool every so often to bring back jars filled with the liquid. These tosculi often come into conflict with the gnoll followers of Ama Ninshu who guard the pool against defilers.

CORPSEHIVE

A bulbous and misshapen mass attached to the side of a cliff, Corpsehive (population 37,000) is composed of more than just sculpted tunnels and mud chambers. Here, tosculi bodies interlock arms and jaws just before they die; then, living hive mates coat them in resin, which bonds them into a single structure. These death-sculptures are built to form buttresses, bridges, arches, and ladders as the hive branches out.

Rektizzok is the Hive-Queen of Corpsehive and a devoted follower of Mot, god of death—although she is shrewd to pay enough lip service to Arbeyach to avoid enraging Ia’Affrat when the herald visits. Tosculi from Corpsehive have shiny black carapaces with white patterns that resemble skulls. They often seize cattle to use as hosts for the queen’s eggs, including some errant ankole from Terrotu. The infected beasts are led back to Corpsehive, where the queen claims their skulls as trophies after they have served their purpose.

The hunters of Corpsehive also conduct frequent raids into Sebbek Sobor, where they skirmish with the dwarf warriors of the Brotherhood of the Axe. The tosculi bring infected individuals back to the community and incorporate their bodies into the walls after they have served as hosts.

DREADWEED

High in the forested mountains of the island of Zanskar lies Dreadweed (population 23,000). This remote hive is a cluster of protuberant mud domes and bloated columns stuck to the side of a mountain peak, and is named for the dangerous, thorny plants that grow throughout the tosculi’s territory. Although hard to reach from the



ground without flying, a network of tunnels exists beneath the hive that connects with the vast Digworks of the island’s xorn rulers. (See page 219 for more about the Digworks.)

Hive-Queen Iknik sends Dreadweed tosculi into the subterranean passages beneath Zanskar to steal slaves from the xorn’s mines, and to claim new territory for the hive. This leads to frequent confrontations with the azers of the Darala Arb clan who are charged with defending the borders of the Golden Sultanate. Pasha Alruljhi Rabbans is determined to exterminate the tosculi once and for all, not least because the walls of Queen Iknik’s royal chamber are said to hold a rich vein of rare trapiche emeralds.

SNOWCAP

Perhaps the tallest of the tosculi hives—and certainly the highest in altitude—this forest of immense, fat mud pillars climbs into the sky. Some locals refer to this place as the City of Chimneys, although it’s more widely known as Snowcap. At least thirty columns rise out of the sand and rocks, each one 100 feet in diameter, 300 feet tall, and extending an equal distance into the ground. These underground tunnels connect the towers to subterranean egg chambers and jelly combs before winding through to the queen’s chamber.

Hive-Queen Kazsivoq rules Snowcap (population 31,000). Unlike some of the other queens, she believes that the tosculi could rule the Southlands tomorrow if they were willing to work together, and she has no aspirations of becoming High Queen of the Swarm herself.

The tosculi warriors of Snowcap have iridescent blue-black carapaces. They range far and wide, using updrafts from desert thermals and mountain passes to push their raids south into Veles-Sa or north into trollkin lands. To make the long trip, hunters often keep a store of tosculi jelly under the joint of their abdomen carapace to eat as they fly. Those who seek this substance say the City of Chimneys has the best jelly of all the major hives and are willing to pay a premium for it.

Sometimes the tosculi of Snowcap must defend themselves against raids—the demon-worshipping trollkin of the Vasha's Faces sept have attacked the hive several times through its underground tunnels and have twice come close to penetrating the queen's chamber.

TITAN'S HIVE

The tosculi infested the ruins of this former titan settlement on the Ramag's Bond ley line near the Youma Hills long ago. Over centuries, they have almost completely encased it in their mud-and-resin structures. Thirty-odd buildings of the lost civilization of Glorious Umbuso are entombed inside the colony, with only a few spires and walls of the original structures visible to the outside observer. It's unclear whether the tosculi truly understand the magic wielded by the site's former owners; regardless, they have figured out how to use a few utilitarian items and turned them to their own uses, and so Titan's Hive (population 55,000) never ceases to surprise explorers.

These relics of the dead civilization include weapons, mining tools, household items, and even children's toys, and they are all quite valuable in the outside world due to their rarity and their connection to the lost empire. The presence of these artifacts has been enough to bring adventurers from all over the Southlands to mount raids on the hive, and in addition the tosculi of Titan's Hive often skirmish with the Trampers of Terrotu, who take exception to their ankole being stolen to serve as vessels for tosculi eggs.

These incursions have made the hive's residents even more aggressive and hostile than the rest of their kind. The Hive-Queen of Titan's Hive is Szerzzih, a ruthless ruler who is keen to harness the might of Glorious Umbuso for the swarm. To this end, she has ordered her jeweled drone



advisors to research the powers of recently unearthed titan artifacts by conducting experiments on captives seized from Terrotu and elsewhere.

HAVEN OF THE OUTCASTS

Some of the tosculi drones who are expelled from their hives or leave voluntarily find their way to the Haven of the Outcasts, a refugee community hidden in the Utunga Mountains in the Abandoned Lands. Here, several hundred tosculi have built a single tall chimney where they can all live together. Some manufacture goods that they trade with the ramag and the people of Munayo; others have become alchemists, producing potions, oils, and unguents for sale. Small groups of "hiveless" tosculi travel outside the Haven on trading expeditions. Most of these outcasts are warriors, although there are several druids of the Circle of the Tosculi among their ranks too.

The tosculi of the Haven have no rulers or leaders; they live together as a single community that shares food and goods among themselves and resolves disputes by nonviolent means. Although members of the group travel outside the Haven, they are careful to keep its location secret. They fear and loathe Ia'Affrat, who takes sadistic pleasure in hunting down and murdering outcasts; the arch-devil would like nothing more than to slaughter every single tosculi living here.

history of the tosculi

The first recorded appearance of the tosculi in the Southlands was nearly 3,000 years ago, following the fall of Glorious Umbuso. Though the titans still ruled much of the continent, gods and demon lords alike found it hard to gain a foothold in their lands, but once the Great Web fell into tatters, the way lay open. Arbeyach, Prince of Swarms, opened several portals on the broken ley lines from Bzeletalet, the Buzzing Hell of Insects, and the first tosculi colonists surged through into the Southlands.

Several minor kingdoms, including the realms of the Molioba Kings and the Ivory Queens of Ylla-Maurefan, were wiped out completely, as the wasp-folk stripped their lands of food, slaves, magic, and resources. The tosculi established the Great Hive of Arbeyach first, then expanded their territory, building more hives throughout the continent.

Further tosculi conquest was checked by the powerful kingdoms of the Southlands—Nuria in the north, Ishadia and Aksaba in the east, and the growing strength of Narumbeki, Lignas, and Morreg to the west—and by the lack of coordination between the queens of each hive. The portals to the Eleven Hells fell dormant, although they still exist today, dotted around the Abandoned Lands and elsewhere, waiting for an unwise or malicious geomancer to reopen the connection. A new portal from Bzeletalet was opened around 200 years ago in the badlands near Dabu, leading to the creation of the Bahima Azar hive; this gateway remains active.

Over the centuries, the tosculi have consolidated the territory they've seized around their major hives, and they have continued to conduct raids into neighboring lands. These incursions are not without risk, however. Seventy years ago, a combined force led by the Eyes of Aten burned the towers of the Great Hive of Arbeyach, inflicting terrible damage. Ten years later, the Cattle Queens of Terrotu launched a crusade against Titan's Hive. That war ended after five years of furious fighting with the assassination of the Terrotu army's leader, the Red Priestess Anlais, by a tosculi elite bow raider named Bezzura.

CURRENT EVENTS

In the last few years, the tosculi have continued to skirmish with their neighbors and raid the civilized lands close to their hives. Things are about to heat up as Ia'Affrat, Herald of Arbeyach, sets his schemes of conquest in motion.

Conclave of the Swarm

For centuries, the tosculi have disappointed Ia'Affrat because he considers them so much wasted potential.

But no more! He has decided the time has come for the hives of the tosculi to join into one single swarm and lay waste to the Southlands. For Ia'Affrat's dreams of conquest—whether at the behest of his master Arbeyach or, more likely, of his own devising—to come to fruition, the Herald must unite the hive-queens so that they work in concert, rather than against each other.

This year Ia'Affrat intends to visit each of the major hives to meet with its queen and invite her to attend a great Conclave of the Swarm at which he will outline his plans for conquest, first targeting the wealthy cities of the Spice Coast. This meeting will take place in neutral territory—the ruined city of Ylla-Maurefan in the northern Aggesal Plains—at a time in the near future yet to be determined. The location is symbolic—the ruins contain a dormant portal to Bzeletalet and were one of the first places in the Southlands to be wiped out by the invading tosculi.

Ia'Affrat expects the queens of the six major hives, as well as those of a dozen smaller ones, to agree to attend the Conclave. If he can persuade the tosculi to work together, the Southlands might never be the same again.

adventure seeds

Although many fortune-seekers prefer to give the hivefolk a wide berth, for the bold and the brave, exciting and rewarding adventure awaits in tosculi territory.

BOVINE RESCUE

The characters run into what's left of a Terrotu mobile town on the edge of their territory that has just been raided by tosculi from Titan's Hive. The Trampplers charged with defending the community are dead, the surviving townsfolk have been dragged off, and the town's ankole have been stolen. Are the adventurers prepared to go after the swarm and rescue the Terrotu and their ankole before it's too late?

THE PERILS OF GEOMANCY

Zinyasha, a Ley Warden from the Ramagani district in the Mlimo Peaks, south of Titan's Hive, has traveled into the Abandoned Lands to repair a broken section of the Great Web that branches off from the Ziwa's Casting ley line. As it happens, her misguided repairs have powered up a previously dormant portal to Bzeletalet, the Buzzing Hell of Insects. Zinyasha and her companions are the first to perish when an infernal tosculi scouting party comes through the portal. It's up to the characters to eliminate the interlopers and close the portal again.

tosculi living items

The tosculi have created a variety of living items to augment their drones, either to boost their fighting power when tosculi warriors are in short supply, or to help them carry out special missions. Although designed for tosculi, living items can be also worn by non-tosculi characters, with the caveat that they can't be kept on indefinitely.

Attaching a living item to a tosculi requires a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Medicine) check; grafting an item to a non-tosculi is harder, requiring a successful check against DC 17. If you are trying to attach the item yourself, you make the check with disadvantage. A character who has proficiency with tosculi surgeon's tools (see below) has advantage on checks to attach or remove living items.

Removing a living item requires a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Medicine) check, made with disadvantage if you are trying to remove it from yourself. On a failed check, the item is not removed, and the item's wearer cannot be the subject of another check to remove the item until that creature has finished a long rest. On a check that fails by 5 or more, the living item is damaged in the attempt to remove it and doesn't function again unless it's repaired.

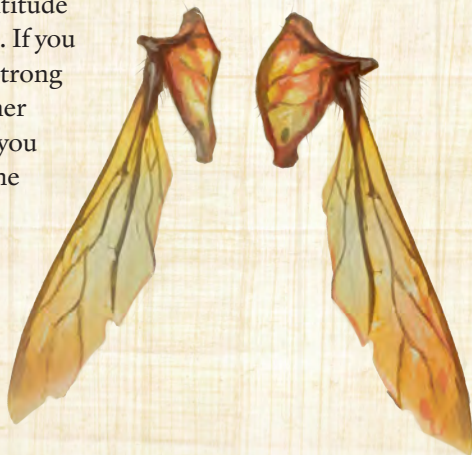
A character who has proficiency with tosculi surgeon's tools can repair a damaged living item only after it has been removed; doing this takes 8 hours and requires a successful DC 20 Wisdom check, or else the item can be repaired by using *tosculi healing resin* (see below). On a failed check, a damaged living item is destroyed instead of being repaired.

A living item lasts for 1d4 weeks before it stops functioning and must be replaced.

Stunted Wing Graft

Tosculi living item, rare

These small, translucent wings attach to your back and protect you from falling damage by slowing your rate of descent to 60 feet per round. You can determine the direction of your fall, gliding up to 10 feet horizontally in any direction for every 5 feet you descend. It is not possible to gain altitude by using this item. If you are buffeted by a strong updraft or any other effect that causes you to gain altitude, the distance you can glide increases accordingly.



Tosculi Antennae

Tosculi living item, rare

You can attach this pair of small antennae by pressing them to your forehead. You have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell, and on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track another creature.

Tosculi Carapace

Tosculi living item, rare

You have a +1 bonus to AC while wearing this heavy, molded carapace, which attaches itself to your chest, conforming to your figure. When you take damage from an attack, you can use your reaction to heal 1d10 damage. After you use this ability, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.



Tosculi Lenses

Tosculi living item, uncommon

Wearing this pair of large, hemispherical, multifaceted lenses grants you advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight, and on Wisdom (Insight) checks, but you make saving throws against gaze attacks and illusions with disadvantage.



Tosculi Pheromone Glands

Tosculi living item, rare

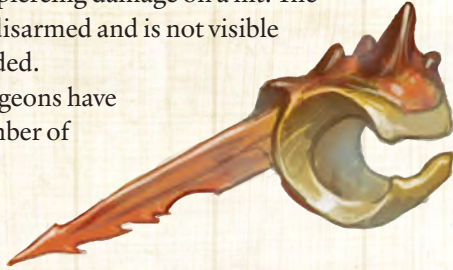
Implanted along the collarbones, tosculi pheromone glands allow you to communicate with other gland wearers within 30 feet without speaking, and to leave scent messages twice per day. Scent messages can be up to twenty-five words long and can persist in a location for as much as three days. Another wearer of tosculi pheromone glands understands the message completely; a creature wearing tosculi antennae can determine only the emotion associated with the message.

Tosciuli Spur

Tosciuli living item, rarity varies

Fashioned as a thick bracer of tosculi carapace, this living item allows you to extend a wicked spur out over your hand as a bonus action. You have proficiency with attacks made with the spur, which has the finesse and light properties, and it deals 1d4 piercing damage on a hit. The spur cannot be disarmed and is not visible when not extended.

Tosciuli surgeons have developed a number of different spurs:



Type	Rarity	Properties
Standard	Uncommon	You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with the spur.
Acidic	Rare	As above, and the spur deals an additional 1d6 acid damage on a hit.
Venomous	Rare	You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with the spur, and you can use an action to coat the spur in poison. The poison remains potent for 1 minute, or until an attack with the spur hits a creature. That creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 2d4 poison damage and become poisoned for 1 minute. After you use this ability, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

tosciuli gear

These tosculi-manufactured substances and equipment can be useful to adventurers.

Tosciuli Surgeon's Tools

Price 50 gp; Weight 5 lb.

This set of tools made from chitin includes a scalpel, forceps, and other appropriate implements. Proficiency with these tools lets you add your proficiency bonus to ability checks to remove or repair tosculi living items.

Tosciuli Healing Resin

Price 300 gp; Weight 4 lb.

Cracking open this fist-sized shell of hardened resin reveals a viscous, honey-colored substance. You can smear the resin onto your body as an action. You gain regeneration for 1 minute, recovering 3 hit points at the start of each of your turns as long as you have 1 hit point remaining.

Alternatively, you can use the resin to repair a damaged tosculi living item by smearing it on the item.

Tosciuli Jelly

Price 50 gp; Weight 1 lb.

This thick, viscous substance smells disgusting to most outsiders, but a pound of tosculi jelly is enough food to sustain a tosculi for a week. Non-tosciuli, particularly spellcasters, value the substance for its other properties.

- You can mix tosculi jelly with a flask of alchemist's fire as an action; doing this increases the DC of the Dexterity check to extinguish its flames to 12.
- When the jelly is used as a material component when casting *black tentacles*, *grease*, or *web*, creatures affected by the spell make their saving throws with disadvantage.

Tosciuli Paper

Price 5 sp (one sheet); Weight –

This durable writing surface is made from pulped wood or reeds mixed with tosculi saliva and treated with alchemical reagents. Although it is no stronger than ordinary paper or parchment, tosculi paper has resistance to fire damage. Ink applied to it is trapped within the fibers of tosculi paper, making the writing less susceptible to aging, smearing, and water damage; an hour of exposure to water or 30 minutes of full immersion is required to make the ink run or smear into illegibility. Spellbooks and other items made with tosculi paper cost three times the standard price.

Tosciuli Saliva

Price 200 gp; Weight 1 lb.

Generally found in a small clay jar, this yellowish paste allows a tosculi living item to be easily detached from a helpless, willing, or dead creature, requiring no Dexterity (Medicine) check to remove the item. A jar contains 1d6 + 1 applications.

the southern fringe



10

The southernmost tip of the Southlands is as wild as any other region on this continent. Fierce trollkin, imperious xorn, fanatical lizardfolk, and an entire city of thieves inside an old wine bottle can be found here.

The Zobanu Jungle, the largest expanse of rainforest on Midgard, dominates the Southern Fringe. Much of the jungle is occupied by lizardfolk who believe that the Great Serpent has chosen them to overrun the world. To the north and southeast are trollkin that would rather flay strangers alive than trade with them. The Southern Fringe is the location of some of the Southlands' greatest assets and riches, including one of the region's richest seaports and an island that boasts an enormous gold mine. The risks are great in the Southern Fringe, but the potential rewards are much, much greater.



the trollkin septs

In the hills and valleys of the Southern Fringe lurk the trollkin septs. The trollkin can trace their origins back to the fey and other immortal or monstrous races. Pushed to the fringes of the titan empire, the promiscuous fey collected mortal admirers as if they were baubles, with a host of monstrous offspring as the by-product.

When the fey fled the Southlands, they left their cities and their half-fey offspring behind. These earliest trollkin, abandoned by their progenitors, soon descended into leaderless chaos. They bred among themselves and with other

The lizardfolk of Veles-Sa pay homage to the huge Egg of Veles in a great marble temple at Azmull-Kre, deep in the Zobanu Jungle.



ances, producing the wide variety of trollkin that exists today. The trollkin are not inherently wicked, and some campfire stories speak of trollkin heroes. For a time, the more civilized nations viewed the trollkin favorably, since they ostensibly carried the blessings of their fey ancestors. Fear and suspicion have long since supplanted that fading goodwill, though, and the septs have stayed mostly on the outskirts of other settled lands.

Most trollkin still respect and are protective toward the ruined fey cities in their territory, but a few are inclined to loot what little remains of their ancestors' fallen homes. Trollkin do not keep written records, nor do they show much interest in the details of their past, other than defeats that remain to be avenged.

DEITIES AND DEMON CULTS

Trollkin are not particularly religious, but those who do revere deities say their prayers to the Battlelord (a mask of Ogun), the Stalker (a mask of the Hunter), the White Goddess, or Xevioso.

MAJOR SEPTS

Between forty and fifty septs control trollkin lands in the Southern Fringe; the four described below are among the most populous and most influential. Elsewhere in the Southlands, trollkin territories include the Trollkin Kingdom of Nmabi (see page 194) and the lands of the Gorgonkin (see page 176).

Burning Arms

Led by Kurta Vanu, who claims he can trace his ancestry to the jinnborn, the Burning Arms sept is based at Umal Jinn, a fey ruin in the southwestern part of the trollkin territories. The sept conducts regular raids into the Zobanu Jungle and against the smaller tosculi hives nearby. A series of elaborate, and likely exaggerated, myths have sprung up around Vanu, including claims that his jinnborn heritage enables him to grant wishes to those who prove themselves worthy. Kurta Vanu uses the statistics of a **trollkin reaver** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 390), with the following addition:

Favor of the Jinn (3/Day). The trollkin can gain advantage on either a saving throw or ability check, or it can impose disadvantage on an attack roll against it.

Filthborn

Along the southeastern coast lies the hunting ground of the Filthborn sept. Shunned and reviled by all other trollkin, these misfits are made up almost exclusively of harpy-kin. Kurta Kraal, the leader of the Filthborn, wants to curtail his sept's savage impulses enough so that they might ally with their kin. He often sends raids into

Sudvall to appease the more bloodthirsty members, while reaching out to other septs in the hope of forming a pact.

Kurta Kraal uses the statistics of a **trollkin shaman**; the other Filthborn are **trollkin grunts** (both *Creature Codex*, p. 357). Filthborn have vestigial wings and the Luring Song trait of a **harpy**.

Rockeaters

The Rockeaters guard the Sleeping Hunger, a fey ruin in the southeastern reaches of the trollkin realm. They are led by Kurta Ononi (CN male **trollkin shaman**), a mystical trickster known for clever dodges, cattle thefts, and tricks played against other trollkin and even the tosculi.

Unlike most trollkin, the Rockeaters do more than respect the place they occupy; they treat the Sleeping Hunger as if it were a god, praying to its crumbling walls and leaving slaughtered gazelles and jackrabbits as sacrifices on its broken streets. Any creature the trollkin catch trying to enter the ruins is left at the city gates, bound at the hands and feet, as a tribute to the Sleeping Hunger. These sacrifices are always gone by morning, with nothing left in their place except for a splash of blood, the rest having been consumed by the **gbahali** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 209) that lairs nearby.

Many of the septs have fallen victim to the allure of the demon cults that pervade the South. Three such groups are detailed below.

Cult of the Whispers

An insidious sect with cells secretly lurking within various septs, the Cult of the Whispers strives to unleash the cataclysmic magic that languishes in the fey ruins scattered throughout the trollkin territories. The cult members worship a hidden being they call the Voice in the Dark, a mask of Aposis, who murmurs in their minds. They sometimes maneuver unwitting trollkin into helping them explore the ruins and search for lost artifacts. Many trollkin eventually have a hard time with reality due to listening to the voices in their heads, but that doesn't stop the cult members from pursuing their goal.

Bloodbirds

The cult that calls itself the Order of the Bloody Phoenix—the Bloodbirds, for short—promotes killing in the bloodiest manner possible. Bloodbirds relish any opportunity to brutally kill, even if doing so means disobeying their leaders or putting innocents at risk. Most septs try to root out Bloodbirds cults because they believe that courting such bloodlust brings bad luck. To those who know about such things, the Bloodbirds' recklessness suggests that the demon lord Camazotz (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 85) or a dark god is manipulating them for some horrible purpose.



TERROTU

QASHIME HILLS

TROLLKIN

ZOBANU JUNGLE

SUDVALL

RAMAG'S BOND
DEBAR'S TEARS
RAMAGANI

THE MSANA
THE TROLLKIN SEPTS
BARDEL MOUNTAINS
SNOWCAP

ZIWA'S CASTING

ENDLESS MAKKA

TEMPLE OF ONYX AND KUBY
MIRAGE PEAKS
ALGOLAE MTS

SKYSHARD

Snowcap

Sleeping Hunger

Umal Jinn

Cloudreach Kapok

Citadel of the Dragon Hermit

VELES-SA

SPLITWATER

AZMULL-KRE

VELES-OON-PKAT

MISTORAK

Cusash

NYSE

ANION

PENTECOR

SUSA

Stoneship Beach



Vasha's Faces

This demon-worshipping sept lairs at the base of the Baridi Mountains and often raids the adjacent tosculi territory. Kurta Nyoka leads his followers in dark rituals to appease their goddess Vasha, a mask of V'ashra the Tormentor. The warriors of Vasha's Faces paint their bodies with white dye, to better show off the spilled blood of their vanquished foes; this imagery can be frightening indeed, considering that many of these trollkin can trace their heritage to ettins and ogres. The leader of the warriors is Two-Headed Nawila, beloved of Vasha (CE female **trollkin shaman**, *Creature Codex*, p. 357; has the Two Heads and Wakeful traits of an ettin).

Veles-sa

Located in the primal and fecund Zobanu Jungle, Veles-Sa is a land of dinosaurs and scalykind. In emerald forests live the lizardfolk, a relatively unknown humanoid race whose civilization sprang up a mere 160 years ago. Outsiders colloquially refer to the core of the territory as the Land of the Terrible Lizards, named after the dinosaurs that roam the dark jungles.

At the heart of lizardfolk civilization is an enormous egg, covered in shimmering flecks of gold and green. The lizardfolk revere and protect the egg, which they claim came from Veles, the Great Serpent, and they believe it to be the source of their power and remarkably rapid evolutionary development.

The alien and cold lizardfolk are builders and engineers, and they have raised large cities and temples in the deep jungles. They often capture and tame the dinosaurs that prowl the mangrove marshes and hardwood jungles, turning them into beasts of burden and weapons of war.

Isolated by distance and terrain, Veles-Sa receives few visitors. Fewer still have returned from the land of the lizardfolk to spread tales—most end up as slaves or in the lizardfolk's larders. But things have begun to change over the past 10 years as the realm's ruler, the Vessel of Veles, has allowed merchants from Sudvall and Morreg to bring their wares to the edge of the territory for trade.

LAND OF TERRIBLE LIZARDS

Veles-Sa sits within the area of the Zobanu Jungle known as the Land of Terrible Lizards. Dinosaurs and other megafauna prowl through the dense jungle and brackish



swamps, which also hide snakes, giant insects, large raptors, and other monsters. Ancient trees rise far into the air, and a humid mist blankets the trees and vines.

The Velesborn lizardfolk have cleared only a fraction of the jungle to build their cities and roads, leaving it largely untouched. Lizardfolk hunters and scouts stalk the jungle, looking for food, capturing dinosaurs, and hunting for slaves. No roads lead into Veles-Sa, so outsiders must blaze their own trails to reach the interior. The rivers are the nation's equivalent of highways, used by the **spinosauruses** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 116) that serve the lizardfolk as transportation and beasts of burden.

Overgrown ruins from long-forgotten civilizations, possibly Glorious Umbuso or Ankeshel, dot the landscape. When they discover these sites, the lizardfolk tear them down and transport the quarried stone to Azmull-Kre for use in their own structures.

GOVERNMENT

Dedicated to the worship of the Great Serpent, Veles-Sa is a true theocracy. Edicts are passed down from Sortaal, the Vessel of Veles, to an inner circle of ruler-priests who lead the various castes. Tantanul, the Keeper of Fang and Claw, commands the lizardfolk warriors, scouts, and dinosaur riders, and is the likely heir if Sortaal should die young.

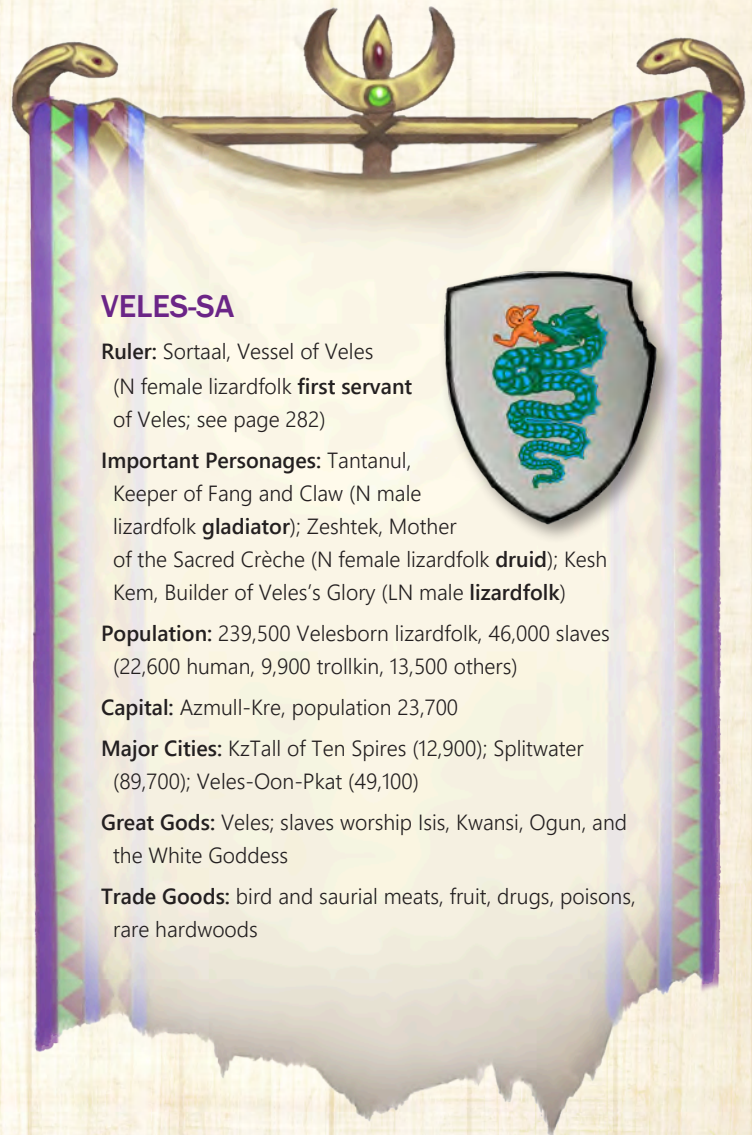
The Mother of the Sacred Crèche watches over the eggs of her people and ensures that bloodlines are kept varied and strong. The Builder of Veles's Glory, Kesh Kem, is responsible for the planning and execution of construction projects throughout the land, teaching and guiding the priest-builders who command engineers, builders, and stonemasons.

AZMULL-KRE AND THE EGG OF VELES

Roughly 260 years ago, an earthquake ripped open a mile-long crevasse in the Land of Terrible Lizards. The rumbling earth gave way to reveal the tip of an enormous egg, golden-green and covered with impenetrable scales. This exposed part of the egg stands 150 feet tall, hinting at the unbelievably huge portion still buried.

As the earth settled, the egg began to hum and pulse, mesmerizing and summoning lizards, snakes, and other ordinary reptiles from the swamps, jungle, and hills. Over the next century, these reptiles underwent a dramatic evolution, growing in size and intelligence to eventually become the lizardfolk. The egg guided the newly evolved lizardfolk with whispers and hints, telling them to breed, expand, and build in the name of Veles.

The lizardfolk cleared the jungle around the egg and built their sacred capital, Azmull-Kre, on the site—a city of gleaming marble step-pyramids decorated with



VELES-SA

Ruler: Sortaal, Vessel of Veles
(N female lizardfolk **first servant** of Veles; see page 282)

Important Personages: Tantanul, Keeper of Fang and Claw (N male lizardfolk **gladiator**); Zeshtek, Mother of the Sacred Crèche (N female lizardfolk **druid**); Kesh Kem, Builder of Veles's Glory (LN male **lizardfolk**)

Population: 239,500 Velesborn lizardfolk, 46,000 slaves (22,600 human, 9,900 trollkin, 13,500 others)

Capital: Azmull-Kre, population 23,700

Major Cities: KzTall of Ten Spires (12,900); Splitwater (89,700); Veles-Oon-Pkat (49,100)

Great Gods: Veles; slaves worship Isis, Kwansi, Ogun, and the White Goddess

Trade Goods: bird and saurial meats, fruit, drugs, poisons, rare hardwoods

obsidian, gold, and silver. They built a marble dome over the egg, complete with traps to keep its secrets safe from would-be thieves and greedy adventurers. One hundred fifty years later, Azmull-Kre is still being built. The city has twenty major building sites at present, where armories, temples, barracks, granaries, and stables for dinosaurs are under construction.

The egg is a source of inspiration and guidance for the lizardfolk, sending dreams, omens, and instructions to their priests. Sortaal believes that it contains Veles's divine spark, and that the dreams sent by the egg are a message from the god himself. Almost all the clerics are of the opinion that the egg should never be breached, but in the last year, small cracks have begun to appear in its shell. Unknown to Sortaal and the other priests, these cracks have been deliberately caused by a heretical group of clergy who believe that if they break the egg open, they will be able to absorb the spark that waits to be released.

Other Eggs?

One of the most tightly held secrets of the lizardfolk is that the Egg of Veles is not the only such object. Sortaal has experienced visions sent by Veles of other eggs buried around Midgard, waiting for the lizardfolk to claim them—regardless of whose land sits above them. One such egg lies in the Mharoti Empire far to the northeast; its mystic guidance might have been what first inspired Mharot to create a pact with other neighboring dragons. Another lies in the jungles of the Spice Coast.

MAJOR CITIES

Like its capital, the other cities of Veles-Sa are unfinished. Interspersed between grand step-pyramids of marble or polished granite are thousands of simple grass-and-stick huts and dozens of muddy market squares.

KzTall of Ten Spires

Twenty years ago, the lizardfolk discovered the trollkin settlement of Ten Spires, slaughtered the inhabitants, and claimed it for themselves. The original name came

from the ten metal poles set in a circle in the middle of the settlement. Perhaps artifacts of the titans, the poles are rust-free and seemingly extend impossibly deep into the earth. Poltergeist activity occurs around them during the full moon.

Splitwater

Located where two rivers meet at a natural granite shelf, the site of a 350-foot-high waterfall, Splitwater has a commanding view of the jungle. Explorers use sail-backed dinosaurs as mounts and barges to travel downstream.

Veles-Oon-Pkat

The largest of Veles-Sa's cities, Veles-Oon-Pkat is built on the site of an ancient ruin of unknown provenance. The titanic Endless Msana ley line runs through the heart of the city, providing a source of raw magic for the creation of its splendid towers and pyramids.

sudvall

A land of conflicting cultures, the former satrapy of Sudvall was created 350 years ago by the amalgamation of three distinct races: minotaur settlers from the Moon Kingdom of Tes-Qamar at the opposite end of the continent, two companies of human knights from the northern Magdar Kingdom who became lost on a shadow road, and the kijani, a race of sentient plants. Previously under the protection of Roshgazi, the minotaur capital, Sudvall was left to fend for itself when the dragons of the Mharoti Empire annihilated its parent city. Since then, Sudvall has thrived by merging the beliefs and customs of its three primary races with a society enveloped in feudal traditions.

The cities and villages of Sudvall resemble those found in the human-dominated cultures of the north, albeit with more minotaurs and plant creatures. Sudvall has a strictly feudal culture, and day-to-day life revolves around a calendar of festivals and jousting tournaments. But the Sudvallans feel a strong connection to nature too, and most non-plant members of the population have bonded with kijani seedlings (see page 292). Minotaurs, in particular, are eager to bond with the seedlings, because doing so makes them immune to the ravaging disease (see page 272). On the streets of Susa, a fully armored minotaur knight with a green seedling curled around his neck like a living torc is not an uncommon sight.

Sudvall maintains robust trade relationships with many foreign powers, including Zanskar and the far eastern lands of Cathay. This trade brings an influx of immigrants and ideas to Sudvall, and its cities are flourishing as a result.





GOVERNMENT

Every 10 years, the people of Sudvall choose a new high marshal to rule them, following the long-held tradition that the position be held by a minotaur, a human, and a kijani in turn, to preserve the balance between the three major races. A combination of aristocratic posturing and an elite jousting tournament is used to determine the leader. The two races not occupying the post of high marshal each elect a speaker to advise the ruler. The term of High Marshal Luan Krivoss expires next year, and speculation is rife over which kijani will take his place and who will be the new leader's advisors. The front runner is the fiery-tempered Sir Talliadden (CN male kijani **knight**), a champion at jousting and a veteran of battles with the Filthborn trollkin who has hawkish views concerning the lizardfolk of Veles-Sa.

ORDERS OF HORN, HAND, AND LEAF

Three chivalric companies act as Sudvall's army, police, and judiciary. The heavily armored Knights of the Horn favor axes over swords, while the Order of the Hand uses medium armor and broadswords. The nimble Knights of

the Leaf wield longswords and wear light armor. Open to any citizen of Sudvall regardless of race, each of these orders requires its members to abide by strict standards of knightly behavior and to exhibit exceptional martial prowess. Well-trained members of all three companies are stationed in the city of Mistorak to provide protection along the border closest to the lizardfolk of Veles-Sa.

SUSA, THE JEWEL OF THE SOUTHERN MOON

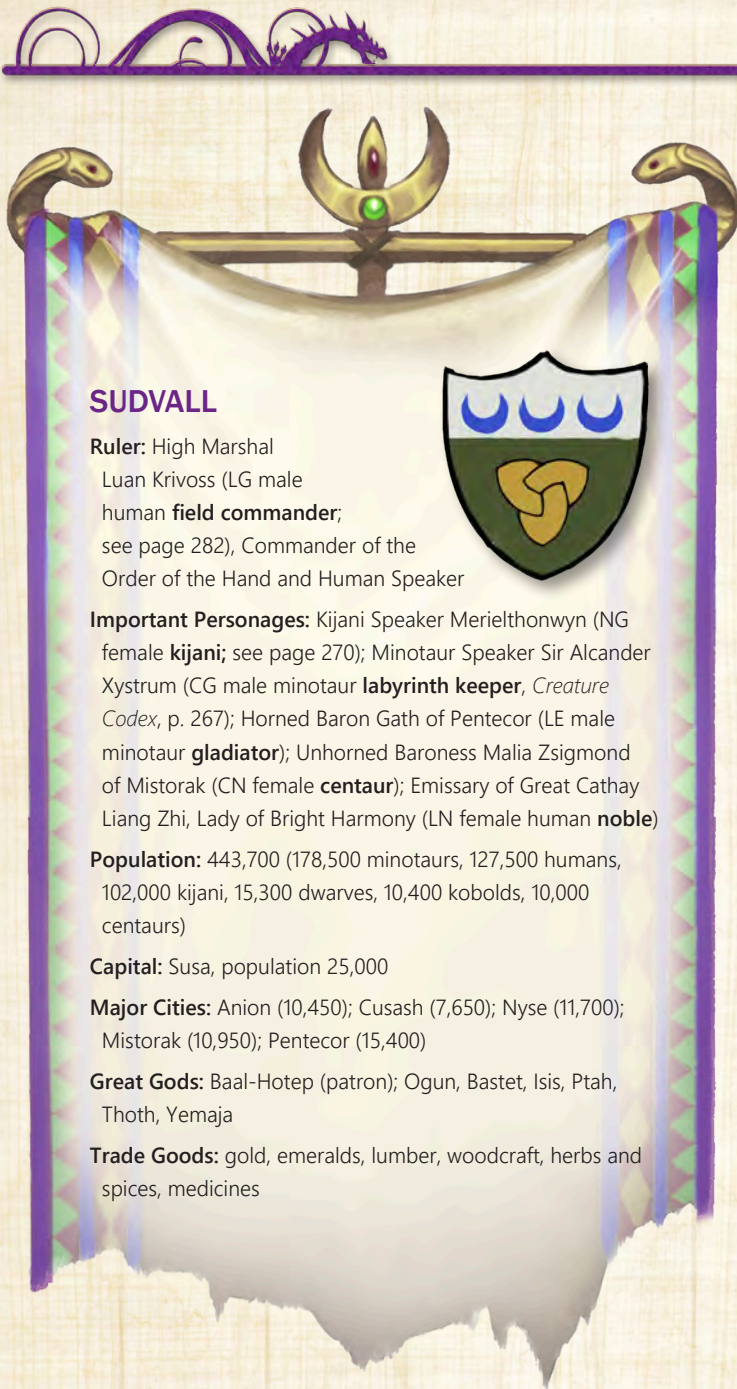
Built in a lush setting on the shore of a deep-water harbor, the capital of Sudvall features tall buildings of native green marble and wide streets bedecked with cultivated trees, shrubs, and vines. Virtually every building and avenue abounds with greenery, from the outer wall, to the high towers of the Palace of the Verdant Horn and the city's Viridescent Labyrinth, to the docks where trading vessels from Cathay and Zanskar sit at anchor.

Susa plays host to an annual Grand Tourney in the early spring, marking the beginning of the jousting season. In a year when it's time to choose a new high marshal, the Grand Tourney becomes a competition between the top sixteen favorites to become Sudvall's next ruler.

THE BOTTLED CITY

The Bottled City was created more than 200 years ago by a Sudvallan wizard named Delos Redmark as a secret magical retreat for himself and his hedonistic minotaur friend, High Marshal Nikos Xersa. Combining genie





SUDVALL

Ruler: High Marshal

Luan Krivoss (LG male

human **field commander**;

see page 282), Commander of the

Order of the Hand and Human Speaker

Important Personages: Kijani Speaker Merielthonwyn (NG female **kijani**; see page 270); Minotaur Speaker Sir Alcander Xystrum (CG male minotaur **labyrinth keeper**, *Creature Codex*, p. 267); Horned Baron Gath of Pentecor (LE male minotaur **gladiator**); Unhorned Baroness Malia Zsigmond of Mistorak (CN female **centaur**); Emissary of Great Cathay Liang Zhi, Lady of Bright Harmony (LN female human **noble**)

Population: 443,700 (178,500 minotaurs, 127,500 humans, 102,000 kijani, 15,300 dwarves, 10,400 kobolds, 10,000 centaurs)

Capital: Susa, population 25,000

Major Cities: Anion (10,450); Cusash (7,650); Nyse (11,700); Mistorak (10,950); Pentecor (15,400)

Great Gods: Baal-Hotep (patron); Ogun, Bastet, Isis, Ptah, Thoth, Yemaja

Trade Goods: gold, emeralds, lumber, woodcraft, herbs and spices, medicines

magic with powerful transmutation spells, Delos created a city so small it could fit inside a wine bottle. The Bottled City contained a plush palace, brothels, taverns, and gardens, staffed with servants under the command of a courtesan named Halina. Anyone who touched the bottle while declaring their heart's desire would be instantly reduced in size and transported inside. Delos and Nikos visited the Bottled City frequently and always had a great time enjoying its pleasures.

After Nikos's term as High Marshal ended, his curmudgeonly successor discarded the bottle, much to Nikos's and Delos's horror. When the bottle washed up on a remote shoreline, Halina and the other residents of the

Bottled City hatched a plan. Instead of returning to their former lives, they launched new careers as thieves with the bottle as their secret hideout. By whispering their greatest sorrow, they were able to pass through the lip of the bottle and revert to their normal size.

Since then, the Bottled City has thrived as it has moved from place to place, sometimes transported by one of the thieves, at other times brought to a new town by a clueless forager. The city's original staff found spouses to bring back to the bottle, allowing its population to grow into a boisterous warren of around 600 criminals of all types, ruled with a firm hand by Marquis Khadija (CN female human **thief lord**, *Creature Codex*, p. 406), one of Halina's descendants.

Although visitors are not sought out, they are not unwelcome in the Bottled City. Those wanting to hire a criminal specialist or to purchase poison or unusual gear will often attempt to track down the bottle—an upsurge in crime is often an indicator that it's nearby.

Zanskar

Remote in location and alien in appearance, yet oddly similar to the desert cities of the north in some ways, the Golden Sultanate of Zanskar is an insular but interconnected place. Most of the island nation's economy revolves around extracting the riches from its honeycomb of mines. At the same time, it lies at the heart of the vast trading triangle that spurs commerce with places across the Tethys Ocean.

Lying off the continent's most extreme southeastern coast, Zanskar remains mostly forested. A trio of cities built by slaves from black basalt sits along the eastern half of the island, and the great subterranean city of Usunhi Ubakna sprawls beneath its central peak. The mines that extend underneath nearly the whole island produce unimaginable sums of gold, which the sultan's servants then trade with the wider world.

An aristocracy of two hundred xorn known as the Granite Conclave holds power in Zanskar, led by the Golden Sultan. The Conclave's dozen houses jockey constantly for position, some trying to win the sultan's favor while others seek to dethrone him. Four clans of azers serve the Conclave, bound in ancient blood oaths of fealty to Zanskar and the Golden Sultan. The Darala Arb clan, led by the Pasha of the Cinder Fleet, is responsible for the Sultanate's defenses; Darala Andaza is charged with overseeing the civil service; the merchant-captains of Darala Daptjara seek out new trade opportunities; and the Darala Kelif clan directs the operation of the mines.

Day-to-day life for Zanskar's citizens, and the culture that underlies it, is similar to that in Siwal or Saph-Saph. The populace always exhibits an air of politeness and respect, and virtues such as courage, discipline, perseverance, and wisdom are held in high esteem.

Life is entirely different for the enormous slave population working the mines that are the source of Zanskar's vast wealth. Since the xorn glide through earth without displacing it, they need others to excavate tunnels so that gold and gemstones can be transported back to the surface. The work is hard and thankless, and slaves often toil until they die at a premature age. Zanskari dhows, fashioned from alchemically treated pumice and rigged with triangular sails, purchase slaves in distant ports, while vessels from Shibai and merchants from the Spice Coast's cities sometimes bring slaves into Khilwah, Zanskar's main commercial port, for purchase.

USUNHI UBAKNA

The subterranean domed city of Usunhi Ubakna is the nucleus of the sultanate, clearly deserving of its title as the Fiery Gem of Zanskar. Its interior is brilliantly illuminated by burning gas vents. The light reflects off veins of brilliant quartz crystals and is sent all the way down to the cavern floor. Peals from great ivory trumpets, exquisitely carved and richly gilded, announce dignitaries who visit the sultan's sumptuous court. Sculpted stone palaces, private residences, and workshops occupy the rest of the underground metropolis.

THE DIGWORKS

The Digworks, the mines responsible for providing Zanskar's vast amounts of gold, are a well-protected network deep under the island. The mines of Zanskar are the by-product of a phenomenon called the Hidden Vault, a stone repository underneath the mines, at least 10 miles in diameter. Enslaved miners carve a honeycomb of tunnels around the Hidden Vault, peeling away the continually extruded gold as they do so, trying to penetrate the vault's unyielding stony skin. The vault has never been breached by conventional means, and it continues to generate gold like an elemental spring.

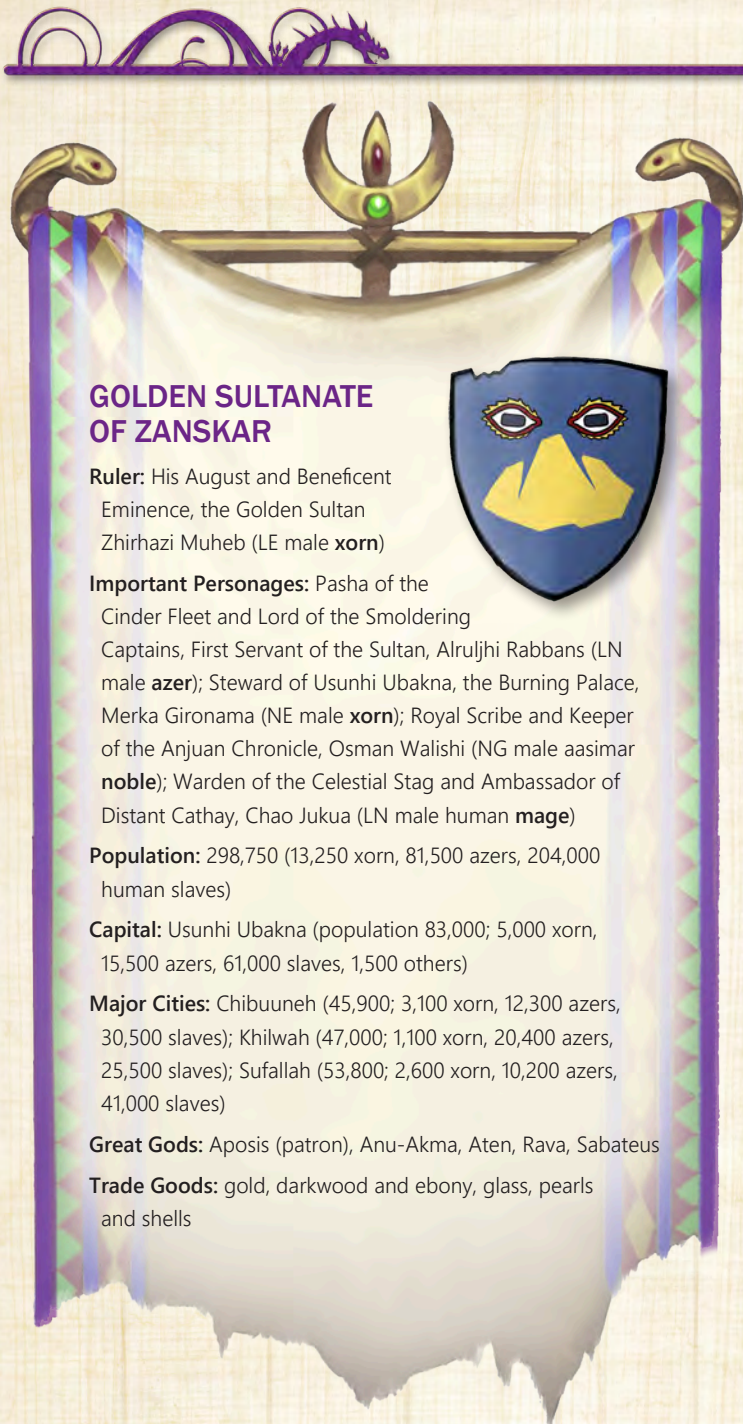
Some scholars and clerics claim that Mammon holds the Vault sacred, and, in support of that contention, more than one **gilded devil** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 106) has been seen stalking one of the side shafts in search of someone willing to make a deal. From time to time, a group of miners occasionally revolts, trying to break free of their azer overseers and escape into the subterranean wilderness that stretches out under the island.

MOTHER OF THE FOREST

Located in a deciduous forest south of the city of Chibuuneh, this ancient baobab is a World Tree. Standing more than 130 feet tall, the Mother of the Forest has bluish-green leaves, reddish bark, and white flowers that give off a watermelon scent. In the winter, its bare branches resemble roots, as if the tree had been planted and is growing upside-down.

A tribe of **lemurfolk** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 271) called the Feathertails lives in the branches of the baobab and other nearby trees. Followers of Eshu and Isis, the lemurfolk use the tunnels beneath the tree's roots to steal from the xorn mines whenever they can. The thieves bring honeycomb, fruits, and nuts to the slaves working the mines, which they consider payment for the gold and gems they take. The xorn find this behavior unamusing and offer a bounty on lemurfolk tails to azer mercenaries.





GOLDEN SULTANATE OF ZANSKAR

Ruler: His August and Beneficent Eminence, the Golden Sultan Zhirhazi Muheb (LE male **xorn**)

Important Personages: Pasha of the Cinder Fleet and Lord of the Smoldering Captains, First Servant of the Sultan, Alruljhi Rabbans (LN male **azer**); Steward of Usunhi Ubakna, the Burning Palace, Merka Gironama (NE male **xorn**); Royal Scribe and Keeper of the Anjuan Chronicle, Osman Walishi (NG male **aasimar noble**); Warden of the Celestial Stag and Ambassador of Distant Cathay, Chao Jukua (LN male human **mage**)

Population: 298,750 (13,250 **xorn**, 81,500 **azers**, 204,000 human slaves)

Capital: Usunhi Ubakna (population 83,000; 5,000 **xorn**, 15,500 **azers**, 61,000 slaves, 1,500 others)

Major Cities: Chibuuneh (45,900; 3,100 **xorn**, 12,300 **azers**, 30,500 slaves); Khilwah (47,000; 1,100 **xorn**, 20,400 **azers**, 25,500 slaves); Sufallah (53,800; 2,600 **xorn**, 10,200 **azers**, 41,000 slaves)

Great Gods: Aposis (patron), Anu-Akma, Aten, Rava, Sabateus

Trade Goods: gold, darkwood and ebony, glass, pearls and shells

The roots of the Mother of the Forest are said to connect to the Plane of Earth and to Mammon's realm in the Eleven Hells. In recent times, a rumor has begun to circulate that one of its roots might extend through a planar portal located inside the Hidden Vault of the Digworks.

perilous sites

Although the Southern Fringe is the site of Midgard's largest rainforest, the hazards of the region don't stop at dangerous flora and fauna. Below are described some of the more notable sites of likely peril and possible plunder in the Southern Fringe.

BLACK FIRE PEAK

This dormant volcano on Zanskar, over 9,000 feet tall, hasn't erupted in centuries, but smolders continually, occasionally emitting plumes of white smoke that can be seen as far away as the coast. Lava tubes beneath the caldera connect to the mines of Zanskar, and one of them leads to a portal to the Plane of Fire. The **azers** of Darala Arb have recently captured several salamanders in the vicinity—spies sent on a mission to Midgard by a greedy **efreet**.

CITADEL OF THE DRAGON HERMIT

In the mountains northeast of Sudvall resides an **ancient bronze dragon** named Sirannonoth. The dragon harbors a secret about Mharot the Founder so explosive that the mighty red dragon spent decades trying to murder him. To escape Mharot's wrath, Sirannonoth faked his own death and escaped to the Southlands where he spends his days in a citadel built into the steep northern face of a rocky, barren peak.

To ease his loneliness, Sirannonoth sometimes takes humanoid form and visits settlements in Sudvall and Terrotu. Most folk think he's a simple traveler, but the more superstitious whisper that their strange visitor is a **fey**-touched harbinger of plenty who blesses those who offer him kindness and stories. Reports of the boons that villages have experienced, including plentiful harvests and entire feasts that seemingly appear from nowhere once he leaves, seem to confirm the wanderer's benevolence. Adventurers who are willing to share their campfire with the shapeshifted Sirannonoth can often learn interesting lore about the Southern Fringe.

CLOUDREACH KAPOK

Towering over the Zobanu Jungle around it, this great kapok tree has reached over 250 feet in height and has a trunk that is more than 25 feet in diameter, rising above its buttress-like roots. Hundreds of orchids and bromeliads grow on its branches, which are home to monkeys, parrots, tree frogs, and—at night—bats.

The Cloudreach Kapok is a World Tree, and its branches are used by the **fey** of the southern jungles to travel to and from the Summer Land. A portal at the end of its highest branch is said to lead to Haval, the palace of the Queen of Birds.

THE SKYSHARD

Near the northern edge of the trollkin territories, close to the Baridi Mountains, stands a blue crystal spire blotched with crimson stains. It rises from a stone plaza in the

middle of a valley. In the distant past, the titans and the fey met on this plaza to negotiate treaties and express grievances. Now it is a pilgrimage destination for many of the trollkin septa, as well as a grazing territory for **tusked skyfish** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 391).

The stains on the spire seemingly come from something trapped in the crystal; it's most likely a powerful extraplanar creature—but no one knows what it is or how it got there. Unable to escape, the creature, known only as The Trapped One, telepathically whispers into the minds of those who come here, promising power and riches beyond belief in the hope that one day someone might free it.

A creature that approaches within 30 feet of the spire can hear these whispers, which act as a *suggestion* spell. If the target fails a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, it tries to break the crystal spire to free The Trapped One, using whatever abilities or tools it possesses. On a successful save, the target is immune to the whispers of The Trapped One for 24 hours.

The crystal is immune to all damage types except force damage, but The Trapped One does not know this, and creatures who have succumbed to its whispers will often pummel the spire ineffectually with their weapons or their bare hands until they collapse from exhaustion. A *disintegrate* spell or dealing more than 50 points of damage from other force spells causes cracks big enough for The Trapped One to escape. Treat the freed creature as a **shoggoth** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 347).

STONESHIP BEACH

An enormous wrecked ship made of stone lies beached on the coast east of Pentecor, its proportions more suited to titans than to humans. A group of medusas lives clustered about the breached hull, hostile to visitors and fiercely protective of the ruined vessel.

A few foolhardy explorers claim to have distracted the medusas long enough to sneak inside. They report that the interior of the ship is filled with ancient treasures of Glorious Umbuso, strange statues (perhaps victims of the medusas), and huge crystalline coffins. On occasion, travelers have reported seeing odd creatures, including enormous bulettes and two-headed giant apes, in the area, leading to rumors that the vessel was transporting a shipment of monsters for some mysterious purpose, and that several have escaped.

adventure seeds

Many opportunities for adventure exist in the Southern Fringe. Below are presented several possibilities.

THE FRACTURED EGG

Onikeh Fola, high priest at the Temple of Djyy in Lignas Proper (see “Religions and Deities”, page 135), has dreamed of cracks appearing in the Egg of Veles. She dispatches the adventurers to Veles-Sa to sneak into the great dome in Azmull-Kre and determine the veracity of what she has seen. If the characters can get past the well-guarded egg, they might be able to identify the heretical lizardfolk priests that are trying to breach the egg.

TERROR FROM THE LABYRINTH

Undead **lost minotaurs** (*Creature Codex*, p. 268) have been emerging from the Viridescent Labyrinth onto the streets of Susa from another part of the Great Labyrinth and attacking the inhabitants. Minotaur Speaker Xystrum asks the characters to investigate which minotaur city they are coming from and why. Inside the labyrinth, the characters can determine that the undead minotaurs have fled here from ruined Kadralthu (see page 75); after centuries of being trapped beneath the sands, something has allowed them to escape.

HIDDEN VAULT HEIST

Hatem Shamoun, a mage of dubious morals from Mhalmat, believes he has discovered the secret of Zanskar's Hidden Vault in an ancient text. He is looking for adventurers to guide him past the xorn rulers of Usunhi Ubakna and into the Digworks undetected. Once in the underground tunnels, the characters need to keep the azer guards busy while Hatem performs a lengthy ritual to create a magical opening in the vault wall so he can gain access to the mineral wealth inside.

BOTTLED UP

Thieves have stolen a priceless jade vase from the Embassy of Great Cathay in Susa during an extravagant party at which the great and the good (and the characters) are in attendance. Emissary Liang Zhi wants to avoid an embarrassing scene, but the vase was a gift from the Emperor himself, and she is distraught over its disappearance. She mentions the theft discreetly to Kijani Speaker Merielthonwyn, who assigns the characters the job of recovering the vase without delay.

A recent spate of thefts suggests that the notorious Bottled City is back in town. If the characters can find the bottle, they might be able to get inside and recover the vase from the Next-Day Market before it vanishes for good.

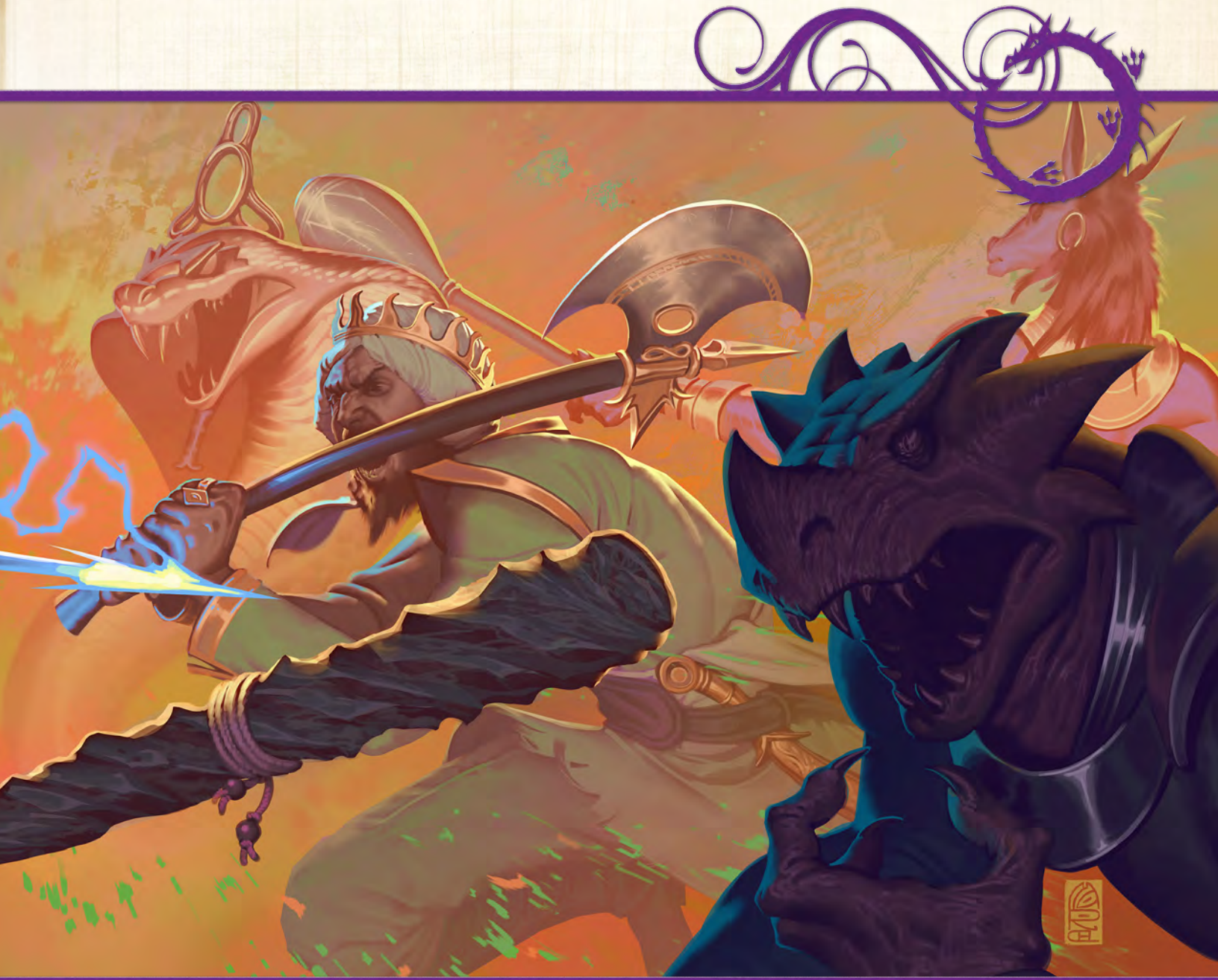
gods of the southlands



II

The gods of the Southlands understand and relish their role in the world, and they are not fearful of offending the worshipers of other gods and realms. They walk among their faithful, explore the physical world, and take some measure of delight in the mundane. Ancient, wise, and treacherous, they demand respect in concrete terms: sacrifices, temples, and proper behavior. Many Southlands gods punish those who fail to propitiate them. A few have clearly turned to darkness to get what they want.

This aggressive stance is fairly recent, as the gods measure such things. For eons, the gods of humans and other mortals were barred from much of the Southlands. The titans of Glorious Umbuso worshiped the long-lost Far Ones, and these distant beings brooked no interference with their worshipers. In particular, the Great Web that the titans spun made it hard for mortal gods to



walk within the borders of Umbuso. It was a realm unto itself, sealed against outside godlings.

Shortly after the collapse of the titans' kingdom, that web fell to tatters and mortals' gods immediately rushed in. With divine lances and earthshaking magic, they quickly supplanted the Far Ones and drove them back into the void. They helped the stragglers fleeing the fall of Glorious Umbuso, and they graciously accepted the worship of the survivors. Humans, dwarves, and others have not forgotten that their gods stood firm when the gods of the titans scattered and collapsed.

Although they are powerful in their homelands, most of these deities have little to no following in the Northlands. The primary exceptions are Veles, Thoth-Hermes, and Isis. Ninkash and Anu-Akma have small but growing

The gods of light battle constantly against the dark gods and demon lords of the Southlands.



followings, as well. This activity has not gone unnoticed; many other gods of the Southlands look to the North and East with interest.

gods and masks

Like the other deities of Midgard, the gods and goddesses of the Southlands are not individuals; they are archetypes or incarnations of universal forces. They aren't people in the same sense that individual mortals are. Though they all arise from the strength of their priests and the cosmos, the same god can look and act entirely differently from one region to another. The beliefs of the faithful similarly vary from place to place, even among those who purport to worship the same deity. Many gods of the Southlands go by multiple names and even switch gender and appearance when it suits them.

As a result, the gods are unknowable and mysterious, and their faiths embody shifting channels of power. Savants believe that only five or six gods might truly thrive in a city, and perhaps only three in a town, and one in a village. Shrines devoted to more than a few gods rarely prosper—the priests of these extra-numerary gods find that their ability to heal or to intercede with the faithful through divine magic is limited; their power is constrained to a single domain, their prayers go unheard, and their sacrifices are of no consequence. But the human heart has room for many gods. Faith in the Southlands is not a matter of choosing a single god, but of choosing the right god for a particular need or occasion. In practical terms, this means that pantheist priests (see *Southlands Player's Guide*) are common throughout the South.

The gods seem determined to hide their true identity from worshipers, and sometimes they pretend to be other gods entirely. This sort of deception is common: Horus might be Wotan, and Khors might be Aten. And, in the North, any fool can see that Perun, Mavros, and Thor are clearly brothers if not the same being. Although malleable

and changeable, each of the gods of the South retains a core identity that the god's faithful recognize, even in altered shape or color.

gods of nuria natal

A hallmark of the Southern gods is their antiquity, and none are as old as the deities of Nuria Natal's pantheon. These gods remained untouched by the Great Web; therefore, they never bowed to the titans, and they never suffered during Glorious Umbuso's collapse. Far from it: Nuria Natal is the birthplace of many gods—hundreds of them, although most are of little consequence (see "City Godlings of Nuria" below).

Few of the great Nurian gods have followers that live beyond the western desert, or in the wet, dark woods of the North. Others have been driven into exile and have found warm welcomes far from the banks of the River Nuria. The Nurian gods are not creatures of draconic enigmas or bloody reaving and debauchery. Instead, they are creatures of finely honed knowledge, possessed of the true and proper understanding of this life and the next. They carry with them an abiding appreciation of souls and power.

Because the Nurian great gods are deep, treacherous, and wise, they are absolutely never to be underestimated. Their faiths are millennia old. They stand implacable in the face of time, chaos, and decay; they are eternal and unyielding.

At the same time, many Nurian gods are peculiar. Most have animal-like heads when they appear in physical form to walk among their worshipers, sleeping in their temples and terrifying their priesthoods on occasion. The Nurian gods enjoy meddling and yet remain wildly inhuman. By turns, they are both cruel and kind. And yet, their people love them, for Nuria Natal remains the oldest and most storied kingdom of the Southlands, and its citizens view all younger realms with a wry disdain. The ancient gods of the realm encourage and exemplify this haughtiness.

GODS OF NURIA NATAL

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Anu-Akma	The elderly, ghouls, gnolls	Death, Justice, Travel
Aten	Humans, dwarves, residents of Saph-Saph	Justice, Light
Heretical Aten	Humans, tieflings, trollkin, travelers, merchants, the wealthy	Apocalypse, Light, Trickery
Bastet	Alchemists, dancers, gnolls, soldiers	Cat, Moon, Hunting, Perfume
Horus	Nomads, heruti, Nurians, Makurians	Speed, Wind, War
Ninkash	Dwarves, brewers, farmers	Beer, Mountain, Nature
Thoth-Hermes	Scholars, scribes, thieves, wizards	Knowledge, Travel, Trickery

city godlings of nuria

The city godlings of Nuria Natal are minor gods, saints, demigods, and obsolete powers—deities with limited abilities and small portfolios, and supported by few shrines or worshipers. Their temples are dusty, and their influence sometimes restricted to strange places, though a minor godling in Nuria might be more widely venerated in the tosculi hives, or vice versa.

These entities are useful to the GM as divine figures who lack the ominous or overwhelming power of Horus or Isis. A cleric might choose a minor godling as their patron deity and find that most people in the Southlands have never heard of that entity, offering interesting opportunities for roleplaying. Or an NPC of such a minor faith might find that they need help on a greater scale than what their god's priests can provide, bringing the characters into the situation.

The godlings are most prevalent in Nuria Natal, a place that has spawned a great number of gods over time; most of the gods of the Southlands originated in Nuria, and many others are the offspring of Nurian gods. The minor gods presented here are detailed in an abbreviated format, as befits their reduced status. Their followers are sometimes wandering pantheist priests (see *Southlands Player's Guide*), individuals who serve multiple gods.

Bes

Lord of Dwarves, Husband to Taweret, Protector of the Household, and Lord of Lions

Symbol: Lion's face surrounded by ostrich feathers

Domains: Cat, Forge

Alignment: Lawful

Typical Worshipers: Dwarves, females, children

Favored Weapons: Hammer and flail

Short in stature and often described as lion-faced, Bes is a minor protector of home and hearth, popular as a household spirit and guardian. He watches over the home when it stands empty, and he guards children and females in childbirth against evil spirits. Bes is the enemy of snakes and rats, but cats are sacred to him. Among the dwarves, he is a great hearth-spirit, equal in this regard to Ninkash—a jolly figure opposing the foes of the dwarves with his roar and his hammer, and always ready for a session of music and dancing with Ninkash.



What Bes Wants: Protect the home and the innocent. Destroy evil spirits and the undead. Dance whenever you hear music nearby, and let your roaring voice ring out often in song and prayer.



Hune

Lord of Doors, Patron of Portals, and Ancient Keeper of the Labyrinth

Symbol: A door or portal

Domains: Travel

Alignment: Neutral

Typical Worshipers: Guards, sentries, toll collectors, minotaurs

Favored Weapon: Staff

Known thousands of years ago as Karakhune, the Nurian god of portals, the dusty and gray-coated Hune is what remains of that dying deity. With only a handful of devoted worshipers remaining among minotaurs and humans, he has seen his function reduced to its very core: the creation of portals. Hune wanders the Southlands, hoping to bequeath his unique gift to anyone he meets. With his help, merchant caravans have crossed the Crescent Desert in the blink of an eye. He most often makes himself





apparent as a disembodied voice asking, “Door?” Those who respond positively find themselves before a portal and can choose to step through it.

What Hune Wants: Step over the threshold into a new place. Visit lands beyond those you know. Accept change and transformation, and make a new life in a new place. Open every portal you find.

Khonsu

Prince of the Moon, Master of Passage of Time, Guardian of Night Travelers, Lord of Dice, Binder of Wounds, and Falcon of the Gods

Symbol: A moon disk resting on a golden crescent



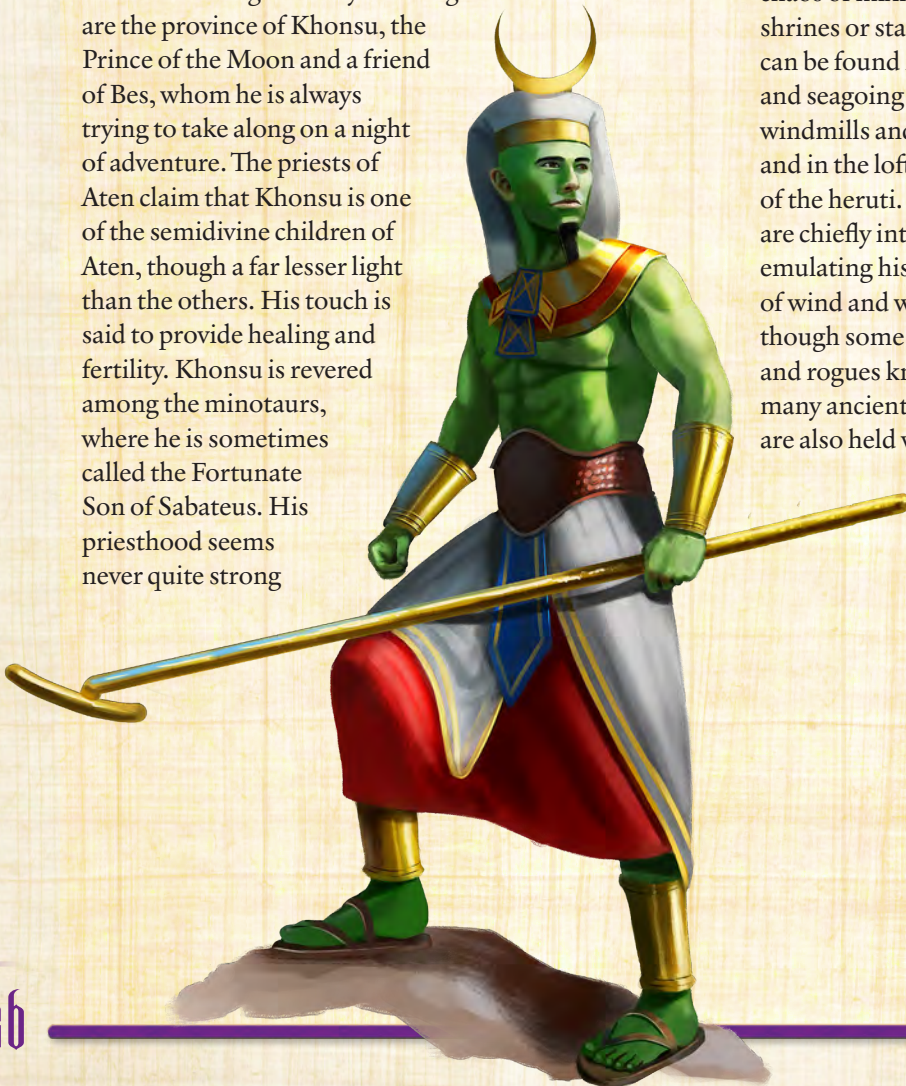
Domains: Moon, Perfume, Trickery

Alignment: Chaotic

Typical Worshipers: Gamblers, the young, adventurers, catfolk, minotaurs

Favored Weapons: Flail and mace

Luck and daring deeds by moonlight are the province of Khonsu, the Prince of the Moon and a friend of Bes, whom he is always trying to take along on a night of adventure. The priests of Aten claim that Khonsu is one of the semidivine children of Aten, though a far lesser light than the others. His touch is said to provide healing and fertility. Khonsu is revered among the minotaurs, where he is sometimes called the Fortunate Son of Sabateus. His priesthood seems never quite strong



enough to bring a great temple of Khonsu into the world, but every gambler is said to invoke his name.

What Khonsu Wants: A life well lived, land kept watered and fertile, and the pleasures of falconry, gambling, jokes, and tricks are objects of joy to Khonsu. Good fortune comes to those who dare great things.

Shu

Invisible Lord of Wind and Sky, King of Clouds, Lord of Lions, Peaceful Ruler of the Sky, and Grandfather of Osiris, Set, and Isis

Symbol: Ostrich feather



Domains: Apocalypse, Knowledge, Wind

Alignment: Lawful

Typical Worshipers: Sailors, millers, heruti

Favored Weapons: Shortbow and javelin

An ancient master of good weather, Shu both holds up the sky and keeps opposite forces apart, to prevent the chaos of mixing earth and sky, or light and dark. Small shrines or statues of Shu can be found in sandships and seagoing ships, in windmills and smokehouses, and in the lofts and rookeries of the heruti. His followers are chiefly interested in emulating his mastery of wind and weather, though some scholars and rogues know that many ancient secrets are also held within



his priesthood. He once had an order of paladins, the Oath of the Silent Wind, devoted to the faith, though it vanished centuries ago.

What Shu Wants: Gentle winds and peaceful trade are cherished by Shu. His is the hidden, helpful hand that transforms rage to joy, and the whispered word that reconciles strife. Humble actions delight Shu more than airy boasts and violent deeds; strive to move with calm deliberation.

Sobek

God of Rivers and Crocodiles, Patron of the Subek, Lord of Lakes and Marshes, the Potent One, the Splashing One, the Green God of the Sacred River, the Lurking God, Hound of Aten, and Maker of Eggs



Symbol: Crocodile

Domains: Nature, Ocean, Serpent

Alignment: Chaotic

Typical Worshipers: Sailors, bargefolk, rowers, subek

Favored Weapons: Dagger and mace

Those who live on or near the water know Sobek, though few worship him exclusively except for his children, the crocodilian subek. He is a creature of great strength who lurks in the



shallows and is given to devouring the unwary, but is also a stalwart protector of eggs, serpents, and reptiles, and sometimes of soldiers and generals, who prize his swift movement and ambush tactics. The living, growing world is Sobek's domain, and some circles of druids are said to revere him and his children in the most fertile marshlands of the river.

What Sobek Wants: Eat well and hunt the creatures of the earth; you are like unto a small god to those foolish enough to cross you. Protect your territory and your buildings; a lair and a nest are home and hearth to the scaled folk. Watch the river for your opportunity; the wise know that patience is one of the greatest virtues. When the time comes to strike, be swift and show no mercy.

Taweret

Goddess of Hippos, Wife of Bes, and Wife of Set

Symbol: Ivory dagger

Domains: Life, Nature

Alignment: Good

Typical Worshipers: Bargefolk, farmers, pregnant women

Favored Weapons: Mace and dagger

Taweret is the goddess of the households along the river, and the goddess of hippos. She protects her worshipers and their residences. Her milk is said to confer divine healing and rebirth in the afterlife. Her shrines are tiny and quiet, commonly marked by little more than a stone carved to resemble a hippopotamus. She is said to be the greatest of a group of sisters (the other hippo goddesses are Ipet, Reret, and Hedjet; these four are often confused).

What Taweret Wants: Protect the living from the dangers





of the river. Raise children well; guide the young and guard them from the dangers of the world. Heal the sick. Protect the home, and help the dying on the river and in dark tombs find their way into the afterlife.

Wadjet

Mother of Cobras, Seer to the Gods, and Guardian of the Subek

Symbol: Winged cobra

Domains: Knowledge, Prophecy, Serpent

Alignment: Chaotic

Typical Worshipers: Scholars, scribes, travelers

Favored Weapons: Scimitar and flail



Wadjet is a wise seer and a patron to scholars, scribes, and desert travelers whose temples exist only in Per-Bastet and (to a lesser degree) in the tosculi hives. She protects the subek and is somewhat of an inconstant, difficult figure to understand; her stature among the tosculi is that of the “wild winged prophet,” a goddess not as bound to law and tradition as others, and

thus a useful foil for the hiveless and those seeking to forge a new path for themselves.

What Wadjet Wants: Listen to the sands of time and the wisdom of the desert; reflect on your path, then plunge into the thrilling chaos of life with a full heart. Teach others to read, and make room for new learning. Kill no cobras or serpents, and keep your greatest secrets written in your heart and in your mind, not on scrolls and tablets.



DOMAIN DESCRIPTIONS

Game information for many of the domains that the gods of the South encompass appears in other Kobold Press publications.

Deep Magic has details on the Apocalypse, Beer, Cat, Darkness, Dragon, Hunger, Hunting, Justice, Labyrinth, Moon, Mountain, Ocean, Prophecy, Speed, Time, and Travel domains.

All of those domains except for Time are also presented in *Midgard Heroes Handbook*.

Southlands Player's Guide, the companion volume to this book, contains information for the Perfume, Serpent, Vermin, and Wind domains.

gods of the desert

The gods of the desert watch over nomads and oasis dwellers. They fly on the winds and find ways to help their worshipers endure heat and thirst. Some are tricksters, and some are careful lookouts capable of seeing through any heat shimmer or mirage. The greatest god of the desert, of course, is the goddess of water, Yemaja, whose name is synonymous with life and hope.

GODS OF THE DESERT

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Kwansi (Anansi, Ikenga, Loki, Rava)	Bards, gnolls, rogues, seers	Prophecy, Time, Trickery, Vermin
Mbanu (Khors, Svarog, Volund)	Craftsmen, dwarves, nobles	Justice, Forge, Mountain
Sabateus (Hecate)	Astrologers, shepherds, wizards, lamia	Darkness, Knowledge, Moon
Takhar (Mavros, Horus)	Soldiers, watchmen	Death, Life, War
Yemaja (Nethus)	Farmers, merchants, sailors	Knowledge, Life, Ocean, Time

gods of dabu

The gnolls of the fractured nation of Dabu have a complex society, ruled by the matriarchs of their clans and tribes, and all their gods but one seem to be reflections of the gods worshiped by the people around them. Xeviosah is the gnoll warrior maiden, swift and sure in battle, able to bind the wounds of the injured and bring storms with her voice—and yet, to everyone but the gnolls, she is obviously a female, gnollish mask of Xevioso. Likewise, the Huntress is the dark god called the Hunter elsewhere, though she often takes the form of a bat when appearing before gnolls that she seems not to favor elsewhere. The married pair of Bastet and Anu-Akma are the strong, civilized parental figures.

The one god unique among the gnolls is Laughing Nkishi—always hungry, and always good for a joke or trick.

gods of the green lands

The great gods Ogun, Xevioso, and Yemaja hail from the green lands. Although their followers are spread throughout the Southlands, these three gods clearly make their home in the savannah and the jungles rather than in the northern deserts or along the River Nuria. Their strength comes from living things, rich waters, enormous herds of wildebeests, and jungles filled with proof of the generosity of the gods of the green world.

DIVINE ALIGNMENT

Gods in the Southlands, unlike other creatures and entities in the world, do not have a two-part alignment descriptor except in special cases. A god's alignment is usually governed by one factor, typically the one concerned with its attitude toward order, and the god is flexible with respect to morality.

For instance, Anu-Akma's alignment is lawful. Some of his adherents are lawful good, others lawful neutral, and some number are lawful evil. The god is not consistent in his behavior on issues of good and evil, but is always on the side of law and opposed to the forces of chaos.

As another example, Ninkash's alignment is good. The god's worshipers must share that alignment with Ninkash, but they can be lawful, neutral, or chaotic in their outlook on society.

With them are often counted Ptah and Veles, the World Serpent. With Ptah, the case is clear: the god was slain in the Vanir War and reborn, and Ptah is living in exile after the rise of Aten in Nuria Natal. Even some humans among the Narumbeki have taken to the stability and strength of Ptah, the architect of the gods. As for the Serpent, that great font of earthly wisdom is loved by the learned and largely ignored by the majority. Still, the father-serpent gets a better reception in the green lands than in most other places, for the world and its creatures are so bright and colorful here.

GODS OF DABU

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Anu-Akma	Elderly gnolls, ghouls	Death, Justice, Travel
Bastet	Gnoll alchemists, dancers, soldiers	Cat, Moon, Hunting, Perfume
The Huntress	Gnoll hunters, the bloodthirsty, vampires	Death, Hunting, Moon
Laughing Nkishi	Gnoll bandits, ghouls	Darkness, Hunger, Trickery
Xeviosah	Gnoll barbarians, druids, and herders	Life, Speed, Tempest, War

GODS OF THE GREEN LANDS

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Djyy / The World Serpent (Veles)	Scholars, oracles, gnoll priests, lizardfolk, dragonborn	Dragon, Hunger, Knowledge, Ocean, Prophecy, Serpent, Tempest
Ogun	Soldiers, archers, explorers, jailers, miners	Justice, Nature, War
Ptah	Dwarves, smiths, architects, jewelers, carpenters	Forge, Knowledge, Labyrinth, Time
Xevioso	Barbarians, druids, herders	Life, Speed, Tempest, War
Yemaja of the Rivers	Farmers, merchants, women	Knowledge, Life, Ocean, Time



GODS OF THE SPICE COAST

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Eshu (Ariadne)	Travelers, nomads, weavers, wizards, gamblers	Forge, Knowledge, Travel, Trickery
Ninkash	Dwarves, brewers, farmers	Beer, Mountain, Nature
Isis (Lada)	Mothers, maidens, aasimar, minotaurs, the sick	Life, Light, Time
Sabateus (Hecate)	Astrologers, shepherds, wizards	Darkness, Knowledge, Moon
Yemaja (Nethus, Ceres)	Farmers, merchants, sailors	Knowledge, Life, Ocean, Time

gods of the spice coast

The deities of the Spice Coast are younger and less stable than those of neighboring Ishadia, Nuria Natal, or even Omphaya. The coastal settlements have shallower roots, and worship of Ninkash, Isis, Yemaja, and Sabateus has been transplanted to the eastern coast of the Southlands by wanderers and immigrants.

The eastern coast is also one of the few regions where female gods have greater influence than male gods. Perhaps the seaward look of the realm makes it friendly to the goddesses of dawn, seafaring, and community. The one god known to originate in this region is Eshu, the wizard and luckbringer.

gods of the catfolk

The goddess Bastet has long been the patron of nkosi and basteti catfolk, and both groups revere her as deeply as ever. In addition, the Hunter, Selket, and even the minor godling Khonsu, Prince of the Moon, are quite popular in Per-Bastet, in Nuria, and throughout the grasslands and hunting territories of Kush—in short, wherever catfolk are found.

GODS OF THE CATFOLK

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Bastet, Patron of the Catfolk	Alchemists, dancers, soldiers	Cat, Moon, Hunting, Perfume
The Hunter	Hunters, the bloodthirsty, minotaurs, vampires	Death, Hunting, Moon
Khonsu, Prince of the Moon	Gamblers, young males, adventurers	Moon, Perfume, Trickery
Selket	Nomads, thieves, rebels	Cat, Death, Hunting, Life

GODS OF THE DWARVES

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Ptah, Maker of the Dwarves	Smiths, architects, jewelers, carpenters	Forge, Knowledge, Labyrinth, Time
Aten	Residents of Saph-Saph	Justice, Light
Bes, Lord of Dwarves	Females, children	Cat, Forge
Mbanu	Crafters, nobles	Justice, Forge, Mountain
Ninkash	Brewers, farmers	Beer, Mountain, Nature

gods of the dwarves

Although the dwarves of the Southlands often revere the same gods as their human neighbors, they hold Ptah and Bes in special reverence. In Nuria and Sebbek Sobor, Ninkash is also a major figure. Mbanu in his bearded, dwarven guise is prominent in the Sebbek Sobor clan holdings, but rare in the deserts and the River Kingdom.

gods of the jinnborn

Many of the jinnborn align themselves primarily with elemental lords and forces, but they also subscribe to more traditional faiths, with a leaning toward gods of magical and elemental knowledge. A few follow Shu, the Invisible Lord of Wind and Sky, who is considered a minor, elderly godling among Nurian humans, but seen as a powerful figure among the jinnborn.

GODS OF THE JINNBORN

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Yemaja	Farmers, merchants, sailors	Knowledge, Life, Ocean, Time
Eshu, Patron of the Winds	Travelers, nomads, weavers, wizards, gamblers	Forge, Knowledge, Travel, Trickery
Baal-Hotep	Bakers, farmers, butchers, judges, soldiers, dragonborn, kobolds	Dragon, Justice, Tempest
Nakresh	Thieves, wizards, tomb robbers, the poor	Knowledge, Speed, Trickery
Shu, Invisible Lord of Wind and Sky	Sailors, millers, heruti	Apocalypse, Knowledge, Wind

GODS OF THE MINOTAURS

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Sabateus, Patron of the Minotaurs	Astrologers, shepherds, wizards	Darkness, Knowledge, Moon
Hune, Lord of Doors	Guards, sentries, toll collectors	Travel
Isis	Mothers, maidens, aasimar, the sick	Life, Light, Time
Ogun	Soldiers, archers, explorers, jailers, miners	Justice, Nature, War
Takhar	Soldiers, watchmen	Death, Life, War

gods of the minotaurs

The minotaurs have long revered Sabateus, called Hecate in lands to the north, and a constellation of other gods. Hune, the lord of doors, is the least of these, barely more than a saint among humans, but seen as a wise maze-walker among minotaurs and a steady guardian. Ogun, the Warrior God, is a patron for adventurers and corsairs, along with his brother, Takhar, who is seen as a soldier, while Ogun is an admiral or general. Isis is deeply embedded in minotaur culture as well, as the goddess of children, mercy, and the weak. Although they prize strength, the minotaurs know that the compassion of Isis keeps them whole and gives them hope.

gods of the tosculi

Faith and piety among the tosculi manifests in an unusual way; the preferences of any hive-queen are indelibly imprinted on those tosculi who hear her song, and the transformation of a temple can take place overnight if a tosculi queen decides that she will no longer follow a particular faith or offer sacrifices to a once-familiar diety. That aside, the hiveless follow a shifting mix of gods led by their patron, Arbeyach, the Prince of Swarms. In addition, Selket is revered for her hunting prowess, and the True Aten is sometimes acknowledged as the source of all prey and the giver of success in raids.

Perhaps the strangest figure in the tosculi pantheon is Wadjet, known as a minor cobra-goddess in Nuria, whom the tosculi honor as a mother of magic, venom, and deep wisdom concerning swarms of snakes, locusts, and other creatures. In some places, her tosculi shrines resemble those of a major god rather than a minor saint.

GODS OF THE TOSCULI

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Arbeyach, Prince of Swarms	Warriors, raiders	Hunger, Justice, Vermin
Ninkash, Lady of Hives	Queens, young, brewers	Beer, Mountain, Nature
Selket	Nomads, thieves, rebels	Cat, Death, Hunting, Life
True Aten	Travelers, merchants, the wealthy	Apocalypse, Light, Trickery
Wadjet, Mother of Cobras	Scholars, scribes, travelers	Knowledge, Prophecy, Serpent

Anu-Akma

God of the Underworld, Judge of the Dead and Guardian of Tombs, Guide of the People of Khem, Purifier of Souls, Preserver of the Worthy, King of Jackals, and Patron of the Gnolls and Ghouls

Domains: Death, Justice, Travel

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapons: Flail and sickle



Anu-Akma guards the tombs of royalty in the southern deserts and stands against the scourges of age, madness, and the undead. Deep underground, his worship takes a darker turn, incorporating the rites of a devil he conquered long ago, when he was known as Akma-Apophis. In such places, he is venerated as a patron of the Ghoul Empire and lord of the underworld.

Anu-Akma promotes purity and preserves order, watching over the timely and dignified death of all. His priests anoint those of royal blood to rise again as mummies or liches, and gnoll mortuary guards and guides protect vast ossuaries and cemeteries from desecration.

His ghoulish followers, meanwhile, anticipate each burial as a new source of flesh for feasting. Anu-Akma preserves the souls of those unfortunate corpses.

When envisioned by humans and desert folk of the surface world, Anu-Akma is a tall, muscular, jackal-headed man whose flesh looks like the starry night sky. His eyes are golden, and he wears the garb of Nurian royalty. Among worshipers who live beneath the dunes, images of Anu-Akma depict a faceless darkness beneath heavy robes and mummy wrappings. His arms are held wide, welcoming all into his cold domain.

Worshippers

The humans of the Southern royal dynasties worship Anu-Akma, who is known as the Old One to the Morreg. The elderly and the ill also worship Anu-Akma, hoping for an easy journey to the afterlife in the hands of holy gnoll guides. The gnolls themselves, and the ghouls and the darakhul, also follow Anu-Akma faithfully.

Symbols and Books

Anu-Akma's symbols are a golden ankh and a golden scythe. In some cases, the scythe blade is curved inward, and the handles are placed so that the scythe resembles an ankh. Other symbols include the vulture, three human skulls, or a human skull with golden ankh painted around its eye sockets.

Anu-Akma's most famous holy text is the *Preservation of Bodies and Migration of Souls*. In addition to sacred copies kept in his temples, the complete text is ritually written on the funerary wrappings of Anu-Akma's high priests.

Shrines and Priests

Anu-Akma's temples are warm, small, and made comfortable for the elderly and infirm. Divinations tell his followers when death approaches, and at that time they are encouraged to move into a temple, eating and growing strong for their journey into the underworld. These temples are adjacent to enormous pyramids and are guarded against the unclean ghouls that whisper lies and horrors to the faithful.

Small shrines, each one often consisting of just a few well-guarded rooms or caverns, are common in the caves that gnoll tribes use to access the underworld. Those tribes give thanks and prepare to delve deeper or engage in trade with denizens of the underworld. No undead can pass to the surface through these caverns.

Temples in the Ghoul Empire honor Anu-Akma in the same way the great deities are honored on the surface. The Hall of Crimson Pillars in the Nurian city of Per-Anu is the greatest surface shrine of the god, overseen by its greatest priest. His fanes in the underworld are more numerous than the ones on the surface, many scattered in regions of the Shadow Realm as well as in the ghoulish lands.



The current high priest of Anu-Akma in the South is Masaharta Hekaib, who lives in Per-Anu (see page 46) and commands the city's funerary attendants, mortuary priests, gravediggers, mourners, and scribes who copy out the verses needed by the mummified dead. Masaharta also trains and commands the gnolls of Per-Anu, who are deeply devoted to the faith and whose numbers include paladins and scouts of great distinction.

On rare occasions, the darakhul priestess Nassara bin Zildesh in the Shadow Realm visits Per-Anu through a passage that connects with the Grand Necropolis of Siwal, bypassing the gravebinders' authority there with an ancient writ of passage (see page 52). These visits are undertaken only in times of war: she and the ghoulish legions march to serve one of the ancient god-kings, for recompense in flesh and magic, or in response to ancient bonds that were forged when the god-kings were among the living. The priests of Anu-Akma hold that such oaths and bonds are not broken merely by a passage to undeath or the afterlife, and so some darakhul march to honor a promise made centuries or millennia earlier.

Masks

The greatest mask of Anu-Akma is Anubis; the two are so conjoined that no one is certain which face is the true one. Charun is rumored to be a mask of Anu-Akma, and both groups of worshipers are distrustful of each other. Darker still, the hunger god Vardesain might be a mask of Anu-Akma. That jackal-headed god is called Hades in the Seven Cities, and Hel in the North. Many believe that the dark god Mot is an evil mask of Anu-Akma, created for some unknowable purpose. Certain blasphemous sects claim that Mot's realm, the Dry Lands, is also the site of Anu-Akma's divine home.

Other Faiths

Anu-Akma pretends to be a servant, but those who know him see a king. When his priests meet with followers and leaders of other faiths, they preternaturally know the truth of things, and they conduct themselves accordingly. In the end, even the priests of other gods are buried in the tombs and cemeteries that Anu-Akma watches. Anu-Akma's priests deeply appreciate this wisdom, and it informs nearly all of their doings. They are patient to a fault.

What Anu-Akma Demands

Respect the ghosts and spirits of the ancestors, and their resting places. Rob no tomb. You are the purifier of life and a custodian of death, so prepare those around you for their inevitable journey and destination. Remind even the youngest that time is short. Be strict and efficient in your work; laziness serves no one, least of all yourself. Destroy anyone who blasphemes against the paradise of the underworld.

Aten

Sun God, Jealous Lord of Light and Good, Master of the Law, Father of Khors and Lord of the Horizons, Slayer of Ptah, Osiris, and Isis, and Patron of the Dwarves



Domains: Justice, Light

Alignment: Lawful good

Favored Weapons: Mace and staff

Aten is a rarity among the gods: he is jealous and forbids his followers to worship any other being. Priests of Aten are never, and are not permitted to be, pantheist priests. Aten's followers are known for their unyielding devotion to their faith, and "nonbelievers" are unwelcome in villages devoted to Aten.

Aten appears as a bronzed giant with a braided beard, piercing black eyes, and a powerful chest. He is similar to dwarves in his proportions. To the dwarves of Nuria Natal, he is the Sun God and the one true deity. Aten is not a maker and forger, but he is the shining light that defines the day. He is the protector of the weak and the elderly, a friend to heroes, and the foe of dark gods. His radiant face is difficult to look upon, his followers say, because his divinity and glory outshine all mortal understanding, and his solar magnificence likewise outshines all other gods.

So sure are the Aten-worshipers of this fact that they claim all other gods are mere reflections or pale shadows of true godhood. The only other gods whose divinity they debate are Lada and Khors, Aten's semidivine offspring, and the Atenites treat them as saints, prophets, or powerful priests rather than as deities in their own right. Small shrines to Lada and Khors are common, but exclusive worship of them is nonexistent. To the faithful, the true light of faith and reason is clearly that of the Sun God himself.

Worshipers

Aten is revered by humans, dwarves, and gnolls in Nuria Natal and elsewhere in the South. His most devoted worshipers are the inhabitants of Per-Xor and Saph-Saph, where the Temple School of Aten teaches new generations of his priests and paladins. A few tosculi follow his heretical aspect (see the sidebar on page 234).

Symbols and Books

The favored weapons of Aten are the mace and the staff, which are symbols of rule and divine authority. These are sometimes combined with sacred texts to create ceremonial items, but under their gilding is a core of iron. The sacred texts of Aten are the *Word of the Invincible Sun* and the prophecies of Ra-Amon-Ra, a holy man of great reputation among the Atenites.

Shrines and Priests

Aten's greatest shrine is the Tomb of the Prophet in the city of Per-Xor, though the healing waters of the Siwal temple are also famous. His priests are many. Traditionally, they take new names with their ordination. The greatest of them now is Ikhnaton of Siwal (see page 52), a self-styled "simple preacher" who wanders Nuria Natal and the Mharoti Empire preaching to crowds about Aten's love and the value of his scriptures.

Most of Aten's priests practice polygamy, a custom not uncommon in the Southlands. The most powerful rulers among Aten's priesthood are Zuberi the Wise, Keeper of Per-Xor, and Saint Hafsah, Golden Daughter of the Prophet (see "Cult of Aten", page 35).



HERETICAL ATEN

The greatest danger to Aten comes from within his own priesthood. For long ages, the worshipers of Aten have included a shadow cult devoted almost entirely to the opposite of the Sun God's stated aims. A group of priests calling themselves "secret initiates" worship Aten as the Father of Fire or, as they most often refer to him, the True Aten. This is an evil and abominable cult that uses fire, assassination, and demonic pacts in an effort to ensure that their god acquires the absolute power they believe he deserves. Their methods include terrorizing innocent shopkeepers and minor nobles; occasionally they confiscate and distribute food and other largesse to the poor, and in so doing they encourage a perception that they take from the corrupt and the wealthy to help the needy (this view is, of course, inaccurate—they take from the rich to enrich themselves).

Many believe that this so-called True Aten is a mask of Kwansi or Baal-Hotep, while those in the secret cult believe that Set and the White Goddess are the True Aten's masks.

Symbol: An eclipsed sun containing leaping fire

Heretical Domains: Apocalypse, Light, Trickery

Heretical Alignment: Chaotic evil

Favored Weapon: Flaming torch (treat as a club that deals +1 fire damage)

What Heretical Aten Demands: Take whatever riches you can claim. Power is meant to be wielded, and the weak are nothing but fools for your plans. A life of strength and service to bring the true face of Aten into the light is a life well rewarded with wealth, power, and earthly delights—when the True Aten is revealed, his greatest followers shall all be his high priests and god-kings on the earth.

Aten's military orders are numerous, and many of his worshipers are officers in the armies of Nuria Natal. The Order of the Phoenix, the Brotherhood of the Temple, the Sisterhood of the Solar Law, and the Order of Radiant Justice are among the largest.

Masks

Aten's masks are confusing and difficult for outsiders to comprehend, since adherents of the faith do not wish their true god to be compared with or placed in the company of other gods. Priests of Khors and Lada, however, believe that Aten might be a mask of their faiths, and some believe that Sif or even the White Goddess is a distorted mask of Aten. The most devout of his priests argue that all other gods are masks of Aten.

Other Faiths

There are no other true faiths, according to Aten worshipers. To them, priests and paladins of other gods are to be ignored or slaughtered as unbelievers, and temples of other gods should be plundered in response to their vile heresy and falsehoods. Followers of Khors and Lada are in error, Atenites believe, but they can still be shown the proper way.

What Aten Demands

Aten wants worship and sacrifice. Two hours must be spent in prayer daily; the sunrise, noon, and sunset hours are ideal for this reflection, and worshipers who fail to gaze upon the light-giving sun every day do so at risk of their immortal souls. Aten wants to receive gold, gems, incense, and chanted prayers throughout the day, and candles, mirrors, and magical light glorify his temples by night. All worshipers of Aten must attempt to convert infidels before slaughtering them, though this effort is sometimes perfunctory at best.

Bastet

Goddess of Cats and Hunters, Queen of Perfumes, Bastard Child of Aten, Mother of Alchemy, Patron of the Gnolls, and Wife of Anu-Akma

Domains: Cat, Moon, Hunting, Perfume

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapons: Temple sword and bladed scarf
(see *Southlands Player's Guide*)



Bastet is the sunny, indolent, and dangerous goddess of warm days and wild abandon; she is a force for chaos and an opportunist. With her cat-headed statues and her slinky female form, she is the goddess of desire and the patron goddess of perfumers, alchemists, and those whose trade is beauty. She carries the scent of the wild desert in her mane when she is a lioness; she is also the simple domesticated cat that kills rats, serpents, and mice. She is a friend to the farmer and the granary foreman.

Bastet's ears are dark, and her fur is golden; she has large breasts and sometimes six or eight of them. She is shown with a solar or lunar disk over her head, and she wears bracelets fashioned in the form of cobras or vipers.

Worshipers

Bastet has an odd medley of worshipers, in keeping with her wild and fickle nature: alchemists, temple prostitutes, simple farmers, soldiers (though never officers), dancers, the gnolls, and the people of Per-Bastet all glorify her name.

Gnolls might not be the most obvious followers of Bastet. However, she gained a whole new group of worshipers when she married jackal-headed Anu-Akma, long considered one of the gnoll-folk. Indeed, the gnolls are devoted to her, and her status as a supreme hunter endears her to these followers.

Symbols and Books

Bastet's symbol is the cat, depicted as a feline head with a solar disk above it. In some regions, the lion and the cobra are her signs as well.

Bastet's followers have relatively few sacred texts. The one that everyone knows is *Divine Lives and Desires*, a volume of sacred poetry and lusty parables. The one that few know about is *Words of the Huntress*, a darker volume that minces no words in imparting wisdom about stalking and slaughtering prey.

Shrines and Priests

Bastet has a city of her own: the metropolis of Per-Bastet (see page 46 and the *City of Cats* sourcebook), where her rule is nigh absolute and where she frequently appears before her worshipers to walk the streets. It is a place of alchemy, perfumery, fine jewelry, and a surprisingly civilized Gnoll Quarter (*City of Cats*, p. 25). Her temples are in great profusion, and her priestesses are ubiquitous. The greatest temple is the Dome of the Divine Face of Bastet, built with a soaring dome over a large interior that holds a dozen fragrant altars. In the guise of Ailuros, she is also popular in the Grand Duchy of Bourgund (*Midgard Worldbook*, p. 246).

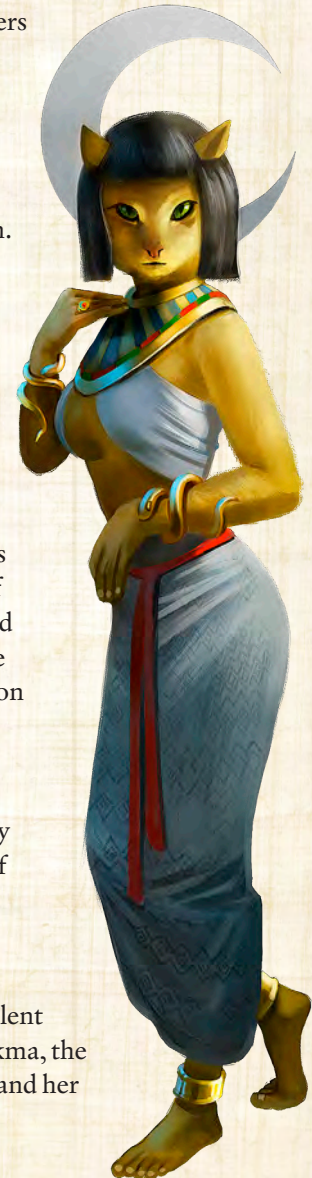
Bastet accepts only females as priests, although male worshipers are welcome. Some of her priestesses are weretigers, werelions, and even rakshasas, and others are alchemists, hunters, rangers, and temple prostitutes. It's an unusual faith.

Masks

Bastet is often confused with Sekhmet, the lion-headed daughter of Aten, and indeed that might be one of her disguises. She is called Ailuros in Bourgund and Artemis in the Seven Cities; in both places she is the goddess of perfume. In the famed city of Aerdvall, where she is worshiped as the goddess of hunting by the light of the moon, Bastet takes on the mask of Oyuh Windqueen. Oddly, Bastet is one of the few human goddesses said to don a dragon god's mask: she is widely associated with Azuran, Lord of the Four Winds, and especially with Chergui, the East Wind.

Other Faiths

Bastet's priestesses are on excellent terms with the clergy of Anu-Akma, the jackal-headed lord of the dead, and her





priestesses and his priests often join in what is called a “mirror marriage,” reflecting the divine wedding.

Her enemies are the dark goddess Marena (who perverts both lust and death), the star god Sabateus (who dares intrude on Bastet’s oversight of the moon), and the jealous faith of Aten (whose followers consider Bastet a demonic abomination, not a goddess at all). Most of all, her followers hate the serpent-god Set, whose corruption and reptilian form make his followers anathema to right-thinking cat-worshippers.

What Bastet Demands

Take pleasure in life, and live for the day. Hunt and kill your own food when you can; take joy in destroying serpents. Visit the perfumers frequently, and offer up gifts of scent and spice to the goddess’s altars. To divine the future, read the entrails of an enormous, unblemished animal, and sacrifice such a creature before undertaking any great endeavor.

Djyy (Veles)

World Serpent, God of the Earth and Waters, Creator of the World, Father of Serpents, Lord of Oceans, Emperor of Earthquakes, Patron of Giants, Lizardfolk, and Dragons, Voice of Distant Stars, and Patron of Lignas

Domains: Apocalypse, Dragon, Hunger, Knowledge, Ocean, Prophecy, Serpent, Tempest

Alignment: Neutral

Favored Weapons: Bite, spear, and battleaxe

Called Djyy (pronounced “DID-zhah”) in Lignas, Veles in the East, Jörmungandr in the Northlands, and Ouroboros in the Western Sea, the Great Serpent is the embodiment of worldly things, strength and rage, wisdom and water, earth and blood, and death. The Serpent is entirely unconcerned with an afterlife; he is entirely focused on the natural world and his various scaly and non-scaly children. Some claim he is one of Kwansi’s offspring, but this is likely another one of Kwansi’s tall tales.

Sailors who claim to have seen the body of Djyy describe the god as a sinuous wall of mossy, scaly flesh encircling the oceans. Beyond his bulk lies the empty sky, filled with nothing but stars and darkness.

Worshippers

Giants, lizardfolk, and dragons make up most of the World Serpent’s followers, and some dwarves, humans, and kobolds also acknowledge him. Principally, the Serpent is a representation of the short lives and paltry significance of most mortals. As a result, few people care to worship him. Most of his followers are dour stoics or frenzied believers who live life to the fullest, since the afterlife is uncertain at best. Certain druidic cults also follow the Father of Serpents, and some of the satarre (a malign extraplanar race that seeks to bring on the apocalypse; see the *Underworld Player’s Guide* and *Tome of Beasts 2*) claim his is the strength that will bring about the End of Days, but these are small cults at best.

Symbols and Books

Some believe that all languages were taught by Djyy to the giants and the dragons. If any original books of his teachings survive, they are known only to a few. Whispers claim that one such volume exists, called the *Forked-Tongue Prophecies*, or sometimes the *Circled Tongue*. Little is known about it, but it is said to grant power over serpents, drakes, and dragons and to foretell the end of all things.

Djyy’s symbol is a snake biting its own tail.



Shrines and Priests

Djyy has few great shrines and famous priests, in the Southlands or elsewhere in the world. Many of his holy sites are caves, especially those containing streams or springs. Some dragons, lizardfolk, and giants claim the title of high priest, but the Great Serpent seems not to care.

In addition, a mighty temple to the Serpent stands in the city of Lignas Proper, called the Temple of Djyy. The high priest of the Father Serpent is a young woman there, Onikeh Fola (see “Religions and Deities”, page 135). Her hard work and diligence have expanded the faith greatly, though she shows a fondness for bribery and adornment that others consider unseemly.

Masks

Priests of Djyy claim that all other gods are his masks. More plausibly, the eastern dragon gods might all be faces or avatars of Djyy, and certainly the dark god Aposis seems like an especially malevolent face of the Serpent. A few Southlanders believe that Djyy is nothing more than a mask of Kwansi, all part of a tremendous trick.

Other Faiths

Djyy is largely disinterested in other faiths, and they likewise ignore the Serpent Father. The great exceptions to this are Xevioso and his mask or brother Takhar; both are mortal enemies of the Great Serpent.

The dragon gods of the Dragon Empire acknowledge Djyy but do little to aid him.

What Djyy Demands

Your time is short, and all things end. Make your mark on the world, show mercy or cruelty, but prepare yourself for the end of all things. Ensure that the ley lines run smooth and that magic remains strong, and the world will live longer. If you corrupt the ley lines and walk with dark gods, you hasten the hour of apocalypse. Walk in wisdom.



Eshu

God of Travelers and Nomads, Patron of Weavers, Master of Birds, Luckbringer, the Golden Gifter, Guide over the Plains, Father of the Ushabti, and Friend to the Jinnborn and the Luckless

Domains: Forge, Knowledge Travel, Trickery

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapon: Spear

Eshu is a wise god, with a trickster’s streak and a great willingness to travel and toil in pursuit of his goals. He grants visions to oracles, and he smooths the way for travelers and wizards, helping humans and others gain knowledge arcane and mundane. He appears as a



young black man, often with white hair and a distinctive shepherd’s cap and crook. Red and black are his favored colors. He carries news and tales from town to town and tribe to tribe.

Worshippers

The worshippers of Eshu include all travelers and nomads, caravanners, camel drivers, weavers, and gamblers—those who live by good fortune and frequent the crossroads. His followers also include messengers, goatherds, and wizards; the jinnborn often think of him as one of their own. Many gearforged of Nuria Natal consider him their patron and maker, but Eshu says their creation was just a trick that worked out particularly well. Mbanu disputes the claim entirely.

Symbols and Books

Eshu's symbols include a pipe and a shepherd's crook. His followers prefer tales passed from mouth to mouth over tales bound in books, but the *Roads of Eshu* and the *Trickster's Gospel* are popular compilations of his priests' parables, wit, and guidance.

Shrines and Priests

Priests of Eshu usually make their way in the world as bards and other tale-spinners. Most of them are nomadic, and many shrines of Eshu are little more than beautiful tents carried across the savannah by faithful herders. He does have several red-rock shrines, where sacred stones have been made the center of a more permanent temple. Many of these places are in market squares, where Eshu's followers turn wool into yarn and cloth. Market-temples to Eshu in the Sultanate of Shibai and the Dominion of the Wind Lords are especially common and cheerful places.

Masks

Eshu is often seen as a friendlier form of Thoth-Hermes, and he is sometimes considered to be related to the Northlands goddess Rava, who shares his love of devices and weaving, though she is much more stern than Eshu is.

Others say that Eshu is Kwansi by another name; certainly when the two gods meet, they speak of spiderwebs and trickery with the fluency that comes from long practice. A few claim that Eshu was once a god named Osiris, now long dead, or that Eshu was a mask of Osiris that was so successful that the god Osiris actually became Eshu.

A few daring priests of Anu-Akma claim that Eshu's role as a guide extends to the afterlife, and that Eshu is a face of their guardian of the afterlife. Few others, though, can see the similarity.

Other Faiths

Followers of Eshu are friends of the followers of Kwansi, Isis, and the northern goddess Rava (also called "Eshu's sister"). Eshu dislikes Ogun for impinging on his role as patron of travelers, and likewise he condemns the war god Takhar for making life harder for travelers, herders, and nomads. Eshu's followers are often allied with the followers of Bastet and Anu-Akma, whom they see as travelers into the afterlife, and whom they believe care for people when Eshu is done guiding their steps.

What Eshu Demands

Never sleep in one place for too long. Be a bit crazy, just to keep life interesting. Sing when you walk or ride or weave. Be kind to mounts and livestock; animals deserve your kindness and thoughtful attention, for they feed, clothe, and carry you. Know how to haggle, and when not to.

Horus

Sky Lord, Master of the Sun, the Moon, and the Heavens, the Desert Falcon, Prince of Princes, the Majestic One, the Chieftain, the Vigilant, the Phoenix God, the True King, and Patron of Nuria Natal



Domains: Speed, War, Wind

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapon: Temple sword (see *Southlands Player's Guide*)

For eons, while the sun and the moon traversed the heavens, Horus was lord of the sky and the righteous god-emperor of the South. In time he grew tired and old, and the upstart Aten seized the mantle of power and cast Horus down. The people mourned and briefly turned their eyes to the blinding glory of the Master of the Sun.

Soon, however, Aten became absorbed with his own vanity, and dark beings stirred during that time of divine neglect. Dragons rose in the east, and a weakened Horus wandered the desert realm of his old rival, Set, who had been slain and cast into a foul pit by the demon serpent Aposis. Horus rescued Set's corpse from defilement and performed the proper funerary rites. As a reward, he was given dominion over Set's kingdom.



Reborn as a young warrior chieftain, alternately hawk-headed and bearing the visage of a handsome prince, Horus strives to reestablish the order of the world. To Horus, the way is simple: demons must be slain, and usurpers must be put in their place. Through bold deeds Horus plans to reclaim his rightful place, reunite Nuria Natal's fractured cities, and cast the dragon gods back into the East whence they came.

Worshippers

The Nurians, their Sarklan cousins, and the Tamasheq nomads of the Crescent Desert all follow Horus. Horus's followers help their tribes contend with the hardships and threats of desert life. Among his older followers in the Nurian delta cities and towns, Horus's popularity has diminished little, though other gods inspire louder, more public gatherings. An order made up of his knights and holy slayers, the Talons of Horus (see page 38), brings justice and order to great cities and small villages alike, though its members are few in number.

Horus's most fanatical believers are the heruti, the enigmatic avian folk known elsewhere as huginn or tengu. They are wandering desert mystics, sword masters, and dispensers of Horus's fury and justice.

Symbols and Books

Falcons are Horus's sacred animals, and they are his representatives and emissaries. The Crown of Nuria Natal is also a symbol of Horus, but his greatest icon is the Eye of Horus, a potent ward against evil when in the hands of the righteous.

Written in the elder Nurian script, the *Code of Horus* details the falcon god's laws and credo. Millennia old before lesser kingdoms were even dreams, Nuria Natal was founded on the precepts of the *Code of Horus*, and this divine text still governs that nation. The *Chronicles of Kings and Wanderers* is a popular collection of tales of legendary figures favored by Horus. His priesthood uses the stories to instruct children and converts.

Shrines and Priests

Aside from numerous ancient temples in the delta cities, the traveling temples are the best known and most accessible of Horus's holy sites. These mobile shrines accompany caravans of traders, pilgrims, or performers in the Crescent Desert, and their priests serve as guards, healers, and guides. They protect and reaffirm Horus's faithful wherever they journey.

Atop high peaks, desert rock outcroppings, and grand pyramids are the ancient sacred sites dedicated to Horus-Re that demarcate the realm of old Nuria Natal, larger than its current expanse but still technically Nurian territory. Horus-Re's temples are large and airy, utilizing

tall columns and huge open spaces. They are built into cliffs or atop mountains beneath the open sky.

The most famous temple of the faith, Khepri Khnum, stands on a mountaintop in the Chelamite range. While the priests command an army of birds, the most famous priests and priestesses are all harpies.

Well-known luminaries of Nuria Natal in Horus's worship include Old Khenses, a priest and storyteller who travels from town to town entertaining listeners with the *Chronicles of Kings and Wanderers*, and the Wingless One, the grandmaster of the Talons of Horus, which is an order of holy slayers of the falcon god's foes.

Masks

Khors might be Horus's avatar in lands north of Nuria Natal. Bolder theologians claim that Aten is a mask of Horus, serving as a test of his faithful to root out insidious evils hidden from him. Nomads of the northern steppes call Horus the Skyfather and hunt with his hawks on the plains. Sometimes he is worshiped under his own name in an exotic cult in the Northlands, or under his older name as Horus-Re.

Horus is often equated with Xevioso and Takhar, though just as many consider them brothers as those who view them as masks.

Other Faiths

Horus is the benevolent chief of the Nurian pantheon and has deep, strong connections to each of the other gods—except Aten, who is another matter. The intense rivalry between Horus and Aten manifests in open hostility among their faithful. Try as he might, though, Aten cannot surpass Horus in the cities, and he knows that chasing Horus's wanderers into the desert is futile.

Horus welcomes foreign gods to his court if they come in peace. Such visitors have included the strange gods Charun, Ceres, and Rava. If strange gods come with the intention of invading, they are met with holy steel and the divine eye of Horus; this has been the case with Khespotan and Seggotan, gods of the dragonkin.

Horus believes that Aposis and his followers are abominations to be destroyed. The demon-dragon Baal-Hotep, would-be conqueror of Nuria Natal, also draws Horus's kingly wrath.

What Horus Demands

The *Code of Horus* distinguishes noble nomads from uncouth barbarians; therefore, obey it always. Battle and slay ancient abominations and their cults. Carry yourself in an upright manner, whether you are a great king or a lowly peasant. Treat others with hospitality and honor. Kill enemies who threaten your homeland, and enslave their kin. Be princes among men, and Horus will watch over you.

Isis

The Golden Goddess of Dawn, Love, and Mercy, the Gentle Maiden, Lady of the Healing Hand, Daughter of Aten, Mother of Horus, Mistress of the Petal Palm, and Protector of Children

Domains: Life, Light, Time

Alignment: Good

Favored Weapons: Staff and scimitar

Everyone loves Isis, the goddess of healing and love, although few unstintingly follow her teachings of mercy and forgiveness—and her cult remains at odds with that of her father, Aten. What’s more, the goddess has wandered far from her homeland in Nuria, and she now focuses most of her efforts on the Spice Coast and in portions of the Northlands. She is a maidenly goddess of the dawn and the day, and is sometimes referred to as the wife of Horus. Although shown as meek and mild in most of her idols and images, she has a powerfully wrathful side, which defends children, slaves, the elderly, and the weak. Compassion and mercy are her main attributes.

Isis appears as a young woman with braided black hair and bright eyes of green or blue. She wears flowers in every season, and her altars are fragrant and covered in rose petals.

Worshippers

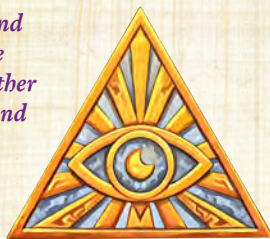
Isis has many worshippers, for does not everyone wish for mercy, healing, and light? Young mothers, children, and the sick are all among her devotees, as are many paladins (especially females) and some rangers, dervishes, and southern travelers. Her shrines and charms are common among the minotaurs, aasimar, dwarves, and humans across the North and the South.

When she appears before them, her followers see her as a female of their own race (a minotaur maiden, an aasimar matron, or a human woman, for example), but all of them appreciate that this external appearance is merely a bridge to connect her with her followers. The prayers of all the groups of her faithful are similar, and their rites are held at daybreak.

Symbols and Books

Isis’s symbol is the radiant eye, and her followers are often referred to as “bright-eyed.” Some of her orders use roses or other flowers as symbols of the goddess as well, though these are more common in the Northlands than in the South, where her faith originated.

The holy books of Isis are both scriptures and medical tracts. The worship of the sun is described in the *Golden Book of Ruby Laughter*, and the full extent of her healing lore is in the *Codex of Herbals, Prayers, and Simples*.



Shrines and Priests

The holiest sites of Isis are those on high ground, where the dawn breaks earliest. For this reason, her temples are situated on hills or mountaintops. Or, when no high ground is available, the temple is built with a tall steeple that greets the sunrise. The main door to one of her temples is always approached from the east.

Smaller shrines are also found in the fields and at crossroads, and near hospitals and funerary complexes, where she is worshiped as a protector. Prayers to Isis are held at the first light of dawn, and sometimes a farewell prayer is said at sunset.

Masks

In the North and in Ishadia, Isis is sometimes called Lada, Hathor, Aset, Baldur (in a male aspect), or Astarte. She is the calm face of reason, healing, and rebirth, and is sometimes called the voice of hope. Most often it is assumed that Yemaja is a mask of Isis, and sometimes she is thought to be a gentler form of Anu-Akma, the protector-god.



Other Faiths

Isis is said to be Aten's daughter, though the two priesthoods rarely get along. Isis and her divine son Horus are more compatible, and she also has amicable relationships with Ogun, Ptah, and Yemaja.

Isis is the unflinching enemy of the three evil sisters, as her priests refer to poisonous Selket, Nkishi of the Night, and the White Goddess.

Her greatest foes, however, are Xevioso and Takhar, the gods of war, whose penchant for destruction and bloodshed her priests find abhorrent. Priestesses of Lada rarely serve in an army devoted to Takhar, though sometimes the healing aspect of Xevioso makes them grudgingly accept such service. Isis despises all who prey on the weak or the sick, especially slavers, bandits, ghouls, and gnolls.

What Isis Demands

Cure all the sick who ask. Defend lovers from all dangers and trials. Show mercy to those who ask for it. Lada's priestesses must make a pilgrimage to the Healing School of Laksor in Nuria once every 12 years. All her faithful must defend and protect mothers and children, and none may turn away from poverty and want without a kind word and an offer of help, whether that takes the form of wisdom, food, clothing, a song, or shelter for the night.

Kwansi

The Spider God, Dancer on the Shores of Time, the Mystic Spider, Storyteller of the Gods, Patron of Seers and Oracles, Friend to the Footloose, God of Laughter, and the Night Hunter

Domains: Prophecy, Time, Trickery, Vermin

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapon: Net

As weaver, watcher, and hunter, Kwansi is a fluid god of many roles and powers, as one might expect from a chaos-god and luck-bringer. He's a teller of tales and a spinner of chaos. When he's riled, his powers as a trickster and rebel strike fear into corrupt kings, tyrannical queens, and their servants. He demands attention, and he responds with laughter to those who see the world with bright eyes. To oppressors, he is a nightmare: shifting, elusive, and striking down the law fearlessly, he entices slaves and peasants to revolt. Kwansi most often appears as a very thin man in robes that seem to hide great depths, and he always carries a length of rope and a traveler's staff.

Worshippers

The worshippers of Kwansi are charismatic elders and wise travelers; merchants, bards, scholars, and seers are



all among his followers. In Aerdvall, Kwansi is known as Karuti the Monkey, and his faithful there focus on their god's happy-go-lucky nature. In the Sultanate of Shibai, Kwansi is known as Nurul. Kwansi's followers tend to be generous and merciful, but strict in their condemnations of cruelty, slavery, and unfair dealings. The followers of Kwansi might know many jokes and tales, but they have little tolerance for fools and tyrants. Slaves, pirates, and rebels are often Kwansi worshippers.

Symbols and Books

Kwansi has many books of tales and a rich oral tradition of parables and songs, taught by his bard-priests and by the griots who favor Kwansi's worship and teachings. The most famous are *How Kwansi Won Freedom for the Gnolls* and *Twenty Tales of the Spider*.

Shrines and Priests

Kwansi's many shrines and sacred groves dot the desert and the western lands. The two most significant are the Oracle Shrine of the Spider Prophet in the Dominion

of the Wind Lords and the Silent Grove of Lignas. The greatest priest of Kwansi is the Spider Prophet (see page 62), though the High Talespinner, Aya Nanbo (see “Silent Grove”, page 135), is also widely revered.

Masks

There is much confusion about Kwansi, and that is probably by the god’s design. Most agree that Kwansi and the minor deities Ikenga and Anansi are entirely the same god with slightly different features, and others believe that Loki is Kwansi’s name in the frozen north. In Nuria Natal and among the dwarves, they call Kwansi by a woman’s name, Rava, and her features are quite different from Kwansi’s. Rava does share a love of spiders and weaving—she is less a trickster, though, as women are often so much more practical than foolish menfolk. Quite a few priests believe that Rava is Kwansi’s wife rather than his mask.

Other Faiths

Followers of Kwansi are generous and kind to those who follow other faiths in addition to the worship of Kwansi, for they believe that Kwansi’s web and pattern is often tangled. Most of Kwansi’s followers believe that some folk simply don’t know him well enough to love him, or they’re too rooted to their own towns and villages to follow Kwansi’s creed of liberation and whimsy. Kwansi’s followers love Yemaja for her songs, and they befriend Mbanu’s followers, who are a bit stuffy but know the art of making a decent campfire. Kwansi’s followers tend to see something virtuous in everyone—or, as they put it, “something of Kwansi in their hearts.”

What Kwansi Demands

Tell jokes. Annoy the rich and pompous. Be merciful to the weak, kind to the weary, and strike always against the harsh hands of the uncaring law. Weave with care, and respect the elderly. Hunt oppressors in their homes and on their streets, and show no mercy to tyrants.

Mbanu

Forge of the Dwarves, Lord of Law, the Hammer God, Iron Fists, God of the Fireproof Beard, and Master of Flames and Lord of Light

Domains: Justice, Forge, Mountain

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapon: Warhammer

A brown-skinned dwarf with reddish hair and a neatly braided beard decorated with gold and lapis lazuli, Mbanu is a compact and powerful figure. He is as implacable and fierce as the sun, and as hard as tempered steel. He is often shown wearing either a golden breastplate of Nurian make, or a red leather apron over a smith’s garb.

Worshippers

The worshippers of Mbanu are workers and leaders—those who abide by the law and execute its commands. Crafters, dwarves, and nobles lead the list; judges, paladins, and army officers are also fond of Mbanu for his courage, his steadfast calm in the midst of awful carnage, and his inspired guidance whether they are planning a great war or defending even the smallest clanhold. Mbanu’s followers are the dependable, the brave, and the hardworking. They often wear rings made of red clay around their biceps in acknowledgment of Mbanu’s strength.

Symbols and Books

Mbanu’s symbol is a burning hammer. He has a single holy text, the *Book of the Law and the Light*, which contains divine wisdom drawn from eons of fiery creation and struggles against chaos, as well as simple tales and techniques about forge-building, fire-starting, and the proper way to command loyal followers. The officers of Narumbeki often refer to *the Law and the Light* in their exhortations to their legions.

Shrines and Priests

Mbanu has a shrine in every smith’s forge chamber, and a shrine to him exists somewhere within the gates of



every dwarven clanhold. Among the Narumbeki, he is propitiated within the barracks of the legions. His greatest priests are the dwarf ring warden Yostos Firemane, who keeps the temple fires of Sebbek Sobor (see page 129), and Steffonoy Hashedim, the human king of the smiths in Corremel (see page 42).

Masks

Mbanu has few masks; he is much too direct and forthright a figure to engage in such foolishness. Still, he bears a great resemblance to Svarog and Volund among the Northern gods, and he is sometimes associated with Aten, the Sun God. A few dragonborn believe that Mbanu is the dwarven face of Baal-Hotep, the draconic fire god.

Other Faiths

Mbanu is on excellent terms with Ogun, Aten, Xevioso, Horus, and, somewhat oddly, the water goddess Yemaja (the two are believed to have been lovers, and some believe they are still). Mbanu has no truck with any dark gods or with followers of the Serpent or frivolous Kwansi.

What Mbanu Demands

Create items of worth. Lead when you are needed, and follow lawful commands. Know that darkness and death are nothing in the face of the law.



Ninkash

Mother of Beer, Goddess of Merriment, Patron of Brewers and Tavern Keepers, and Matron Goddess of the Cantonal Dwarves

Domains: Beer, Mountain, Nature

Alignment: Good

Favored Weapon: Mace



Dwarves love ale and consume prodigious amounts of it—at least by human measures—and, when they do, they become incoherent, clumsy, or simply fall asleep. The dwarves call this last condition “gone,” short for “gone to visit Ninkash.”

Indeed, the matron mother goddess of ale and merriment has turned brewing and drinking—once the domain of stern dwarven priests, who toasted the dwarven dead at midwinter—into a more frequent and joyful sacrament, though still a serious one. Ninkash embraced the dwarves, and they embraced her.

The public face of Ninkash is a golden-glowing, oversized tankard with a simple handle; it is an ever-full vessel that floats in midair. To her faithful, she appears as a jovial, buxom female dwarf clad in flowing robes that are nut-brown one moment and golden the next. Her garments are simple as a tavern maid’s. The goddess appears barefoot, her clothes unbelted and low-cut. Ninkash always smiles. When she is displeased, her smile

is colder and she shakes her head. When she is pleased, she beams and extends her arms to bring all into her bosom.

Worshippers

Dwarves revere Ninkash, as do the lower classes of Nuria Natal, many of the Ramag in their splintered city, and some folk along the Spice Coast and in Ishadia, the Mharoti Empire, and distant Khandiria and Sikkim. She has also made deep inroads with the dwarves of the North, some say even in the lands of perpetual ice and snow.

Symbols and Books

The holy symbol of Ninkash is a golden, roughly drawn Y shape. Ninkash’s smile appears as a golden, rippling glow above altars and followers singing her praises as they consume her libations. Although she likes to remain unseen, Ninkash can impart directions and visions for the purpose of guidance, warning, or instruction. Ninkash has few texts and appears primarily in dreams and drunken visions. A vision from the goddess usually includes either a golden tankard or rivers of ale spouting from gargoyles and gutters. Sometimes she imparts visions to the sleeping by means of rowdy drinking sessions in noisy dream-taverns.

As a matron goddess, Ninkash represents morale, and she encourages favoring oneself and one’s family with small, daily pleasures—kindnesses and shared fellowship, dining, drinking, and hospitality. She is the goddess of

inward desires, of the demands of flesh and kinship, of expressing oneself, and of questioning laws and authority.

Shrines and Priests

The shrines of Ninkash are both alehouses and places of worship; the holy ales brewed for the fortunate are shared with the community on high holy days, but the halls are always open to those in need of company and consolation.

The priests of Ninkash all wear plain brown robes and carry two tankards, a miniature container and a large belt-tankard. The clergy of Ninkash advise the dwarves of a community, calming and soothing them when necessary but also warning against other influences—even the priests of other gods—when needed. Within the priesthood, male and female dwarves are equal: either gender may lead rituals or hold any rank or holy office.

The most famous of Ninkash's priests currently is Ekibe of the Barley, her principal representative in Nuria Natal, who holds the title of Matron Keeper of Corremel (see “Temple of Ninkash Reaping”, page 42). Among humans, the best-known priestess of Ninkash is Mother Heket Kha-Ahmet (CG female human cleric of the brew of Ninkash, *Creature Codex*, p. 399), a young, black-haired woman of Corremel (see page 42) known for her kind words and relentless devotion to the people of her church.

Masks

Ninkash is often associated with Isis and sometimes with Taweret, who share her role as protectors and keepers of the community. At other times, Ninkash is thought to be the more successful side of Bes, patron of the dwarves.

Other Faiths

Ninkash is on excellent terms with Ptah, Bes, Taweret, and Isis, and likewise seems to be respected by followers of Set, Sabateus, and even ancient Horus, who finds that his soldiers and generals alike are impelled to greater efforts if they know that the solace of Ninkash awaits them after a long march.

Thoth-Hermes and Ninkash consider one another rivals: the priests of Thoth-Hermes see Ninkash's worshipers as rabble, and the followers of Ninkash view the scribes and keepers of knowledge as insufferable snobs.

Most gods have nothing bad to say about Ninkash; even the followers of dark gods seem to find her alehouse temples a fertile ground for recruitment.

What Ninkash Demands

Procure or create a personal tankard and use it to drink ale every day. Learn the craft of brewing and alchemy before you marry. Be kind to others and forgiving of those who fall short of what they might be. Strive to make each day better than the last. Embrace and praise your fellow worshipers, for all the children of Ninkash are stronger together than separately.

Ogun

The Warrior God, Mighty Lord of Iron and War, Patron of the Morreg, Hunter of the Divine Spheres, Forest Master, Patron of Smiths and Miners, Keeper of Keys and Dungeons, Judge of Truth and Celestial Jailer, and Friend to Eshu

Domains: Justice, Nature, War

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapons: Longsword and shortsword



Ogun is the ideal warrior and also the patron of metalworking and smithing; he often rides into battle with blades he has newly forged—blades that seem alive and answer to his call. At the same time as he revels in glorious battle, Ogun is a keeper of the forests and a hunter, for not all of life is centered on battle. He is also a jailer and a dungeon steward, concerned with keeping criminals and monsters away from civilized people.

Ogun is usually depicted as a bald black man in a green tunic and leggings, and often with a wide leather belt. When in battle dress, he wears a bright metal breastplate and a crested helm, and in this form he is a god of great strength and violence. The



destruction he wreaks, however, is always in service to his people. He is occasionally depicted as a master miner or a farmer bringing in the harvest. No matter which aspect of Ogun is shown, he always carries a large ring of keys along with his twin swords.

Worshippers

Ogun's followers include most of the Narumbeki legions as well as the soldiers of Morreg and Lignas. He is a friend to explorers, archers, and miners. Some farmers revere Ogun for his mastery of plants and growth. Mostly, he is revered for being triumphant over serpents and tosculi, a mounted warrior without peer, and a dashing god of victory.

Symbols and Books

Ogun's symbol is a key, or sometimes a ring of keys, representing his skill in unlocking doors. At the same time, Ogun is the lord of jailers, justice, and dungeons: a key locks things away as easily as it releases them.

Ogun's followers have a single sacred text, the *Book of Locks*, which includes strictures that cover the god's creation of metals for the use of men and women, the proper care of weapons, and the terms of imprisonment for various crimes.

Shrines and Priests

Ogun's temples are likely to be located where a prison stands, at the doors to the barracks of the Narumbeki legions, and in favored forests and great cities, for Ogun is well loved by the people of the greener reaches of the Southlands. His greatest temple is the Sword Hall of Ogun in the Narumbeki capital, Ashamba, though the temples along the Morreg forest border are likewise impressive works of carved timber, decorated so as to seem half-alive. In addition, his halls are common in Terrotu and up and down the Spice Coast.

Many of the followers and priests of Ogun are men. The archers of the Fire Legions are all devoted to him, and their general, Xhosa (see "Religions and Deities", page 127), is a follower of Ogun. The keeper of the site that serves the Coil of Memory in Lignas as a prison and a place of punishment is Oghassa Ulfa, Greatest Memory of the Coil (see page 135), a high priest of Ogun.

Masks

Ogun is sometimes thought to be simply the mask that Ptah shows to humans; certainly the two gods share some interests, but their demeanors are quite different, with Ptah a god of stability and Ogun a god of war, wild growth, and triumph in battle. More often, Ogun is associated with his fellow god of smiths, Mbanu.

Other Faiths

Ogun is on good terms with Eshu and Isis, as well as with Mbanu, Takhar, Horus, and Ptah. He is far less a friend to Xevioso, his sometime rival on the battlefield, though

the two are not quite enemies, either. Kwansi is not to be trusted, and Bastet is likewise a dangerous friend (though a worthy hunter).

Ogun is a great and relentless foe of Aposis, Aten, the Hunter, Nakresh, and the White Goddess, all of them forces of chaos and enemies of the people.

What Ogun Demands

Seek glory on the battlefield; strive for greatness in all you do. Keep the caverns and places of the earth sacred, and allow no creatures of darkness to befoul dungeons, pastures, or forests. Ensure that justice is done and the guilty are kept apart in jails, and ward and guard against chaos and law-breaking. Treat all things of metal with respect; your tools are a sign of your character. Respect and care for the growing things in the forests and on the savannah, as greenery is the source of bread and life.

Ptah

First and Reborn Creator-God of Dwarves and Men, Lord of the Eternal, Master of Justice, Sculptor of the Earth, Patron of the Dwarves, Husband to Ninkash and Sekhmet, Shipbuilder of the Gods, Tomb Builder of the God-Kings, and Lord of the Labyrinth



Domains: Forge, Knowledge, Labyrinth, Time

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapons: Staff and hammer

Ptah is the god of the dwarves, killed by Aten with fire and sword and then reborn in the mountain cradle of Sebbek Sobor. He is a hard god; his steel is tempered, his skin is as black as iron or green as copper, his beard is a fiery red, and his arms and muscles can lift any burden. His demeanor is dour and industrious. Work and struggle are his daily meat, and he is not a god of fripperies or idleness—though many say that his first wife, the beer goddess Ninkash, can coax a smile from Ptah.

Ptah is a master of metalwork and jewelry, the creator of the shabti of Nuria Natal, and at one time a confidant to the god-kings as a maker of weapons and a master of every type of construction from mills to barges. He is said to have personally supervised the building of many of the pyramids and tombs of the god-kings, and many of those rulers consider themselves in his debt as a consequence. It is said that when Ptah does visit the River Kingdom, he comes through hidden arcane portals within the tombs of these ancient allies.

In statues, Ptah is always shown with either a bull-headed staff or a staff topped with an ankh, and he has a blue helmet or skullcap. When he wears a smith's



apron, it is decorated with gold and silver, and his arms and neck often display multiple torcs and bracers. He is often shown barefoot, representing that he is deeply in touch with the earth.

Worshippers

Ptah's worshippers are primarily dwarves and artisans. Human carpenters, shipwrights, miners, and architects often venerate him as well. His priesthood is under frequent threat of death in Nuria Natal, and so his worshippers are more commonly found in Narumbeki and in Sebbek Sobor, as well as some few among the dwarves of the Mharoti Empire. His faith is promoted everywhere dwarves are found; every smithy is marked with his sign, and his temples are sometimes as simple as a pair of pillars marked with runes.

A small splinter of Ptah's worshippers are minotaurs, who style him as Lord of the Great Labyrinth and Maker of Mazes.

Symbols and Books

Ptah's symbol is the bull, often shown with the sun as a solar disk hovering above it. Dwarves often use a pillar or a ram as signs of Ptah as well.

Ptah's followers have many sacred texts. Most are written in dwarven runes or encoded when they concern

great mysteries of magical metallurgy, rune magic, or similar lore. The best-known collection of Ptah's faith, and the one most often shown to new converts, is the *Scrolls of Creation*, which contains maxims for leading a good and lawful life, as well as the principles of sacred elementary smithing and the sanctification of blades and armor. One of the more obscure volumes of Ptah's lore is the *Blood of the Bull*, a set of revelations and prophecies concerning the impending death of Aten.

Shrines and Priests

Ptah is a god of architects whose greatest temples have all been torn down. At one time, the Great Temple of Ptah in Nuria Natal was a masterpiece of the builder's art, said to be a place of shining pillars and cool shadows, where knowledge of writing was first given to the Nurian people by Thoth, Ptah's apprentice. But this temple and others have all been destroyed, remade, or confiscated by the cult of Aten in Nuria Natal. As a result, Ptah's priests in that land are quiet, hidden, and modest. Their power speaks through their works of charity and other modest deeds rather than through grand temples and elaborate ceremonies of sacrifice.

Presently, he has one great temple in Narumbeki, the House of Portals, and a second in Cindass, the Shrine of the Maze Builder. The two are said to be connected via a shadow road of some sort. His finest temple in Sebbek Sobor is the House of the Ram, which was once a temple shared with Ninkash. That goddess is no longer worshiped side by side with Ptah in this place, though her adherents are still welcome there.

In both Narumbeki and Sebbek Sobor, reverence to Ptah follows the old ways, and his temples are large, proud structures with dozens or hundreds of human and dwarf priests classified in a dozen categories, including initiates, smith-priests, forge-priests, gold-priests, iron-priests, rune-priests, and (the highest ranking) ram-priests and mason-priests. The high priest of Ptah in Narumbeki is Ummunar Ptah-sar (see "Religions and Deities", page 127), and the high priest in Sebbek Sobor is Solet Ptah-sela (see page 129). The minotaur priests in Cindass are few in number and operate in secret.

Masks

Ptah is widely associated with the Northern god Volund, also a dwarven deity. Among Southern gods, he is often seen as a transformed face of Rava, also a goddess of industry. A few humans think that Ptah and Mbanu are similarly dour and law-driven gods, and that they therefore must be masks for the same divinity, but dwarves think this notion is purely ridiculous; the two gods are as different as Ninkash and Aten, as is plain for any fool to see. A handful of more mystical dwarves believe that Ptah in his creator role is a mask of Veles, the World Serpent.

Other Faiths

Ptah is on excellent terms with followers of Ninkash, Mbanu, Ogun, Horus, and Takhar. They share a love of making, of the law, and of dwarves, and these six gods are sometimes called Ptah's Pantheon or the Gods of the True and Righteous Law in dwarven clanholds. Ptah is also close with Thoth-Hermes, whom priests of Ptah often refer to as Ptah's Apprentice. Both are gods of knowledge, and it is widely believed that some temples of Thoth-Hermes also permit worship of Ptah when the cult of Aten will not allow it elsewhere.

Ptah is a sworn foe of Aten, and the cult of Aten keeps the priesthood of Ptah in Nuria Natal small and secretive. Priests of Ptah believe that Ptah's wooing of the lion-goddess Sekhmet, Aten's daughter, was part of what caused the rift between Ptah and Aten long ago, though accounts vary. Ptah is opposed to the nonsense of the indolent and wild Bastet and to fools such as Kwansi, though this attitude is more a matter of contempt than hatred. True hatred Ptah reserves for Aten and all the dark gods, whom Ptah abhors as stains on the world.

What Ptah Demands

Work hard and honestly. Strive to improve each thing you make, and strive also to avoid excesses of wine, lust, and greed; the soul must be tempered with moderation and thrift. Praise good craftsmen, and pay for the work of able hands. Acts of thievery against anyone, whether peasant, smith, or scribe, are shameful. Give alms to the deserving poor, and lift up those around you by your stout example.

Sabateus

Lord of Stars and Planets, Maker of Magic, Patron of the Shadow Paths, King of the Moon and Master of Night, and Lord of the Desert Night

Domains: Darkness, Knowledge, Moon

Alignment: Neutral

Favored Weapons: Dagger and staff

Sabateus is an enigmatic figure, often described as the "seven-sided god." He is always shown in a tabard or djebella of black marked with white and yellow stars. He is often portrayed masked or with a halo and attended by circling stars and moons. His worship takes place exclusively at night, and yet he is never ranked among the dark gods. He might be distant and rarely moved by entreaties, but Sabateus is a celestial figure. He is never openly malevolent.

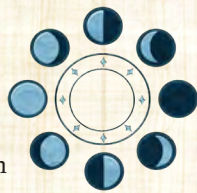
Worshippers

The worshippers of Sabateus are seekers after wisdom and knowledge, and they are devoted to the stars, ancient

mysteries, and knowledge from ages long gone. Some cast horoscopes, others master magic, and others still are simple shepherds who hear the song of the spheres in the desert nights. The lamias are also known to worship Sabateus as the Moon's Husband.

Symbols and Books

Hundreds of volumes of Sabatean lore exist, though many are little more than plodding poems dedicated to the stars and the sphinx. Some are grisly tales of magical rituals and descriptions of how to master esoteric knowledge. The only Sabatean volume that has universal appeal is the *Gospel of Adimun*, written by the first prophet of Sabateus. Adimun is widely seen as one of the great wizards of the Southlands and, by some, the first recipient of the Emerald Tablets of Thoth-Hermes. His sacred writings include the "First Key," which is a form of recited magic used for instructing disciples in the arcane. A few consider him a disciple of Veles, from whom Sabateus learned or stole the secrets of magic for mortals.



Shrines and Priests

Idols of Sabateus exist in many places, often on desert plateaus or carved in the soft stone of desert cliffs and tablelands. Temples are rare, and built in secret spots, often more noticed by night than by day, much as a lighthouse seems to be just a tower until after the sun sets.

The priesthood of Sabateus is largely nomadic, and its members are known for their humility and their caution. Few speak to the faithful directly as Adimun did; rather, they gather fellow adherents under the night sky and declaim from works of verse or recite hymns in accordance with celestial events.

Masks

Sabateus is sometimes thought to be a mask of Thoth-Hermes, though with a greater emphasis on stars and celestial events, or the male face of Hecate from the North. The more prevalent speculation is that Sabateus is some form of herald or a seemingly kindly dark god. His worshipers are often thought of as suspect or dangerous because of their nocturnal services and their devotion to darkness.

Other Faiths

Followers of Sabateus rarely get along with the gods of light, especially Horus, Xevioso, or Mbanu. They are on excellent terms with the priests of Thoth-Hermes, the mendicant priests of Eshu, and the tale-spinner-priests of Kwansi. Sabateans are often accused of being willing to attend the services of dark gods when seeking ancient secrets; this accusation may be true of some of them, but not all, since most Sabateans believe that the dark gods pervert and foul the purity of the stars.

What Sabateus Demands

Learn to find the stars and constellations, and know their meanings. Understand the ways of the night, its creatures, and its rhythms. Sleep by day when you can, and seek the old lore in hidden places. Preserve and expand knowledge of the earth, the stars, and the people of both realms.

Takhar

Guardian of the Gates, Keeper of the Springs of Life and Death, Warden of the World Tree, Far-Seer, and the Incorruptible

Domains: Death, Life, War

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapons: Scimitar and greataxe



Takhar is the marshal of war, the officer among the watchmen, and the keeper of the law. His eyes are stern, his vision is sharp, and his orders are issued with firm



purpose. When Takhar is on the move, the folk of the desert say, the winds scatter and the dunes hide their children. His red turban and mirrored helmet shine, and his white robes are sometimes flecked with blood. Takhar's scimitar is harder than diamond and twice as bright. He is always shown wearing armor of some sort.

Worshipers

The worshipers of Takhar include all the soldiers of the armies of Cindass, Mhalmel, the Lion Kingdom, and many of the desert sheikhs. Guardians, judges, jailers, and mourners pay homage to him, as do the gravebinders of Siwal and the shamans of the Tamasheq. Even among the gnolls, those who turn away from Laughing Nkishi revere Takhar. Paladins, fighters, rangers, healers, and generals all flock to his banner, as do a fair number of the dwarves of Sebbek Sobor. One of the greatest of Takhar's followers

might be Hune, the Lord of Doors, a legendary figure said to be a man of Ramag who became a godling in Nuria.

Symbols and Books

Takhar's sacred books are three: the *Book of Just War*, the *Book of Saint Saussatar*, and the *Gospel of the World Tree*. His symbol is a door or gate, either flanked by great trees or containing the World Tree.

Shrines and Priests

Statues of Takhar are kept in niches beside doors throughout the Southlands deserts, and they are common in tombs, in storehouses, and even in wine cellars and abattoirs. He is often propitiated by the sacrifice of bulls, wine, and cobras, and his temples sometimes offer both blessings and funerals to soldiers and watchmen on the holy days of the faith. More than most priesthoods, the followers of Takhar commission the resurrection of famed heroes and beloved warriors of the faith—those not entrusted with the secrets of the cult's mysteries are rarely granted this dispensation.

Masks

Takhar is widely assumed to be Horus, Ogun, and possibly Xevioso—the gods of sun and the gods of war are somehow linked, though no one understands the full truth of it. Some say that the four are brothers, and others say that they are two pairs of twins. In the North, Takhar is sometimes associated with thunder gods.

Other Faiths

Followers of Takhar are friendly toward the followers of Horus, Aten, Ogun, Xevioso, and similar martial figures. They also strive to be close to the worshipers of Isis, goddess of healing, said by many to be Takhar's sister or cousin—though Isis and her followers are rarely fond of Takhar's violence. Takhar's followers are universally opposed to all the dark gods, as well as to the schemes of the World Serpent (Djyy), the foolishness of Kwansi, and the dark path of Anu-Akma.

What Takhar Demands

Fight hard against the darkness at the end of days; heal the wounded, and give succor and encouragement to wavering and faltering soldiers. Keep your oaths, turn aside foulness and temptation, and shepherd your followers wisely; each is blood of your blood. Your burdens are great, but you must live to be worthy of glory, and to strive for the honor of climbing the World Tree into the heavens, where your deeds shall be rewarded.

Thoth-Hermes

The Wise, God of Knowledge and Learning, Creator of Language, Lord of Merchants, Patron of Scholars and Thieves, Master of the Arcane Realms, and Creator of the Emerald Tablets



Domains: Knowledge, Travel, Trickery

Alignment: Neutral

Favored Weapons: Staff and dagger

The visage of Thoth-Hermes is represented alternately as that of an ibis, a stork, or a winged human. His body is thin (sometimes stooped and sometimes lithe), and he is frequently depicted wearing either a cloak of feathers or winged sandals. Far more important than his statues are his libraries and his market shrines, for Thoth-Hermes is the patron of both reclusive scholars and worldly, engaged merchants who carry goods far beyond Nuria in search of profit.

Worshippers

Thoth-Hermes is worshiped by scholars, scribes, merchants, thieves, messengers, travelers, and wizards throughout Nuria Natal and in Kush, Shibai, Mhalmet, and Aksaba. In the city of Aerdvall, Thoth-Hermes is known as Irkalla, and in Ishadia he is known by the name of Az. His followers come from all sorts of backgrounds, but they are curious, learned, and interested in knowledge both licit and illicit.

Thoth-Hermes is the patron of the Nurian arcanists and the Scribes of Thoth, who are masters of both arcane and divine magic, sometimes interwoven. He is the patron of hieroglyphic magic and learning of all kinds.

All followers of Thoth-Hermes must create a "life book" of value to savants, scholars, and future generations. (See "What Thoth-Hermes Demands" below.) The life books of some high priests and notable wizards are treated as prophetic, holy, or inspired works.

Symbols and Books

The favored weapons of priests of Thoth-Hermes are the staff and the dagger, which the god considers symbolic of magic, thievery, and humble scholars. The penknife of Thoth is sometimes also cited as a favored tool, and a few diehards believe in carrying only a quill or a stylus as his symbol and sign.

All books are sacred to Thoth-Hermes, and to destroy a book is considered an abomination. The most famous sacred texts of Thoth-Hermes include the *Book of Passage to Heaven*, the *Book of Magic*, a volume titled *150 Sacred Rituals*, the *Book of Starry Wisdom*, and the *Book of the World*, which is a sort of encyclopedia of priestly knowledge. A

set of Emerald Tablets, sacred to Thoth-Hermes, are a lost artifact said to date from the earliest days of his divinity. A cult called the Emerald Order claims to have them and to be pursuing their own ends based on those writings; most priests of Thoth-Hermes are, at best, skeptical of both the cultists' claims and their goals.

Shrines and Priests

The greatest shrines of Thoth-Hermes are libraries, such as the library-temple of Siwal or the seminary library-temple at Laksor. Just as important and far more numerous are the small shrines in every market where Thoth-Hermes is worshiped: each such place contains a set of weighing scales and a locked box for offerings. The scales are true and well balanced, and theft from the god's offerings is met with swift reprisal at the hands of Thoth-Hermes's more fanatical followers.

Thoth-Hermes has no major military orders but is responsible for the legions of spies, diplomats, and couriers that armies rely on, not to mention wand-wielding elite companies of spellcasters.



Among these might be counted some of the Scribes of Thoth-Hermes, the extremely learned casters from the temple at Laksor. While many work at the temple itself, others go out in to the wider world in small groups in search of particular books, knowledge, or items of interest to the high priests of Thoth-Hermes.

Masks

Thoth-Hermes is sometimes thought to be a mask of Ptah among the dwarves, or a more daylight-loving face of Sabateus. Folk in the Northlands often assume he is a mask of Loki or Wotan, but in the South he is often associated with Wadjet and Shu, or occasionally with Khonsu and Eshu.

Other Faiths

The followers of Thoth-Hermes are either largely indifferent to the world beyond the scriptorium door, or deeply engaged with it in their roles as messengers and explorers. The priests of the faith have a special hatred for the cults of Titivillus, the patron demon of scribes, and likewise for Mammon, the demon lord of greed (a corruption, they believe, of the principles of proper trade). They are friendly with most other faiths, especially those of Isis the Golden and of Horus. The temples of Bastet and Aten are boisterous targets for Thoth-Hermes's more earthy and thieving followers.

What Thoth-Hermes Demands

Literacy is your most important attribute; cultivate it continually. Use the knowledge you gain from written works to develop and hone your skills, concentrating on those disciplines and techniques that lead to the discovery of more knowledge. Keep a record of all new lore you acquire, and of personal experiences that will inspire those who come after you.

Xevioso

God of War and Thunder, Lord of Battle and Rebirth, Patron of Narumbeki, Master of Strife, Swift Striding Commander, and Husband to the White Goddess

Domains: Life, Speed, Tempest, War

Alignment: Neutral

Favored Weapons: Scimitar and spear

Xevioso, the swift god of war and thunder, is known as the Master of Strife in the South. The sound of spear on shield is his chorus, and the tramp of boots as soldiers march and muster is his ceremony—war songs and battle chants praising him are common. Xevioso seeks to expand conflict between nations, and to strengthen his worshipers against their enemies. He is the bright blade of



youths making their first cattle raid and the notched edge of gray-bearded veterans. Many turn to him in times of anger. They know that his service is an honorable estate, as long as they do not violate the Edicts of Just War.

Xevioso is perhaps the simplest of gods—an entity who savors destruction, strength, and war. His more unusual aspect is that of healing and rebirth, since his mysteries involve not just death and glory, but also resurrection and the cleansing of the soul.

Most soldiers, guards, watchmen, bandits, and scouts make offerings to Xevioso. In his cavern-temples, he brings the greatest warriors back to fight once more, for resurrection magic is at his priests' command. Xevioso's role in resurrection is tied to his status as a master of the spear-maidens, which are angelic figures said to have once visited Midgard in corporeal form to rule it with uncompromising justice.

Xevioso is usually pictured wearing his coat of storms. This is a tailored garment that resembles a suit of heavy metal plates, but it also gives off lightning that strikes his enemies and heralds his terrible stride across the field.

Worshippers

Humans are Xevioso's most devoted worshippers, especially those of Morreg, Lignas, and Narumbeki, as well as communities in Terrotu and in scattered Ramag. In Ishadia, Xevioso is known as Mavrash. A few orcs of the Green Abyss are said to follow his most warlike priests and shamans, though their worship is surely rife with error and blasphemies. A few dwarves have taken to his mastery of swift courage and unerringly strength; most others consider his faith tainted because of its appeal to orcs.

Soldiers, watchmen, farmers, and shepherds beseech the God of War and Thunder for strength and guidance. Females are frequent adherents of Xevioso's mysteries, and the spear-maidens of Morreg and Lignas are rightly feared. Few wish to cross the god's daughters in battle.

Symbols and Books

All weapons of war are weapons of Xevioso, and yet he has his favorites: the spear and the scimitar. Among minotaurs and dwarves, the ax is also associated with the Bloody God of War. Many of his worshippers incorporate a lightning bolt, a red bull, or a red circle in their heraldry.

The holy writings of Xevioso include 25 *Martial Books* and the more mystical *Soldier's Journey*. The first is written in the Northern Tongue, and the second in the Southern Tongue, but both are translated for his priests in other regions. The *Edicts of Just War* is not precisely a holy book, but it provides the legal and moral framework for his followers and how they must behave on the battlefield and in matters of marching, siege, surrenders, prisoners, and the treatment of innocents.



Shrines and Priests

Xevioso's priests are frequently officers in Southern armies, and they are considered simultaneously the best officers and among the worst (because of their fanaticism). The priesthood is more than 80 percent male among humans; only among gnolls is the priesthood overwhelmingly female. The worship of Xevioso is most common in spring, as the campaign season begins. His priests are indistinguishable from mercenary captains, and indeed some serve as leaders in various long-standing bands of sellswords.

Masks

Though primarily a god of war and thunder, Xevioso is also the god of chaos and rebirth, and he is a patron of animals and druids.

Xevioso is called Perun, Thor, or Mavros in the Northlands, and Horus is often said to be the face of the god in Nuria. Others claim that Takhar and Xevioso are much alike, or sometimes Xevioso and Ogun. Among

gnolls, Xevioso is seen as a female goddess named Xeviosah but otherwise largely identical. The difficulty is that many gods of war are, invariably, concerned with many of the same trials and troubles.

Other Faiths

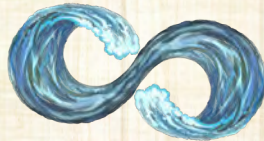
Xevioso is the brother of Sabateus and, among the orcs, the husband of the White Goddess. He is also seen as the son of Horus, though many followers disagree on this point. He is among the least connected to other faiths, since his priests treat soldiers as his children and victory as his only love. Xevioso's greatest enemies include Isis the Golden Goddess, whose priests disdain the honorable wounds of battle and promote peace rather than strife.

What Xevioso Demands

Xevioso wants action from his followers! Seek out opportunities for battle and keep your martial skills well honed. Duels and other forms of combat may never be refused. The perfect end of life for a follower of Xevioso takes place on the battlefield—death from old age is abhorrent. You must attend the mysteries at his temple before undertaking a great battle or a long journey, and never abandon a comrade's body on the field. Make a pilgrimage to a great battlefield at least once in your life. Retreat is acceptable in the face of destruction, but victory is the finest goal you can achieve.

Yemaja of the Waters

The Benevolent Voice, Goddess over All Waters, Mother of the Titans, Patroness of the Tamasheq, Lady of Sirens, the Eternal Memory, and Sister-Wife of Veles



Domains: Knowledge, Life, Ocean, Time

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapon: Staff

When the elemental dragon Nethus-Seggotan came into existence, long before the other gods, one other entity was in the world: Yemaja. She was merely an essence then—made of pure thought and memory—but she had been there before Seggotan, and he knew that she would be there long after him. She was the Keeper of Time, though Seggotan later stole the title. When he did so, the aloof Yemaja offered no resistance, nor did she seem to care. She remembered the truth.

Yemaja took her time in choosing a corporeal form; she did not appear as a humanoid (a fey-like, adolescent siren) until the other gods had all selected their forms and chosen their heavenly and earthly domains. She spent some time in the Northlands, where the people call her Mnemosyne and revere her as a daughter of the sea.



When Seggotan became aware of her presence, joy filled his heart at her beauty and he became smitten with the coy woman-child. For years on end, he wooed her with his ocean song and bade his servants to bring her flowers. Seggotan's courting eventually won her over, and they wed. For a long time, they were happy, and their marriage produced several offspring, chief among them the Southlands titans.

Worshippers

Yemaja is worshiped as a water goddess as well as the protector of women and children. Humans, minotaurs, and jinnborn comprise the majority of her worshippers, along with a few dragonborn and lizardfolk. Temples to her exist in major cities across the South, and many village wells are marked with her sign, as are bridges, docks, and even ships.

Symbols and Books

The most common symbol of Yemaja is the symbol of infinity, a sidewise figure eight. Yemaja has no books or doctrine of her own. Her less common symbols include a wave, the claw of a crab, or a bubbling spring.

Shrines and Priests

Yemaja has an enormous temple in the city of Shibai, as well as major temple complexes in Cindass, Narumbeki, and Avawa, the second-largest city in Lignas. The most famous priestess of Yemaja is Alayinca the Wise, a wealthy woman of Narumbeki (see page 124) who is overseeing the construction of a new temple there and whose followers believe that wealth flows from her touch and blessings. The priestess Bmidele Awansha is a prophet in Lignas (see page 133), highly honored there for her insights into the future.

Masks

Some believe that Yemaja is a mask of the World Serpent because of her connections to the infinite. Others see her nature as closer to that of Takhar, god of doors. She is also called Mnemosyne (or, to some, this Northern face is her daughter), and Yarila, Porevit, and Thoth-Hermes are often assumed to be her masks.

Other Faiths

Yemaja's only true allies are Nethus-Seggotan and Thoth-Hermes, though Horus shares her view on justice. Hecate's followers despise Yemaja, but they know they cannot kill her lest they unravel the threads of their own world. In her Nurian offspring or mask form as Taweret, Yemaja is said to be the wife of Set and also the wife of the

minor godling Bes; her vast capacity for love could account for both relationships, though the followers of Bes claim that Set is an interloper, and Set's followers insist that Bes is Yemaja's brother.

What Yemaja Demands

Shelter females and young from harm. Share water with the thirsty. Strive to promote justice, beauty, and songs of knowledge; reconcile with Nethus-Seggotan and unravel the mysteries surrounding his imprisonment. A worthy life is one lived in service to others, whether as a parent, a provider, or a seeker of knowledge and truth. Strive to uphold the law always.

dark gods of the south

One person's divinity is another person's dark abomination, and some gods are more often jealous, rapacious, devouring, and malevolent. The most dangerous cults and fanatical priests tend to favor divine mandates to mass murder and a never-ending hunger for sacrifice and conquest. These dark gods are sometimes openly embraced, but they are far more often treated as rivals and enemies of the protector gods.

At the same time, several of these gods specifically champion the poor, the weak, and the voiceless among the Southlands: peasants, slaves, rebels, and the poorest of the poor. Willing to provide divine sanction for those whom the more established gods shun, the dark gods provide power, meaning, and even hope to the desperate. Whether this is a kind service or a cruel deception is merely a matter of perspective.

DARK GODS OF THE SOUTH

Name	Typical Worshipers	Domains
Aposis	Crocodiles, lizardfolk, satarre, subek, cultists	Apocalypse, Darkness, Dragon, Hunger
Arbeyach	Tosculi, judges, gnolls, subek	Hunger, Justice, Vermin
Baal-Hotep	Dragonborn, kobolds, jinnborn, bakers, farmers, butchers, judges, soldiers	Dragon, Justice, Tempest
The Hunter	Hunters, the bloodthirsty, catfolk, minotaurs, vampires	Death, Hunting, Moon
Laughing Nkishi	Gnolls, bandits, ghouls	Darkness, Hunger, Trickery
Mot	Forest tribesmen, Narumbeki fire legions, nobles, undead	Death, Justice, War
Nakresh	Thieves, wizards, tomb robbers, jinnborn, the poor	Knowledge, Speed, Trickery
Selket	Nomads, catfolk, tosculi, thieves, rebels	Cat, Death, Hunting, Life
Set	Peasants, farmers, watchmen	Darkness, Dragon, Prophecy, Tempest, Vermin
White Goddess	Orcs, goblins, ogres, trollkin	Darkness, Death, Hunger, War

Aposis

The Chaos Serpent, Dragon of the Apocalypse, the Devouring Wurm, Patron of Zanskar

Domains: Darkness, Dragon, Hunger

Alignment: Evil

Favored Weapons: Morningstar and khopesh (see *Southlands Player's Guide*)



Aposis is an enormous serpent, often depicted as golden, though just as often it has black scales on its back and a white underbelly. Most depictions of Aposis show a serpent at least 20 feet tall and more than 300 feet long, but its size is highly variable. Aposis has wide jaws, the better to swallow the sun or whatever else it desires. It hungers always, and its enemies are legion, for it seeks to destroy the world and bring on the apocalypse.

Worshippers

The followers of Aposis are fanatical supporters of the end of all things and the world's destruction. They include human cultists in Sar-Shaba and elsewhere, satarre, lizardfolk, some trolls and trollkin, as well as subek and werecrocodiles. Not all these supplicants are evil; some are simply stoic and fatalistic about what will happen once Aposis begins devouring the mortal world and the World Trees crash to earth.

Symbols and Books

Aposis has about a dozen major works of summoning, revelation, and prophecy, including the *True Book of Devouring the Soul*, the *End of All Things*, the *Revealed Word of the Great Destroyer*, and the *Book of 5,000 Sable Scales*. Certain volumes of satarre void-prophecies are attributed to visions granted by Aposis. Some satarre ingest poison to gain such visions; these works include the *Serpent's Eye Devouring the World* and *Nicatree's Revelations of the Void*.

Shrines and Priests

Aposis has almost no shrines in civilized lands, though lizardfolk often raise piles of skulls in its honor, decorating them with entrails and with runes written in blood. Some of these cairn-shrines can grow to substantial size. The largest resemble small hills and have steps carved into their slopes.

Masks

Most priests and savants believe that Aposis is a dark mask of Veles, the World Serpent, or a foreshadowing of some future time when Veles turns and begins consuming the world. Some scholars and worshipers believe that it works through other dark gods such as Laughing Nkishi, Set, and Vardesain (in the North).



Other Faiths

Followers of Aposis are amused by all other faiths. They are certain that all the foolish devotees to other gods are doomed weaklings, and that when Aposis rises to the fore, none will stand in its path for long. Thus, Aposis's followers are quite tolerant of other dark gods and even the more violent war gods.

At the same time, followers of Aposis are devoted foes of all worshipers of Aten, Horus, Ogun, Khors, and similar gods of light and sun. If captured, followers of the gods of light are always slain in elaborate sacrificial ceremonies that involve the symbolic devouring of their hearts by Aposis.

What Aposis Demands

Destroy Aten's followers and all such bringers of light. Devour the earth. Prepare for the end of all things—and hasten it with acts of blood and murder.

Arbeyach

Prince of Swarms, Arch-Devil of the Buzzing Hell Bzeletalet, Lord of Locusts, Patron of the Tosculi, Emperor of Wasps, Supreme General of the Meat-Raids, Scion of Endless Hunger, and Shining Light of Hives



Domains: Hunger, Justice, Vermin

Alignment: Lawful evil

Favored Weapons: Shortbow and dagger

The Prince of Swarms most often appears to humans as a man wearing ragged finery and with his skin and bones undergirded with swarming insects rather than flesh and blood. In this form, his eyes reflect glittering sparks, and his nails are long and unkempt. Something always crawls beneath the clothing that was once rich vestments.

He commonly appears to the tosculi as a warrior with a glimmering carapace and wielding a deadly bow. His carapace is often shown flecked with blood or gore.

The rarer female form of Arbeyach is revered among some of the tosculi, who claim the hive-empress they call Arbeyesha is the greatest of queens, and that she has been corrupted by contact with human worshipers who fail to understand her or depict her correctly. Some worshipers account for both possibilities by referring to Arbeyach as “it,” a creature of indeterminate gender.

In any of these guises, Arbeyach is an arch-devil who embodies rigid order and inevitable decay. He preaches strict adherence to every law, and famines follow in his footsteps. All things will come to him to be devoured by the swarm. Ultimately, all worship is futile, and yet the forms of reverence must be strictly observed.

Arbeyach enjoins his priests to carry bows and daggers to slay whatever wasps, locusts, and hunger cannot.

Worshipers

In most lands, Arbeyach has no temples or priesthoods, only cults and petitioners. Among humanoids such as goblins and gnolls, he is seen as a mighty insect that grants the prayers of those engaged in scavenging, looting, and destruction. Among humans and devils, some corrupt lawyers, thieving sheriffs, and warmongers find his cult appealing. The satarre see Arbeyach as a congenial figure who heralds the world’s decay into nothingness.

Most of his worshipers are tosculi, and some human and dwarf farmers of the Southlands also pray to him. Some kobolds, gearforged, subek, gnolls, satarre, and a few jinnborn venerate Arbeyach as an entity to be placated before a raid or an enormous feast, or honored as a patron of destruction.

Symbols and Books

Arbeyach’s symbol is a circular arrangement of six locust wings, often with a mystical seal in the center. Other symbols include a mystic circle marked on half of its face, a hexagonal eye, and a piece of textured cloth with a sheen that resembles the shimmering of a swarm.

The only text of Arbeyach’s faith is the *True Song of the Hive*, a compilation of commandments and rituals that explains the correct protocol for all occasions. Ceremonies of hatching, naming, swarming, mating, raiding, prayer, and offering sacrifice are covered, as well as ceremonies of investiture for habitations and rituals for setting a watch, building a fire, or skinning meat. It is precise and tedious in its gory details.

Shrines and Priests

The tosculi have erected almost all the shrines to Arbeyach, though occasionally the god rates a small chapel in a temple devoted to Set or the White Goddess. The Great Hive of Arbeyach is its holy city and greatest shrine, and a site of pilgrimage for the tosculi faithful.

The current high priestess of the faith is Hrash Hrashnat (see “Sky Temple”, page 203), Speaker for the Hive.

This luminary has a particular fondness for offering up



the priests of other faiths as sacrifices to strengthen Arbeyach's waning power.

Masks

Several Lords of Hell are often conflated with Arbeyach, including the stiff and rulebound Totivillus, and even the bizarre Xecha Zecha Amblamar, the Lady of Pure Distillate. More often, it is thought that the slaving Vardesain is a mask of Arbeyach, or more likely, that Arbeyach is Vardesain's face among the tosculi. For the most part, Arbeyach is too minor and strange a god to be seen as the face of another divine figure.

Other Faiths

Arbeyach is closely allied with the arch-devils and creatures of the Eleven Hells, from the Lord of Flies to the automata devils and Parzelon, keeper of secrets. He is also on good terms with Mot, lord of the undead, Selket as mistress of poisons, and with Set, who considers Arbeyach a useful tool and enforcer. Aten, Takhar, and Ogun all see Arbeyach as contemptible and dangerous, since his command of swarms of locusts, along with armies of tosculi, could undermine entire nations if allowed to grow in numbers. His worshipers' delight in desecrating graves is especially offensive to Anu-Akma.

What Arbeyach Demands

Swarm the earth and strip it bare for the glory of Bzeletalet and the thousand hives. Keep the traditions and make the living sacrifices as they have been made for ten thousand generations; never change the forms and the manner of worship. Plan for everything; prepare your raids, your obeisance, and your speech each day of your life. Consume all that life offers.

Baal-Hotep

He Who Rides on the Clouds, Lord of the Heavens, Lord of Fire and Master of Noble Sacrifice, King of All Dragons, Lord of Fertile Fields, Master of Rain and Dew, Scarlet Protector of the Innocent, Fearsome Judge of the Unrighteous, Supreme Fire Dragon, and Patron of the Empire and Dragonkin



Domains: Dragon, Justice, Tempest

Alignment: Lawful

Favored Weapon: Longsword

This dragon god is a figure of great power and opulent statues in the Mharoti Empire, but he is considered a renegade at best in the ancient pantheon of Nuria Natal. Nonetheless, he is revered in secret in Nuria and more openly along the Spice Coast and elsewhere. While still a figure of fire and rulership, to the Nurians he is also



the god of fertility, rain, and dew, a master of armies and elements, a source of harsh justice, and the dispenser of vital rain and soothing winds.

Baal appears in two fearsome forms. One is a flame dragon of incredible size with blazing eyes, scales of red-rimmed black, and golden claws, eyes, horns, and spines. His black wings are streaked with green and gold. A second avatar, much more common outside the Mharoti Empire, is a horned minotaur with bronze skin and a mouth filled with fire. Both are sometimes shown commanding the clouds and lightning. The jaws of Baal are huge and fanged, and—as his scriptures frequently intone—the fires must be fed.

Worshipers

Dragonborn and kobolds revere Baal-Hotep openly wherever they are found in the Southlands. Among humans, jinnborn, and dwarves, his followers are numerous (especially in Cindass and in Kush) but often much quieter. They include bakers, farmers, butchers, goatherds, and other people dependent on the land and rainfall. Soldiers are sometimes followers of Baal-Hotep, as are nobles and judges who have become dissatisfied with the chaos and strife in their holdings.

Symbols and Books

Baal's symbols are a horned dragon head and a leaping flame. The colors red, gold, black, and orange are common among the vestments of his priests.

The teachings of the Lord of Fire are never written down. Instead, they are maintained in the oral history of the faith and recited daily by the Baal-Shek, the learned priests who have memorized all 444 of the sacred stories of Baal. The final 44 of these are secrets peculiar to the priesthood of Baal, and it is said that those who learn to solve them are all dragonborn who were raised from infancy by the dragon-lords themselves.

Shrines and Priests

The greatest temple of Baal is the Sultan's Fire Shrine in Harkesh, the capital of the Mharoti Empire; pilgrims from Cindass and Kush sometimes travel north to visit it. Their own temples are also beautifully ornate works, their walls and slim towers covered in thin hammered gold leaf, their interiors lit by perpetual altar fires. The shrine in Cindass (see page 71) is the Holy Sept of the Light of Baal-Hotep, whose chief priest is the gray-bearded elder Betron Ya. In Kush (see page 115), the Firelord's Sanctum in Suadu is overseen by Fire Priestess Ellte Tidzkanel. The temple is made of ebony wood marked with golden inlays and mother of pearl brought from the distant coast. Its flames send up a constant plume of smoke visible from Aerdvall and the mountains.

The current leader of the priesthood of Baal-Hotep is High Priestess Hasibe al-Harkeshi (LN female dragonborn **first servant** of Baal; see page 282). On her throne in the Fire Shrine, she is always accompanied by elementalists, salamanders, and tophet guards and attendants, and she is said to sacrifice bars of pure gold to the god each week.

Masks

Some believe that Baal-Hotep is a mask of Aten, Chernovog, Ogun, and possibly even Volund, but such thoughts are considered blasphemy within the Dragon Empire. Elsewhere, most of Baal's followers believe that Vardesain, the ghoulish god of hunger, is a less fiery mask of Baal-Hotep, and a few believe that Baal is simply a mask of Veles, the Father Serpent. In practice, the god of fire has many children—at least as the Mharoti see it.

Other Faiths

Baal-Hotep considers Aposis a servant of his and thinks of the White Goddess as a heretical corruption of the fiery truth. Aten is likewise a fraud, Baal-Hotep believes. Mbanu and Baal-Hotep are long past simple rivalry; members of the two faiths despise each other, and Horus and Baal-Hotep are likewise implacable foes.

Followers of Baal-Hotep get along well with worshippers of the Serpent, the other dragon gods, and, perhaps not surprisingly, the Hunter and Vardesain.

What Baal-Hotep Demands

Sacrifice gold, blood, and treasure to the fiery furnace. Pray before a fire every day, and burn fat, meat, paper, and incense in his name. Avoid water; never swim or sail if you can walk or fly. Rage is a righteous and proper form of worship, but you must protect the innocent, unless their hour of sacrifice is at hand. Never write down the lessons of Baal-Hotep, but keep them in your heart.

The Hunter

Master of the Hunt, the Horned Huntsman, the Blood God, the Horseman, the Many-skinned Walker, and Patron of Per-Kush

Domains: Death, Hunting, Moon

Alignment: Evil

Favored Weapons: Spear and bow (any)

The Hunter walks in countless forms, including those of a dire wolf, human huntsman, fell hound, centaur archer, pale king, fey assassin, blood demon, and goblin trapper. The god embodies the fierce animals lurking in the wild fringes as well as those who pursue and conquer them. The Blood God encourages the dark instincts that drive beasts to fury. The Hunter revels in the chase and thrives on power, violence, and blood.

The Hunter sometimes appears wearing a crown of horns or claws, a rich fur cloak, and deerskin leggings, and wielding a black-tipped spear. The Hunter's eyes are said to flash green and gold, particularly when he is in the throes of a challenging chase.

Worshippers

The Hunter has ancient roots, and his priests lead or influence many of the most violent bandit gangs and tosculi raiders. He is publicly worshiped in Per-Anu, Per-Kush, and among the catfolk and humans of Kesara, Omphaya, and most of all, in the Great Hive of Arbeyach southeast of Kush. When the Hunter rides forth, all who hear his call must heed it—even fey gods have been enraptured by it.

The Blood God enjoys a large following among human and catfolk hunters, lycanthropes, gnolls, vampires, ogres, and even shadow fey. Many hobgoblin, trollkin, and goblin tribes revere him as well. The minotaurs see him as the champion of murderous urges and the embodiment of the delight of tracking and killing prey; his worship is perhaps more widespread among them than anyone cares to admit.

The gnollish aspect of the god is called the Huntress (see "Gods of Dabu", page 229).

Symbols and Books

Every kind of predatory beast, monstrous and otherwise, can be a representation of the Hunter, though his primary



symbol is a bloodied carcass. Other signs of his faith include stylized spear tips and arrowheads, particularly where the Horned One's nature must remain hidden. Observant, intelligent prey can interpret such symbols as omens or warnings.

The Hunter's faith is spread through oral tradition, often in campfire stories shared by hunters. Written texts devoted to the god are rare. Books, after all, are only guides to embracing the Horned God; believers must demonstrate real bloodlust before they can fully understand the Hunter's call.

Shrines and Priests

Every bloodied hunting ground can serve as a shrine to the Hunter. Full-fledged temples are rare, but small, formal shrines are consecrated in remote woods or secluded valleys. Adorned with the bones and skins of the followers' prey, these gory shrines are bathed in blood. Less grisly altars are maintained by various hunting fraternities in Narumbeki and Lignas.

Masks

Despite an occasional association with other gods, the Hunter's priests claim that their god wears no masks, though others believe variously that Vardesain, Mavros, Kwansi, or Baal-Hotep are aspects of the Hunter. Some of his names are taken from gods who became his prey.



Other Faiths

To the Hunter, there are only two kinds of gods. The worthy ones are fellow hunters who join him on his great chases, and their followers are their yeomen and attendants. All other gods are meat. Their clergy and their followers are also meat, all the sweeter for their mortal suppleness.

What the Hunter Demands

Hunt or be hunted. Join the Master's Hunt when it rides by, and hunt warthogs, wildebeest, impala, antelope, rabbits—whatever crosses your path. Learn to track, learn to kill without hesitation, and eat what you kill. Know that your life, too, might someday come to a violent end, and live your life with great gusto before that day arrives.

Laughing Nkishi

The Laughing Darkness, Blood-muzzle, Man-killer, the One Who Knows the Path, the Two-faced God, Patron of the Gnolls

Domains: Darkness, Hunger, Trickery

Alignment: Evil

Favored Weapon: Spear



Long ago, Smiling Nkishi was a city god and a famed hunter, but after the fall of the Carnidine Kingdom, something changed. His smiles grew bitter, his fangs grew long, and his patience frequently ran thin. Some say that after this transformation Nkishi and Kwansi quarreled over Isis; others believe that Nkishi argued with Ptah over the proper building of a great pyramid.

Still others say Nkishi quarreled with everyone, and as a consequence he killed the elephant god Maraut and drove the ape-demon Mechuiti to strange madness. These days, Nkishi is a dark god of cold, cruel laughter, a god who demands great courage and rewards followers with strength in battle. There might be a few followers of the old Nkishi somewhere, but they are few and well hidden. Laughing Nkishi is an active and vibrant god who seeks new followers, triumph in battle, and glory for the gnolls.

Nkishi is always shown as an armed, powerfully muscled gnoll, often with a face and a snout on each side of his head. He carries a spear adorned with the scalps of his enemies, and he is usually wearing red boots and sometimes a red kilt. One of his boots often rests on a human skull.

Worshippers

Nkishi's faithful are primarily gnolls, though he counts many bouda and other shapechangers of the Southlands among his adherents, as well as humanoids that attach themselves to gnoll bands. His priests consider other gods

to be evil spirits whose influence must be crushed. Gnoll worshipers of Nkishi believe that the gnolls as a people have lost their way, and that it is their sacred duty to bring others to the true path by means of brutal example.

Symbols and Books

Nkishi has no holy books or writings of any kind. Any lore concerning the faith is passed orally from tribe to tribe or temple to temple. In places where his cultists have ritually slain lone humans, they have taken to leaving the victim's skull behind, with one of its own bones, cracked, inserted between its teeth. Some of his faithful, and even nonbelievers, have begun to interpret this as a symbol of Nkishi.

Shrines and Priests

Certain caves and rock formations are sacred to Nkishi. These are used by priests and cult leaders as holy places where evil spirits are cast out from gnolls thought to be possessed. A few of these sites include caverns, stone worked by dwarven or human slaves, or pillared halls meant to honor Nkishi's glory. Mirrors and reflecting pools are a common feature of his shrines. Some maintain an emperor's hyena as a sacred animal (*Tome of Beasts 2*, p. 135).

The priests and priestesses of Nkishi are fanatical and obsessed with two things: terrorizing human settlements whenever possible, and purifying their fellow gnolls of perceived weaknesses. When an uninitiated group of gnolls is encountered, they are given two choices: turn over their spiritual leaders for exorcism—or execution—and take up the worship of Nkishi, or be hunted, killed, and devoured. Priests of other gods who are handed over to Nkishi's faithful rarely survive the experience, though a few have been wily enough to convince their tormentors that, thanks to the cultists' efforts, they now see the true path.

Masks

Although many assert that Nkishi is a mask of the Hunter, his faithful reject this notion vehemently. They argue that Nkishi would not tolerate humans as worshipers in any guise, as the Hunter does. Nkishi's priests, conversely, think that the Hunter might be a mask of Nkishi, luring in humans so that they may be devoured.

A growing number of those who have studied the cult's behavior are convinced that Nkishi is a demon lord masquerading as a true god, but attempts to persuade his faithful of this "fact" have met with no real success. The cultists are of a mind that there is no real distinction between the two.

Other Faiths

Those who venerate Nkishi tolerate no other faiths among their ranks.



What Nkishi Demands

Convert the foul unbelievers, or feast on them and crack their bones. Find the richest bounty of fat camel-drivers and take what is yours. Laugh at your foes, and laugh at death. Never show fear, and always slake your lust for blood and carnage. The night is yours!

CULT OF NKISHI NEAR NURIA

A growing cult is spreading rapidly north from the Sarklan Desert, aggressively converting gnoll bands under threat of death, sacking and desecrating the holy places of other gods they encounter, and slaughtering their priests where they can. They worship the gnollish trickster Nkishi, a god who preaches that it is holy and right to prey upon and terrorize humanity. All other religious pursuits are distractions to them, and their religious leaders attempt to drive out the influence of other gods from priests as though they were possessed by evil spirits. The cult is part of a growing fanaticism among the gnolls of Nuria Natal and regions around the Free Cities.



Mot

God of Eternal Death, Lord of the Undead, the Death of Fire, Black Emperor of the Silent Land of Mirey, Prince of Necromancers, and High Potentate of Dragonslayers

Domains: Death, Justice, War

Alignment: Evil

Favored Weapon: Greataxe



Mot is the god of endings. His role is multifaceted: the champion of death and sterility and the overseer of fields that never grow, of the noble house that dies out, and of the destruction of entire nations. He encompasses mass slaughter, necromancy, and obliteration on a grand scale.

Mot is always shown as a near-skeletal figure, with jeweled eyes and wearing a crown of various styles. He is often seen with his greataxe resting at his side, and with his arm in a gesture of command. His green robes are marked with glyphs of fire and signs of warding; no light or vision can see within his garments, and anything covered by Mot's robes is said to be taken from the world into the Realm of Shadows.

Mot rules the underworld and the afterlife from a black throne in a land of mists near the River Styx. He maintains the plane of Mirey as a place of filth, full of torments for the unworthy. Mot's treasury is said to contain all the wealth of the dead in his lands, and "rich as Mot's vault" is a common phrase used to describe extreme wealth.

Worshippers

The followers of Mot are relatively few, and humans who worship him openly are found only within the jungles of Kush. Nevertheless, the god of endings does include among his faithful all intelligent undead, many forest tribesmen, some members of the Narumbeki fire legions, and some especially debauched and calculating nobles. Ghuls, darakhul, vampires, ghosts, mummies, and other undead praise Mot and call on him for intercession when clerics of light and life threaten them. Other, stranger creatures worship Mot as well: some say the **folk of Leng** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 204) pay him homage, as do the orcs of the Green Abyss and a wide range of devils and demons. Some tosculi and trollkin seem fond of him as well.

Symbols and Books

Mot has three major works of scripture. They are, in order of availability, *The Hand of Death*, a stoic primer on correct action in the face of eternal nothingness; *Revelations of Black Fire*, a set of prophecies said to have been given to the lich-priest Astremolech; and the *Fuligin Book of the Void*, a work of such mind-blasting malevolence that anyone who reads it is often instantly transformed into a darakhul, a vampire, or a ghost.

Shrines and Priests

Mot has a fair number of shrines for a dark god, including the Ebony Fane in Laksos, the Temple of Mot's Fire in Narumbeki, and the Silent Shrine maintained in Per-Bastet by the Pallid Court (*City of Cats*, p. 9). Most of his shrines are small ones meant for the use of a small group of undead or a necromancer and his entourage. The priesthood of Mot is similarly spread thin, though the name of one priest is widely known: Jabir Al-Seki was both a high priest and a necromancer in Kush. He was quite open about his involvement in Mot's cult, and it is said that he traveled to the Spice Coast after his transformation into a lich. His current whereabouts are unknown; some say he was so favored by Mot that he now dwells in Evermaw, the plane of the undead where Mot's power is greatest.

Masks

Mot is widely assumed to be a mask of Sabateus or sometimes Khonsu, or simply a male face for the White Goddess. A few bolder priests speculate that Mot is himself the divine figure behind all the dark gods,



especially Nakresh (who is sometimes called “Mot’s Monkey”) and Set (who is said to be Mot’s mask when the god speaks to the lower social orders).

Other Faiths

Mot despises Baal, the fire god of the Dragon Empire, and can be counted on to strike down any race or army that praises him. In this sense, Mot is a defender of Nuria Natal against the Dragon Empire. Mot is also the foe of Mbanu, Takhar, and Anu-Akma, all of whom claim some part of his dominion. Mot is on excellent terms with Nakresh, though he always considers himself the senior partner; with Selket, an honored peer; and with the White Goddess. Strangely, Mot and the White Goddess are sometimes seen as married, though they are without offspring (and Takhar also claims the White Goddess as his wife).

What Mot Demands

Incinerate the fools who do not see the glory of Mot’s vision. Raise up the bones from cemeteries and charnel houses in praise of Mot’s name. Learn the arts of necromancy and honor the undead, for they have seen beyond the veil and into Mot’s realm.

Nakresh

The Many-handed, Patron of Thieves and Tomb Robbers, Archmagus among Wizards, Demon Monkey and Bane of the Rakshasa, King of Revelry and Japes, Protector of the Poor and Destitute, and Bane of the Rich Man

Domains: Knowledge, Speed, Trickery

Alignment: Evil

Favored Weapons: Shortsword and wand

Nakresh the Many-handed is a god of the east, a monkey-demon thought by some to be the smarter brother of the ape-demon Mechuiti (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 88). He works through deception, magic, and corruption of the poor. His greed is immense, and his reach always much longer than one would expect. He enjoys stealing things that are considered perfectly secure, and he finds that such challenges are a good way to dispel his boredom and to challenge his worshipers. His trickery is often more productive than his brother’s volcanic rage.

Nakresh is usually shown as a mandrill or a human-mandrill hybrid with small black horns, blazing eyes, and six or eight arms. Two of his hands hold a wizard’s wand and a footpad’s dagger or sword. His other hands grasp a variety of items, such as a bag of coins, a fist-sized jewel, a bouquet of flowers, or a string of pearls. One hand is always empty, symbolizing his lust for more wealth. Nakresh often wears either a wizard’s robe or, on a cord around his neck, a mage’s severed hand.



Worshipers

The followers of Nakresh are thieves, wizards, slavers, and diabolists; they include tomb robbers and the most desperate of the poor. His worship as a godling is common in Nuria Natal, but it is also found in Narumbeki, and up and down the Spice Coast. The desperation of Nakresh’s followers is enough to make them try anything to succeed, and in many cases, they find they have an affinity for crime and a love of wealth. Jinnborn rogues and tricksters seem to have a special respect for Nakresh, whom they call “Uncle Whispers” or “the Duke of Air and Steel” or “the Peach Collector” or a dozen other nicknames. In their eyes he takes on less of a demonic aspect and more of a trickster and jokester, though always with an edge to his humor and a price to pay for those who do not appreciate his skill.

Symbols and Books

The sign of Nakresh is an open hand with a star in its palm. He has only one holy book, the *True Gospel of Prosperity and Wealth*, which is a collection of cheats, cantrips, cons, and swindles practiced by his followers against more gullible members of the public.

Shrines and Priests

The cult of Nakresh is led by the mysterious figures known as the Five: the faith’s greatest priests, wizards, and scoundrels. Their names are not widely known, but they are thought to all be rivals for the title of Greatest of the Five, the cult’s top ranking.



The cult of Nakresh has its home in Nuria Natal, and its main temple is hidden within the sprawl of the capital city itself. An honor guard composed of the most loyal followers of each of the Five defends it against intruders. This includes a group of gnoll archers, kobolds loaded with alchemical weapons, a cadre of rogue-wizards, a gang of roachling rogues, and a pack of derro. At most times, the temple is not in regular use, as each of the Five worships in the holdings of his or her own domain. The Five travel to Nuria only when they convene for business or for high holy days. (See *Demon Cults & Secret Societies* for more information.)

Other temples are few. One significant site is the Tomb of Nakresh in the Domain of the Wind Lords (southwest of Cindass). Some see it as a place where Nakresh hides his greatest treasures; others believe the whole trap-ridden place is a test of skill and faith for his followers.

Masks

Nakresh is often thought to be a mask of Thoth-Hermes, Kwansi, or Mot (whose followers refer to him as “Mot’s Monkey”). He might simply be a demon lord who has learned the secret of divinity.

Other Faiths

Nakresh is a friend and sometimes servant of Mot and Set, and likewise he is on good terms with the demon lords Mechuiti and Mammon. The faith of Bastet seems particularly hostile to that of Nakresh; the “monkey priests” are often hunted for sport by the Cat Goddess’s followers. The faithful of Nakresh know that followers of Horus, Mbanu, and Takhar are best avoided at all times.

What Nakresh Demands

Strength is for fools; take what you need through guile and quickness, and the world may be yours. Idleness is the reward for skill. Magic and talent are their own rewards. Charity is for sentimentalists. Those who die with the most wealth are Nakresh’s most beloved. Praise the rogue and the robber for their daring; despise the rich who have been born into wealth, for they truly have earned nothing.

Selket

Goddess of Scorpions, Queen of Vipers, Mistress of the Desert, Shield of the Pure, Terror of the Faithless, Patron Goddess of Raiders and Nomads, and Mother of Venom

Domains: Cat, Death, Hunting, Life

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapons: Scimitar and spear

Selket is usually shown as a beautiful brown-skinned woman wearing a scorpion-shaped crown and often carrying a scimitar or a spear. In some depictions, she also



has a scorpion’s tail. Selket is a goddess of healing, and was known by this portfolio in Tes-Luria among the catfolk. More recently she has assumed a role as the goddess of stealth and poisoning; her means for gaining power might lurk in the shadows, but her devotees would say that this is all the better to take fools and unbelievers by surprise. Only after Selket strikes do her enemies take heed of her—if they survive.

Under the leadership of Dakhamunza, one of the most powerful priestesses of Selket, the cult known as Selket’s Sting (see page 38) is forcefully bringing recognition of the Goddess of Scorpions to Nuria Natal. As a result, farms and settlements along the River Nuria have reported an increase in animal attacks. The culprits are unusually aggressive, leading some to believe they are being compelled by magic. Recently, a rash of killings has occurred among the merchants in Per-Kush—many say that this is retaliation by Selket’s Sting for the merchants’ underhanded dealings with the Tamasheq.

Worshippers

Worship of Selket is common among the Tamasheq nomads of the Sarklan Desert and among nomads generally, and she is widely worshiped in Lignas as well as in Mardas Vhula-gai. Her priests serve as protectors, healers, and dealers of vengeance. Given Selket’s connection to death and especially mummification, some nobles are sympathetic to her followers. Or, possibly, they are secretly cult members themselves. In Nuria Natal, her followers are surprisingly forceful in expanding their numbers. Paying close attention to Selket, however, is thought to be a way to ensure that one is properly delivered into the afterlife upon death.

Selket is also a popular goddess among catfolk, tosculi, thieves, and rebels. In the hive-cities she is called the “Mother Huntress” or “Saint of Stings,” and amulets representing her crown are common charms. Some tribes of gnolls venerate her name as well.

Symbols and Books

The symbol of Selket is a stylized scorpion. She has two holy books, the *Revelations of the Scorpion* and the *Shield of the Faithful*. The first includes parables and tales of Selket’s wanderings and deeds and those of her champions. The second is a more prosaic recounting of Selket’s power and songs of her praise, as well as instructions and laws governing the preparation of mummies and the use of venom in healing.

Shrines and Priests

The cult of Selket has many leaders in many places, but two stand out: Dakhamunza Sat Selket resides in Per-Amarna, the City of Scorpions (see page 55), directing the cult’s activities from the temple there. Sadiki Sefu (LE male

dwarf **thief lord**, *Creature Codex*, p. 406) calls the Free City of Siwal his home, from where he oversees the activities of the Desert Scorpions (see *Demon Cults & Secret Societies*, p. 136), producing poisons that are shipped secretly with caravans headed west to cells throughout Nuria Natal.

Masks

Selket is sometimes thought of as a mask of Set, and at other times as a face of the Hunter. Oddly, Selket is sometimes called the dark sister of Isis. Most, however, agree that she stands on her own.

Other Faiths

Selket is a friend to the White Goddess, Nakresh the Many-handed, Set, and, to some degree, Sabateus and Takhar, who are gods of the desert. Her enemies include Aten, Bastet, and Horus, though she is no friend to Ogun or Xevioso, either. Selket and Isis are often rivals as well; Selket claims that her healing arts were stolen by Isis long ago, and the offense has not been forgiven.

What Selket Demands

Strike down those who oppose the true path of the goddess; poison is her gift, and using it is the path to holiness. Death by stealth is a holy death; the sting of Selket is ever merciful. Strike once, and strike true—hesitation can be a fatal error. Heal the sick, and honor their suffering. Defend your allies and loved ones with all the fierceness you can muster. When any decision for vengeance is made, do not waver thereafter.



Set

God of Storms and Chaos, True Patron of Nuria Natal, Son of Veles, Master of Men and Serpents, Lord of the Red Desert Lands, Wind Caller, Doom of Osiris, Friend to Strangers, Strongest of the Divine Company, and Defender of the Boat of the Sun



Domains: Darkness, Dragon, Prophecy, Tempest, Vermin

Alignment: Chaotic

Favored Weapon: Mace

Restored from ashes by Horus, Set has never forgiven his rival for showing him mercy; indeed, the debt stings and rankles. Set was once a contender for the title of Protector of Nuria Natal, but the title and the temples went to Horus. This humiliation, also, Set has never forgiven. The storms and earthquakes that he commands are sometimes referred to as “Set’s anger,” and for good reason.

Set is a god with white skin and spiky red hair similar in texture to the pelt of a donkey. His head has a black, curving snout and an animal’s ears, somewhat like an aardvark’s or a donkey’s.

Worshippers

Peasants, farmers, and watchmen are all followers of Set, for he protects the weak from the crocodile and the lion, and his priests bring healing salves and medicines to the ill and the dying. In times of strife and war, when Horus and Bastet prowl the land and banditry is everywhere, Set can be relied on as a protector, a strong force against robbery, oppression, and the hammer of law. In particular, Set confuses the gaze of the heruti (ravenfolk), and the commands of the servants of Horus, when Nuria Natal’s armies plunder farmers of their crops and steal the bread from the poor. Set’s fogs and sandstorms have saved many a silo of barley and many a herd of goats from confiscation by the troops.

In addition, Set is the god of rebels, usurpers, impious nobles, and desert raiders who thrive on chaos.

Symbols and Books

The symbol of Set is the head of an animal somewhat like an anteater and somewhat like an aardvark, but it is truly neither. It has a long snout and ears that are roughly square, and some claim it is the visage of a minor demon or a donkey. People refer to it simply as the “Set animal.” The mystery of its origin is one the priests of Set do not care to solve, and no mortal example of such a creature is known in the Southlands.

The sacred texts of Set include the *Divinations from the Blood of Osiris*, the *Book of the Seeds*, and *Prophecies of the Red Desert Oracle*.

Shrines and Priests

Temples of Set are most common in the desert, away from the River Nuria in small villages and towns where sandstorms blow and older traditions are remembered. The greatest of these temples is the Supreme Temple of the Wind Caller at the heart of Per-Set (see page 48), once a thriving city but now little more than a caravan stop. Smaller shrines are maintained in Nuria, in Corremel, and in towns such as Laksos and Per-Anu. In addition, the Serpent Shrine of the Red Desert Oracle due west of Per-Kush is a site of pilgrimage for followers of Set, and it is a place of great prophecies and oracular pronouncements.

Even though many followers of Set prefer to keep their devotion quiet, the priests of Set are often public figures. They show generosity to the poor while terrorizing the wealthy with vague threats and transforming foes into serpents—or simply ensuring that enemies succumb to accidents while the priests are ostensibly elsewhere.

The greatest and most dangerous of these public priests is Shajar din Izzadin (LE female human **apostle** of Set; see page 281), who commands a small army of bandits or holy warriors (depending on one's personal view of Settites) in the ruins of Per-Set. The cult itself is led by Banafrit al'Qam (LE female aasimar **apostle** of Set), but the army is under Shajar's control.

Shajar's position seems hereditary; her grandfather, Izzadin Qallawun, died 8 years ago and she immediately carried on in his name. She is a charming, educated, and lavish hostess, loved by her friends and followers. She is also ruthless in achieving her goals, especially in the destruction of the priests of Aten, and in the raising of her sons, Hem-Netjer al-Shajar and Tepi al-Shajar, to the priesthood.

Masks

Set's priests claim that he wears no masks, and that no other god is his equal or avatar. But no one believes them; those who do not follow Set seem certain that he is the true god behind Aposis, Selket, Baal-Hotep, the Hunter, Xevioso, and Takhar, or that he is a particularly clever mask of Veles, the World Serpent. A few mad prophets insist that Set is a mask of Horus, belief in which truly represents a test of faith for the followers of the Falcon.

Other Faiths

Followers of Set despise Horus and Aten, and they are suspicious of Mot, Mbanu, and Takhar, who are all warmongers, bullies, and boastful gods. Aposis is a child of Apep and not to be trusted, and neither are the dragon-gods of the Mharoti Empire.

On far better terms are the goddesses whom Set admires: Isis (though she spurns Set's advances, she is worthy of respect and obedience), Bastet (a hunting companion), and Selket. Set also gets along well with Laughing Nkishi of the desert raiders.



Most of all, Set is a loyal friend and husband to Yemaja, whom his followers call Taweret, the hippo-headed goddess of childbirth and river-magic. These two gods have no known descendants.

What Set Demands

Be humble and strong. Speak what you mean, and destroy your enemies utterly. Strike down the foul followers of Horus; they are prideful liars and unworthy of life. Protect farmers and peasants, for they are the true-hearted strength of Nuria Natal, and they deserve mercy more than any lordling or prince.

White Goddess

Goddess of Bright Pain, the Sun's Queen, the Pale Matriarch of Blood and Strength, Patron Goddess of the Orcs, and Empress of the Green Abyss

Domains: Apocalypse, Darkness, Death, Hunger, War

Alignment: Evil

Favored Weapons: Greatclub and temple sword (see *Southlands Player's Guide*)

The White Goddess was born with pale skin and red eyes. When she emerged from her people's home beneath the skin of the world, Khors challenged her to endure his



radiance. She would not be intimidated and stared him down, chasing him as he ran, until he hid beyond the horizon. Along the way she crushed his subjects, the sun-kissed races, and tore out their bones, armoring her flesh with them and feasting on the marrow. To this day, every time the Sun sneaks over the horizon, she chases him away. Her faithful follow her each night, tearing the flesh from the sunlit races and offering up bones and screams in tribute to her might.

She is a battle goddess who embodies the harshness of life and the sun's cruel heat and blinding radiance. She is the will to persist and the blessed rest that comes to those who earn their indolence.

The White Goddess appears as a massive albino orc, with red eyes that glow like embers and intricately carved tusks. She wears crude bone armor and carries a massive club in one hand and an equally large sword in the other.

Worshippers

Her primary worshippers are the savage and failing race of orcs. This race was once dominant, but now the remaining orcs eke out their survival in the depths of the earth and in the farthest reaches of mountains, forests, and deserts. Tales of their viciousness bring other savage peoples to the worship of their brutal goddess: goblins, derro, ogres, and even kobolds and centaurs sometimes venerate her.

Symbols and Books

The White Goddess's most recognized symbol is a sun-like splatter of blood on a white field. Other signs associated with her include a red skeleton, a skull with tusks, and a black sun.

The only text of her faith is a large black metal sphere called the *Sun's Eye*, which is inscribed with descriptions of tortures and rituals to be used on the sun-blessed races. Her priests say it was torn out of the sun, or from the skull of Khors. Proof of her supremacy comes to the faithful when the sun turns its empty socket toward the lands below during what the other races call a solar eclipse. These occasions are the White Goddess's holiest days, when the orcs emerge from the wild to raid and kill their enemies.

Shrines and Priests

The orcs and others build altars of bones to honor their goddess. Any creature a worshiper kills has its bones removed and piled on the site of its death. These places are her most important holy sites.

Her current high priestess is the war prophet and general Jabresha Khemsal (CE female orc **apostle** of the White Goddess), a force among the orcs of the Green

Abyss. Her harem includes a few powerful male priests of the White Goddess and several clan chieftains.

Masks

Some of the Lords of Hell are said to be masks of the White Goddess (see *Warlock: Eleven Hells* for details), and likewise the Goat of the Woods (*Midgard Worldbook*, p. 395) is sometimes rumored to be a mask of hers. Enemies of the church of Aten accuse him of being one of her masks, as well.

Other Faiths

Other than strange orc gods acknowledged only by that race, the White Goddess has no known allies, though the orcs assert that Xevioso and Mot are her slave-husbands (a title less familiar to humans and dwarves than to orcs). Aten and Ogun are her implacable enemies.

What the White Goddess Demands

Do not shy away from pain and light. Your goddess's truest name can be found in the screams of the dying, so prolong their suffering and revel in those holy sounds. Take what is yours from the weak, and enslave or kill those who challenge your rule. Pile high the bones of the fallen.



appendix a: new southlands monsters

Many of the creatures that inhabit the North are also found in the Southlands, of course. In addition to those monsters, several creatures and creature types either originated in the Southlands or have special significance to a campaign that takes place there. This appendix presents that group of new monsters, which cover the entire spectrum from benign to malevolent.

AKANKA

Akankas are arachnid-like fey that claim to be the children of Kwansi. Their jewelled carapaces reflect the light, creating an after-image identical to the true creature.

Nothing satisfies an akanka more than hoodwinking an unsuspecting treasure hunter. They shroud themselves and their lairs in layers of illusion and pretend to be wise oracles or helpful allies. In conversation, they are charming and accommodating with the hope that being so will lower their prey's guard. When its treachery becomes evident, an akanka savors the look of surprised fear and anger on the face of its victim, and it replays the look in its mind over and over again while it waits for fresh prey.

Brazen akankas that live near humanoid settlements often disguise themselves as traveling humanoids to infiltrate and make connections they hope to exploit later. When these forays go poorly, akanka that have been discovered prefer to flee than fight, and they sometimes bide their time for years before making another attempt. Akanka that live in tombs or ruins often watch potential victims and, sometimes, even help them if it won't draw attention. When their prey readies to leave the area, relaxed and laden with their spoils, the akanka strikes.

AKANKA

Medium fey, chaotic evil

ARMOR CLASS 12

HIT POINTS 45 (7d8 + 14)

SPEED 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

SKILLS Deception +5, Perception +2

CONDITION IMMUNITIES unconscious

SENSES passive Perception 12



LANGUAGES Common, Southern Tongue

CHALLENGE 2 (450 XP)

Spider Climb. The akanka can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Web Sense. While in contact with a web, the akanka knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

Web Walker. The akanka ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

Innate Spellcasting. The akanka's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). The akanka can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components.

At will: *minor illusion*, *silent image*

3/Day each: *major image*

1/Day each: *hallucinatory terrain*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The akanka uses Mirrored Carapace. It then makes one bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or fall unconscious for 1 minute. The target wakes up if it takes damage or if another creature takes an action to shake it awake.

Mirrored Carapace. The akanka projects an illusory duplicate of itself that appears in its space. Each time a creature targets the akanka, if its attack roll result is below 15, it targets the

duplicate instead and destroys the duplicate. The duplicate can be destroyed only by an attack that hits it. It ignores all other damage and effects. A creature is unaffected by this action if it can't see, if it relies on senses other than such, such as blindsight, or if it can perceive illusions as false, as with truesight. The ankole can't use this action while in darkness.

ANKOLE

This enormous bovine has a pair of curved horns and a deep, mahogany hide. Although initially appearing somewhat placid, it responds aggressively to threats.

Ankole are herd animals as big as elephants. Created by the titan Enkai for her chosen people, the Terrotu, these great cattle provide them with the meat, skins, and milk they need to survive.

Ankole can be trained for battle. The Trampers, Terrotu's elite warriors, and sorcerers who have the Ankole Bloodline sorcerous origin (see *Southlands Player's Guide*) sometimes use trained ankole as mounts. Groups of ankole instinctively form a defensive circle when threatened, refusing to yield to predators until they are disabled.

ANKOLE

Huge beast, unaligned

ARMOR CLASS 12 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 63 (6d10 + 24)

SPEED 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	2 (-4)	11 (+1)	4 (-3)

SKILLS Perception +3

SENSES passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES —

CHALLENGE 3 (100 XP)

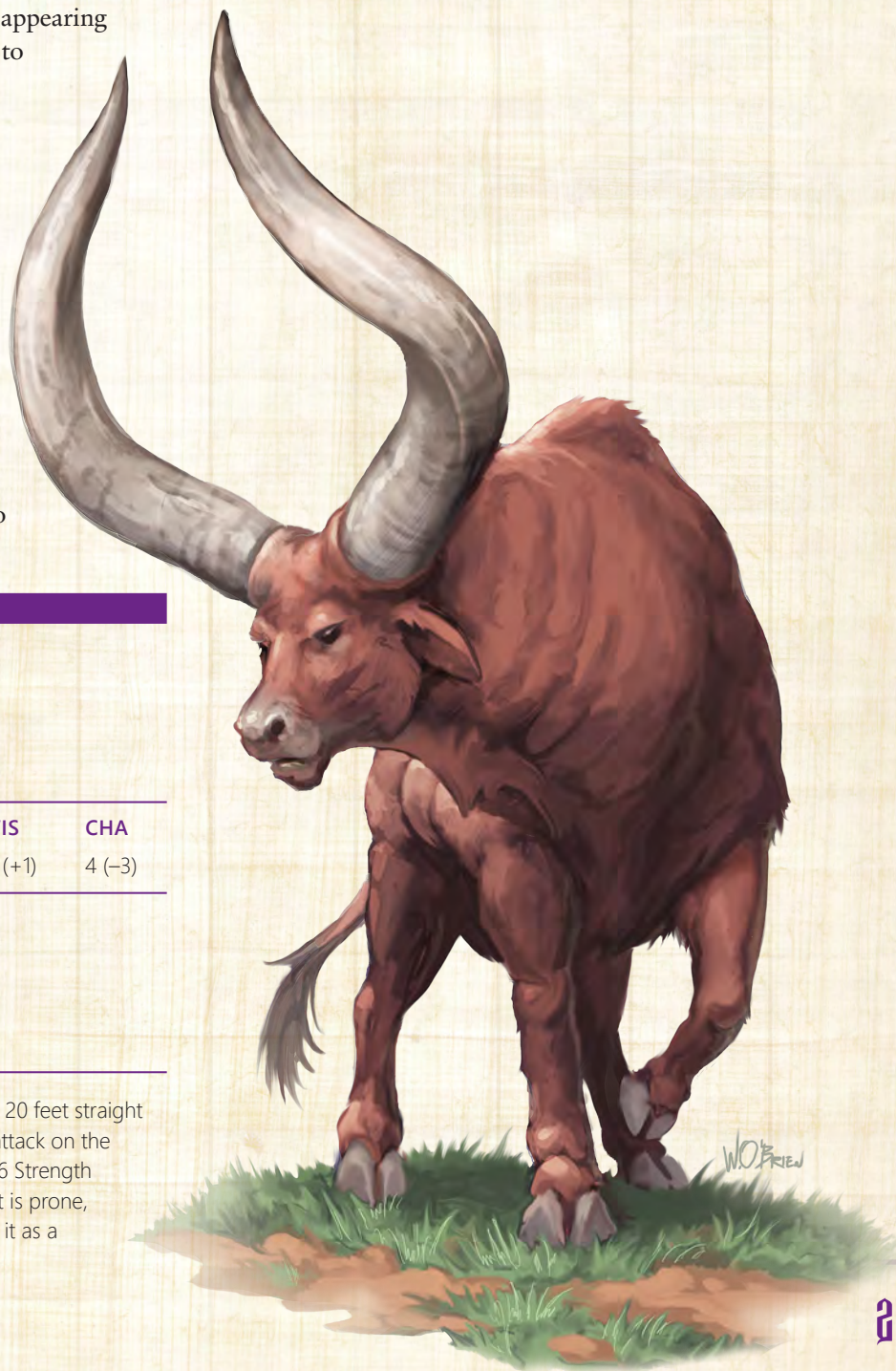
Trampling Charge. If the ankole moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the ankole can make one stomp attack against it as a bonus action.

Stampede. Creatures have disadvantage on Strength saving throws to avoid being knocked prone by an ankole's Trampling Charge if the ankole is in a group of three or more charging ankole, and no two are more than 10 feet apart.

ACTIONS

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) piercing damage.

Stomp. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one prone creature. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage.





APAXRUSL

Apaxrusl, or sand drudges, are created through dark rituals that merge a corpse with desert sand.

The damned souls filling the apaxrusl give it intelligence, but its constructed form keeps it loyal, making it a valuable asset to its creator. Necromancers often create apaxrusl to lead small groups of undead on specific tasks, confident in the construct's ability to execute orders and lead the undead while away from the direct control of the necromancer.

The apaxrusl doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

APAXRUSL

Medium construct, neutral

ARMOR CLASS 13 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 60 (8d8 + 24)

SPEED 30 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	6 (-2)	7 (-2)

SKILLS Stealth +3

DAMAGE VULNERABILITIES thunder

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES fire, poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 30 ft., passive Perception 8

LANGUAGES Abyssal and one language of its creator

CHALLENGE 3 (700 XP)

Earth Glide. The apaxrusl can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the apaxrusl doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

Fiendish Construct. The apaxrusl's sand is infused with the souls of the damned. Its type is fiend in addition to construct when determining the effects of features such as a paladin's Divine Smite or a ranger's Primeval Awareness.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The apaxrusl makes two slam attacks. If both attacks hit the same creature, the target is blinded for 1 minute or until it uses an action to wipe its eyes.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Fiery Sands (Recharge 5–6). Sand whips violently around the apaxrusl. Each creature within 10 feet of the apaxrusl must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) slashing damage and 10 (3d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

REACTIONS

Shifting Sands. The apaxrusl can shift the flowing sands of its body to avoid harm. When the apaxrusl takes damage, roll a d12. Reduce the damage it takes by the number rolled.

CATFOLK, BASTETI

The cherished children of the cat goddess Bastet, these mischievous humanoids are found throughout Nuria. They live in Per-Bastet, the City of Cats, in great numbers.

Lithe and slender, basteti have a cat's eyes, long tail, and soft fur coat. Their fur varies in coloration and is often accented with spots, stripes, and other markings.

Basteti like nothing better than having new experiences and meeting interesting strangers so they can share tales of their escapades with their family and friends. Their natural curiosity might get them into trouble, but they often seem to be able to quickly extricate themselves from their misfortunes and land on their feet.

BASTETI

Medium humanoid (catfolk), neutral good

ARMOR CLASS 13 (leather armor)

HIT POINTS 11 (2d8 + 2)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)

SKILLS Acrobatics +4, Perception +1, Stealth +4

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

LANGUAGES Nurian, Southern Trade Tongue

CHALLENGE 1/4 (50 XP)

Agile Climber. When the basteti moves at least 10 feet along the ground, it can use the rest of its movement to scale a wall or other vertical surface as if had a climbing speed. It must end its movement standing on a horizontal surface.

Bastet's Blessing. The basteti can communicate simple ideas to cats and other feline beasts, but it can't understand them in return. In addition, it has advantage on Charisma checks when dealing with such creatures.

Stalker's Reflex (1/Day). When it makes a Dexterity check, the basteti can choose to have advantage on the roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The basteti makes two attacks: one with its scimitar and one with its claws.

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) slashing damage.

appendix a: new southlands monsters

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

BASTETI CAT BURGLAR

Medium humanoid (catfolk), neutral

ARMOR CLASS 15 (leather armor)

HIT POINTS 33 (6d8 + 6)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

SKILLS Athletics +5, Acrobatics +8, Perception +2, Stealth +6

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

LANGUAGES Nurian, Southern Trade Tongue

CHALLENGE 1 (200 XP)

Agile Climber. When the basteti moves at least 10 feet along the ground, it can use the rest of its movement to scale a wall or other vertical surface as if had a climbing speed. It must end its movement standing on a horizontal surface.

Bastet's Blessing. The basteti can communicate simple ideas to cats and other feline beasts, but it can't understand them in return. In addition, it has advantage on Charisma checks when dealing with such creatures.

Burglar. The basteti has proficiency with thieves' tools and can pick a nonmagical lock as a bonus action.

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the basteti can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Stalker's Reflex (3/Day). When it makes a Dexterity check, the basteti can choose to have advantage on the roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The basteti makes two melee or two ranged attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) slashing damage.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

GHUL

When an undead with the ability to raise more of their kind, such as a vampire, wight, or wraith, slays a geniekin or some other lesser elemental, the risen creature is a ghul instead. Rather than retaining control of whatever elemental forces it may have had during its life, the ghul becomes representative of all four of the classical elements.

Like more common ghouls and ghosts, a ghul's existence is focused around a relentless, agonizing need

to consume living flesh. Ghuls favor live targets and can be seen sampling their meal even while battle rages around them.

GHUL

Medium undead, any evil alignment

ARMOR CLASS 15 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 105 (14d8 + 42)

SPEED 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

DAMAGE RESISTANCES cold, fire, lightning, necrotic

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, petrified, poisoned

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

LANGUAGES Southern Trade Tongue

CHALLENGE 5 (1,800 XP)

Paralyzing Throes. When the ghul dies, it explodes in a puff of noxious smoke. Each creature within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed until the end of its next turn.





Turn Resistance. The ghul has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Variable Immunity. As a bonus action, the ghul changes one of its damage resistances to immunity to that type of damage until the start of its next turn.

Innate Spellcasting. The ghul's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *chill touch*, *fire bolt*, *ray of frost*, *shocking grasp*

3/day each: *fog cloud*, *levitate**, *misty step*, *shatter**

1/day each: *blur*, *fireball*, *gaseous form*, *sleet storm**, *stinking cloud*

* if using *Midgard Heroes Handbook*, replace the indicated spells with *rolling thunder*, *spire of stone*, and *frozen razors*, respectively

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ghul makes two attacks with its claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

KIJANI

The kijani are a race of plant folk found in the Zobanu Jungle and Sudvall in the lands of the far south.

For eons, they dwelled quietly in the High Jungles, largely invisible to the titans and their followers. When the druids of Kush arrived, the kijani shared their ancient lore with them. This was to prove their undoing. The foolish druids summoned the Green Walker, which ravaged and dominated the jungles. The kijani fled south to the Zobanu Jungle, but less than half escaped. Those who were left behind became the first tendril puppets—slaves to the Walker's whims.

Their exodus has left the kijani deeply scarred; their calm and peaceful manner conceals both a great fear of the Walker and a powerful, quietly simmering fury at their fate. Their misfortune has prompted the kijani to attempt something unprecedented—a secret plan to alter their very nature, known as the Great Change. By encouraging humans, minotaurs, and others to bond with their vine-like seedlings until they grow into adulthood, the kijani hope to one day evolve into mammals.

Most kijani follow the Verdant Oath—a spiritual belief system dedicated to nature, growth, and acceptance, but also to suppressing and hiding the fear and anger ingrained in every kijani since the coming of the Walker. The oath helps the kijani to maintain self-control over their fear and anger, but it only works to a point. If pushed too far, a kijani will erupt in fury.



Kijani organize themselves into clusters, groups of individuals that work together for the common good under the direction of a leader known as a speaker. While individual kijani often come across as charming, a group of the plant folk can seem standoffish and closed-minded to outsiders.

KIJANI

Medium plant, neutral

ARMOR CLASS 15 (leather armor, shield)

HIT POINTS 13 (3d8)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)

SKILLS Nature +2, Perception +3

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES Southern Trade Tongue, Sylvan

CHALLENGE 1/4 (50 XP)

Contained Fury. While a kijani has less than half its hit points, it deals an extra 3 (1d6) damage when it hits with a weapon attack.

Innate Spellcasting. The kijani's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *thorn whip*

1/day each: *entangle*, *speak with plants*

Plant-born Resilience. The kijani has advantage on saving throws against fear effects, and magic can't put the kijani to sleep.

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Furious Defense. The kijani adds 2 to its AC against one attack that would hit it. To do so, the kijani must have less than half its maximum hit points and must see the attacker.

MONKEY'S BANE VINES

These deadly, semimobile carnivorous plants appear at first glance to be normal vines. Monkey's bane vines are found throughout the jungles of the Southlands, growing around the trunks of towering rainforest trees. In spring, the vines grow colorful blooms, and in late summer they produce tasty-looking orange fruit that attracts prey. The fruit has a sickly-sweet flavor that monkeys find irresistible; the nimble creatures are willing to risk being grabbed by the plant's tendrils to snatch the tasty fruit.

When a creature gets too close, the vine strikes, grabbing hold of its victim with its tendrils and either ripping it apart or crushing the life out of it. The vine deposits the remains of the creatures it has slain near its roots, where they fertilize the plant.

MONKEY'S BANE VINE

Large plant, unaligned

ARMOR CLASS 13 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 119 (14d10 + 42)

SPEED 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)

SKILLS Perception +2

DAMAGE RESISTANCES cold, fire

CONDITION IMMUNITIES blinded, deafened, exhaustion, prone

SENSES blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES —

CHALLENGE 4 (1,100 XP)

False Appearance. While motionless, a monkey's bane vine is indistinguishable from a normal vine.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The monkey's bane vine makes up to three tendril attacks.

Tendrils. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled by the vine (escape DC 14). While grappled in this way, the creature is restrained and takes 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage at the start of its turn, and the monkey's bane vine cannot use this tendril on another target.

RAVENING MINOTAUR

This feral minotaur is driven by a monstrous hunger that can be sated only by consuming the hearts of its foes. Its fur stained with blood, it fights with its teeth, its sharp claws, and its lethal horns.

The ancient minotaur clans once deliberately exposed their warriors to a disease called the ravening, hoping to strengthen them. This practice led to disaster as the highly contagious disease spread throughout the minotaur cities, creating large numbers of ravening minotaurs—wild creatures filled with uncontrollable fury and a lust for consuming the hearts of other creatures.

RAVENING MINOTAUR

Large monstrosity, chaotic evil

ARMOR CLASS 14 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 85 (10d10 + 30)

SPEED 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)

SKILLS Perception +7

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

LANGUAGES Minotaur

CHALLENGE 3 (700 XP)

Charge. If the minotaur moves at least 10 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 9 (2d8) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 10 feet away and knocked prone.

Keen Smell. The minotaur has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Labyrinthine Recall. The minotaur can perfectly recall any path it has traveled.

Ravering Madness. The ravening minotaur has disadvantage on Intelligence ability checks. It cares for no one; everyone is considered a foe, and it is hostile toward every creature it sees.

Ravering Hunger. When a ravening minotaur reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the minotaur can take a bonus action to consume the creature's heart. Once the

THE RAVENING DISEASE

This affliction causes uncontrollable fury and an irresistible lust for power in those it infects. Transmitted by contact with infected fluids or clothing, or by the bite of a ravening minotaur, the ravening is highly contagious.

A creature exposed to this disease must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become infected. Minotaurs have disadvantage on the saving throw. A creature bonded to a kijani seedling (see page 292) is immune to the ravening.

Infected creatures are consumed by ravening madness and ravening hunger (see below) 24 hours after becoming infected. An infected creature can be cured by magical healing that

specifically cures diseases. If an infected creature has gained Hit Dice from the ravening hunger effect, it retains the additional Hit Dice after being cured.

Ravening Madness. Filled with a monstrous rage, the infected creature has disadvantage on Intelligence ability checks and considers all other creatures to be foes. An infected creature has a starting attitude of hostile toward every creature it sees.

Ravening Hunger. The infected creature instinctively knows that consuming the hearts of other creatures is the key to gaining new power. When an infected creature has consumed a number of hearts equal to its Hit Dice, it gains one Hit Die.

minotaur has consumed a total of ten hearts, it gains $1d10 + 3$ hit points permanently.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the minotaur can choose to have advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The minotaur makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 8 ($1d8 + 4$) piercing damage, and the ravening minotaur gains temporary hit points equal to the damage dealt. Creatures that are bitten must make a successful DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be infected by the ravening disease.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 7 ($1d6 + 4$) slashing damage.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 13 ($2d8 + 4$) piercing damage.



RIDING ZEBRA

Zebras are used as mounts by the Imbangala, the cavalry casters of the Narumbeki. These animals serve the mages as mounts, but they do not usually let anyone else ride them.

Though smaller and a bit slower than horses, zebras have great endurance and agility. They are vicious animals and do not need to be trained to use their hooves or bite in combat. Zebras stand 4 to 5 feet tall at the shoulder and weigh about 700 pounds. Their striped coloration makes it harder to target individuals accurately when they are standing or moving in a group.

RIDING ZEBRA

Large beast, unaligned

ARMOR CLASS 14

HIT POINTS 23 (2d10 + 12)

SPEED 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	6 (-2)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)

SKILLS Perception +3

SENSES passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES —

CHALLENGE 1/2 (100 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The zebra has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Minor Concealment. Creatures have disadvantage on ranged attacks against the zebra if it is part of a group of three or more zebra, and no two are more than 5 feet apart.

ACTIONS

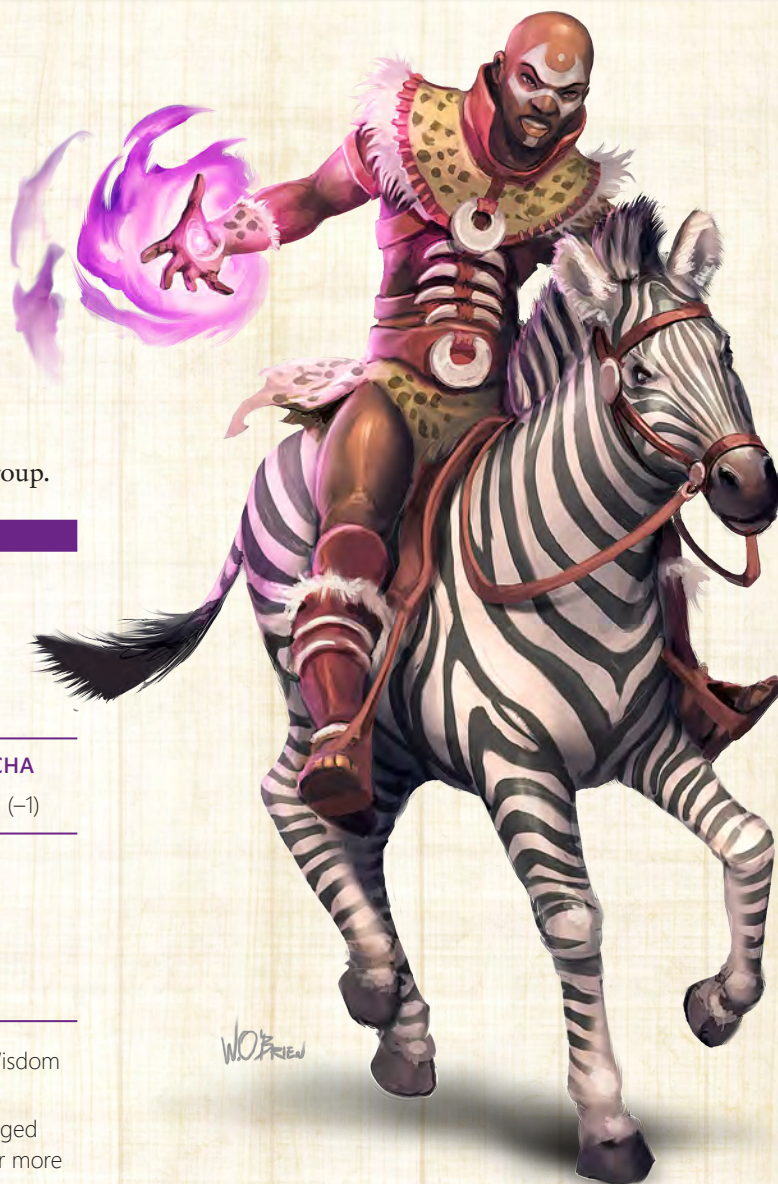
Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Hooves. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

SANDDRIFT DRAKE

Found in the hottest deserts, the sanddrift drake is a cunning hunter that blends in with the burning sands. The fallen fey lord, Tarkun, has been known to capture and tame sanddrift drakes for use in his army.

The sanddrift drake hunts by hiding beneath the desert sand and ambushing its prey from below. A series of transparent lids protect the drake's eyes from the harsh light of the desert and the sand where it hides, leaving it with a clear view of approaching prey.



SANDDRIFT DRAKE

Large dragon, neutral

ARMOR CLASS 16 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 102 (12d10 + 36)

SPEED 40 ft., burrow 40 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	7 (-2)	15 (+2)	7 (-2)

SKILLS Perception +5, Stealth +7, Survival +5

DAMAGE RESISTANCES poison

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES fire

CONDITION IMMUNITIES blinded

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 30 ft., passive Perception 15

LANGUAGES Draconic

CHALLENGE 6 (2,300 XP)



Desert Camouflage. The drake has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in sandy terrain.

Sand Glide. The drake can burrow through nonmagical sand and worked earth. While doing so, the drake doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The drake makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature.
Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or its speed is halved for 1 minute. If the target's speed is already halved and it fails the saving throw, it is paralyzed for 1 minute instead. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Heatwave Breath (Recharge 6). The drake exhales superheated air in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If a creature fails the saving throw by 5 or more, it gains 1 level of exhaustion.

VIRTUOSO LICH

A virtuoso lich is an artist whose love of art sustains it beyond death.

A virtuoso lich is created when an artist powerful in both its artistic and magical expression dies with art left undone. Such artists often die before completing or creating a masterpiece, and the torment of the art left undone couples with the artist's powerful magical talents, turning the artist into a virtuoso lich. A virtuoso lich is bound to an object of art, such as a favorite musical instrument, painting, dance slippers, quill, or some other object of artistic expression that was significant to the lich in life. This piece of art is the lich's phylactery.

A virtuoso lich maintains the beauty of its former life, appearing much as it did in life—except for one physical feature that betrays its undead nature. This feature can be a clawed, skeletal hand, which the lich hides in a glove; a stiff, zombie-like leg, which the lich disguises with robes and a cane; a face ravaged by undeath, which the lich covers in a beautiful mask; or any other appropriate feature.

The virtuoso lich doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

A VIRTUOSO LICH'S LAIR

A virtuoso lich chooses a lair with an eye and ear for artistic potential, whether that lair is an ancient cavern with natural acoustics, a meadow with plentiful natural light, a hall of mirrors, or some other locale capable of enhancing some form of art, allowing the lich's magic and artistic expression to swell, reaching every corner.



LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the virtuoso lich takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; the lich can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- The virtuoso lich channels artistic expression it can see or hear into a magical assault. The artistic expression must be of the type chosen with its Versatile Artist trait, but it otherwise can be any form of expression not originating from the lich, such as the song of nearby singers that echoes in the lair, the colorful paint decorating canvases, the twirling forms of dancers, or similar. The virtuoso lich chooses a creature it can see within 30 feet of the artistic expression. The target must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) damage of the type chosen with the Versatile Artist trait on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
- The virtuoso lich enhances the natural artistry of its lair, distracting and hindering nearby creatures. The lich chooses a point it can see within 60 feet of it. Each creature within 5 feet of that point must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, a creature has disadvantage on saving throws against the lich's spells and its Corrupted Art action until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- The virtuoso lich rolls a d4 and regains a spell slot of that level or lower. If it has no spent spell slots of that level or lower, nothing happens.



VIRTUOSO LICH

Medium undead, any evil alignment

ARMOR CLASS 17 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 123 (19d8 + 38)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)

SAVING THROWS Dex +7, Wis +6, Cha +9

SKILLS Deception +9, Perception +5, Persuasion +9

DAMAGE RESISTANCES necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES blinded, deafened, charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

SENSES truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 15

LANGUAGES Southern Trade Tongue, plus up to two other languages

CHALLENGE 12 (8,400 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the lich fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Rejuvenation. If it has a phylactery, a destroyed lich gains a new body in 1d10 days, regaining all its hit points and becoming active again. The new body appears within 5 feet of the phylactery.

Turn Resistance. The lich has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Versatile Artist. At the end of each long rest, the lich chooses one form of artistic expression, such as song, poetry, dance, fashion, paint, or similar. Until it finishes a long rest, the lich has immunity to one type of damage, which is associated with its artistic expression. For example, a lich expressing art through song or poetry has immunity to thunder damage, a lich expressing art through fashion has immunity to slashing damage, and a lich expressing art through paint has immunity to acid damage. This trait can't give the lich immunity to force, psychic, or radiant damage.

Spellcasting. The virtuoso lich is a 12th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *message*, *true strike*, *vicious mockery*



- 1st level (4 slots): *bane, hideous laughter, thunderwave*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *enthrall, hold person, invisibility, shatter*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, fear, speak with dead*
- 4th level (3 slots): *compulsion, confusion, dimension door*
- 5th level (2 slots): *dominate person, mislead*
- 6th level (1 slot): *irresistible dance, programmed illusion*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The virtuoso lich uses its Corrupted Art. It then makes two Artistic Flourish attacks.

Artistic Flourish. *Melee Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) damage of the type chosen with the Versatile Artist trait.

Corrupted Art. The lich hums a discordant melody, paints a crumbling symbol of death in the air, performs a reality-bending pirouette, or emulates some other expression of corrupted or twisted art and targets one creature it can see within 60 feet. This action's effects change, depending on if the target is undead.

Non-Undead. The target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Undead. The target regains 18 (4d8) hit points. Healing that exceeds the target's hit point maximum becomes temporary hit points.

Call Muse. The lich targets one humanoid or beast it can see within 30 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the lich for 1 minute. The charmed target, the lich's "muse," has a speed of 0 feet and is incapacitated as it watches or listens to the lich's artistic expression. The muse can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the lich's Call Muse for the next 24 hours. If the muse suffers harm from the lich, it is no longer charmed.

The lich can have only one muse at a time. If it charms another, the effect on the previous muse ends. If the lich is within 30 feet of its muse and can see its muse, the lich has advantage on its first Artistic Flourish attack each round against a creature that isn't its muse.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The virtuoso lich can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The lich regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Artistic Flourish. The lich makes one Artistic Flourish attack.

Move. The lich moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Cast a Spell (Costs 3 Actions). The lich casts a spell from its list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.

Unrestrained Art (Costs 3 Actions). The lich unleashes the full force of its artistic talents on those nearby. Each creature within 10 feet of the lich must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 18 (4d8) damage of the type chosen with the Versatile Artist trait and is knocked prone. On a success, a creature takes half the damage and isn't knocked prone.

WERECROCODILE

Werecrocodiles inhabit many cities and villages on the banks of the River Nuria and can also be found in numbers in Lake Gossai in the Fallen Kingdom of Aksaba, where they serve a sinister cult known as the Seven Wicked Blades (see page 164).

Werecrocodiles in humanoid form are well muscled and have a disconcerting smile that is just a bit too wide. They like to wield khopeshes (Nurian sickle-swords) and other brutal slashing weapons in battle.

Werecrocodiles are often confused for subek, which can sometimes lead to nasty surprises for those seeking knowledge or goods. The indifference that subek feel toward werecrocodiles doesn't help the situation, leaving customers always on edge, never knowing if they're dealing with a subek merchant or a duplicitous werecrocodile.

WERECROCODILE

Medium humanoid (human, shapechanger), neutral evil

ARMOR CLASS 11 in humanoid form, 12 (natural armor) in crocodile or hybrid form

HIT POINTS 58 (9d8 + 18)

SPEED 30 ft. (20 ft., swim 30 ft. in crocodile or hybrid form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)

SKILLS Deception +4, Intimidation +4, Perception +2

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

SENSES passive Perception 12

LANGUAGES Nurian, Southern Trade Tongue (can't speak in crocodile form)

CHALLENGE 3 (700 XP)

Hold Breath (Crocodile or Hybrid Form Only). The werecrocodile can hold its breath for 15 minutes.

Shapechanger. The werecrocodile can use its action to polymorph into a crocodile-humanoid hybrid or into a crocodile, or back into its true form, which is humanoid. Its statistics, other than its AC and size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). The werecrocodile makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite.

Bite (Crocodile or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 12). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the werecrocodile can't bite another target. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with werecrocodile lycanthropy.

Tail Swipe (Crocodile or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target not grappled by the werecrocodile. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Khopesh (Humanoid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

YILANKA

Yilankas, sometimes called the scaled healers of the sands, are said to be born when Set blesses a clutch of lost cobra eggs. Their combined aspects of humanoid and serpent accurately model their natural inclination to switch between kindness and cruelty.

Yilankas prefer to live far from the constraints of civilization. They make their lairs in small cave complexes, and they favor areas with strong winds where the action of the wind passing through the tunnels creates an eerie sound that keeps predators away. Yilankas enjoy isolation and are loath to entertain a guest for too long. They find other creatures tiresome and often use violence to drive off visitors who have overstayed their welcomes.

Nomadic people of the desert speak of how the blood and bile of yilankas can cure any ailment.

The hunting of yilankas for their humors in ancient times led to their near extinction and current distrust of humanoids. Creatures that approach a yilanka carefully and respectfully find that they have a keen knowledge of medicine and natural remedies. If their knowledge is insufficient to cure a petitioner's ailment, a yilanka may be convinced to trade its blood if an acceptable offer is made.

YILANKA

Large monstrosity, chaotic neutral

ARMOR CLASS 13 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 76 (9d10 + 27)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

SKILLS Medicine +5, Nature +4

CONDITION IMMUNITIES poisoned

SENSES passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES Common, Southern Tongue

CHALLENGE 3 (700 XP)

Asymptomatic Carrier. The yilanka is immune to the effects of all diseases, but it can be infected with and spread them.





NEW DISEASE: YILANKA TREMBLES

A creature can contract yilanka trembles anytime it is in close proximity to a yilanka.

It takes 1 day for the effects of yilanka trembles to manifest in a victim. The symptoms include uncontrollable shaking and numbness of the affected creature's appendages. At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or its trembling prevents it from using bonus action or reactions for the day. A creature that succeeds on three saving throws against the disease recovers from it.

Omen Tongue (Recharge 6). As a bonus action, the yilanka speaks a rapid jumble of words in a multitude of languages. Each creature within 30 feet of the yilanka, that can hear it, must roll a d20. On a result of 1–5, the creature is afflicted with bad omens for 1 minute, and it takes 1d6 psychic damage each time it deals damage to another creature while afflicted. On a result of 16–20, the creature regains 1d6 hit points. A creature afflicted with bad omens can make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

REACTIONS

Infectious Presence. When a creature ends its turn within 5 feet of the yilanka, the yilanka can infect it with yilanka trembles (see sidebar). The creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or contract the disease.



YILANKA CURATIVES

The blood and bodily fluids of a yilanka can be reduced and added to commonly available herbs and botanical extracts to create a potion that makes the imbiber resistant to poisons and diseases. Making the curative requires simmering 1 pint of yilanka blood and fluids for 24 hours over a low heat and succeeding on a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check.

A creature that imbibes the potion has advantage on saving throws against diseases and against being poisoned for 8 hours. If the creature is poisoned or suffering from a disease when it drinks this potion, it can repeat the condition or disease's saving throw as if it had taken a long rest, but it suffers no ill effects on a failed saving throw. The creature has advantage on this saving throw.

ZALIKUM

An enormous vulture forged from sand and malignant power, a zalikum is created by mages who capture souls of the damned and infuse them into the superheated sands of the desert.

The souls infusing a zalikum are from the Abyss. A zalikum's creator can gather these souls from the Abyss but, more often, the creator makes a deal with a demon in exchange for the souls. Unfortunately for the creator, the demon usually hands over souls that aren't the easiest to control, leading many creators to die at the talons of their zalikums. Such destruction frees the demon from its bonds, releasing it and the zalikum into the world.

A zalikum doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

ZALIKUM

Huge construct, neutral evil

ARMOR CLASS 16 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 103 (9d12 + 45)

SPEED 20 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	17 (+3)	21 (+5)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

SAVING THROWS Dex +6, Cha +5

SKILLS Perception +3

DAMAGE RESISTANCES bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES fire, necrotic, poison, psychic

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

SENSES darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES understands the languages of its creator but can't speak

CHALLENGE 7 (2,900 XP)

Flyby. The zalikum doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Ghastly Heated Body. A creature that touches the zalikum or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 3 (1d6) fire damage and 3 (1d6) necrotic damage.

Rejuvenation. The zalikum can store the souls of up to 3 victims inside it at one time. If it has at least 1 soul, a destroyed zalikum gains a new body in 1d10 days, regaining all its hit points and becoming active again. The new body appears within 5 feet of its sandy remains. If its sandy remains are soaked with holy water and buried in consecrated ground, its trapped souls are freed, and the zalikum can't rejuvenate.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The zalikum makes one beak attack and one talon attack.



Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.
Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage and 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. If a creature is slain by this attack, its body crumbles to sand, and the zalikum stores its soul. The creature can be restored to life only if the zalikum is destroyed and can't rejuvenate (see the Rejuvenation trait).

Talon. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage and 3 (1d6) necrotic damage.

Death-infused Desert Breath (Recharge 6). The zalikum exhales superheated sand infused with the power of damned souls in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage and 14 (4d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If a creature's saving throw fails by 5 or more, the creature also gains 1 level of exhaustion.

ZILAQ

Zilaqs are minor dragons found throughout the Southlands. They are equally likely to be found talking to the workers in a scriptorium as they are to attack a group of adventurers while leaving a looted wizard's lair.

Zilaqs love books, language, and stories. Over their long lifespans, they build impressive libraries in which they immerse themselves. Some zilaqs are so truly obsessed, they essentially entomb themselves in their repositories, using agents to procure ever more books while they guard the hoard. Their love of stories makes them one of the more agreeable and easy-to-approach types of dragons, and zilaqs can easily be convinced to provide service in exchange for a story.

Zilaqs don't just hoard their stories, they read and remember them. They are engaging conversationalists and fonts of information on a wide range of subjects. Zilaqs are social creatures that prefer the company of other intelligent beings to being alone. Even while in the company of others, however, one of the zilaqs heads is often reading, only stopping briefly to ask a clarifying question or correct a point its other head is trying to make.

ZILAQ

Tiny dragon, neutral

ARMOR CLASS 15 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 82 (15d4 + 45)

SPEED 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

SAVING THROWS Int +4, Cha +4



SKILLS Arcana +4, History +4, Performance +4

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES thunder

SENSES passive Perception 10

LANGUAGES Common, Draconic, Southern Tongue

CHALLENGE 4 (1,100 XP)

Eidetic Memory. A zilaq remembers everything it hears or reads. It has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) and Intelligence (History) checks.

Two-Headed. The zilaq has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The zilaq makes two bite attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Sonic Yelp (Recharge 5—6). The zilaq makes a high-pitched squeal. Each creature within 60 feet of it and that can hear it must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) thunder damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



Enthralling Speech (2/Day). Each creature within 60 feet of the zilaq and that can hear it must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed for 1 minute. While charmed, a creature suffers one of the following effects (zilaq's choice):

- The creature becomes hostile toward another creature of the zilaq's choice that is also charmed by the zilaq.
- The creature must roll a d100 at the start of each of its turns. If the result is 51–100, it can take no action until the start of its next turn.

Phantasmal Oratory (1/Day). The zilaq describes a creature so vividly, the creature takes on a semblance of reality. The zilaq creates an illusory creature that resembles a beast, monstrosity, or plant with a CR 1 or less for 1 hour. The illusory creature moves and acts according to the zilaq's mental direction, and it takes its turn immediately after the zilaq's. The illusory creature uses the statistics of the creature it resembles, except it can't use traits, actions, or spells that force the target to make a saving throw.



ZWANA LION

Found throughout the central Southlands from Narumbeki to Omphaya and Terrotu, the zwana lion is a cousin to the standard lion, with something of a leopard's rangy nimbleness. Zwana lions are 4 to 6 feet long and weigh 250 to 375 pounds. Not as heavy or powerful as other great cats, zwana lions use their higher intellect to coordinate group attacks on their prey. They are usually the top predators in their territories, though they have trouble competing with standard lions due to their greater size.

Nkosi can assume the form of a zwana lion when they change shape.

ZWANA LION

Medium beast, unaligned

ARMOR CLASS 13

HIT POINTS 18 (4d8)

SPEED 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	4 (–3)	12 (+1)	8 (–1)

SKILLS Perception +3, Stealth +7

SENSES passive Perception 13

LANGUAGES —

CHALLENGE 1/2 (100 XP)

Keen Smell. The lion has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Pack Tactics. The lion has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the lion's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Pounce. If the lion moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the lion can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

appendix b: new southlands npcs

The people of the Southlands include a variety of imposing clerics, merchants, warriors, and spellcasters unique to the region. Exemplars of those roles are provided here, as well as an animal lord and a fey lord that are particular to the region's deserts. As always, additional NPC options can be found in a variety of monster tomes and codices, including *Tome of Beasts* and *Tome of Beasts 2*.

APOSTLE

Apostles are powerful clerics who can ably serve as both the defenders and healers of their flock. In metropolitan areas where larger temples and churches can be found, there might be several apostles of a given religion. In rural areas, an apostle is often the senior representative of a faith and might be responsible for overseeing several small temples and shrines in the region.

APOSTLE

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

ARMOR CLASS 14 (breastplate, 16 with shield)

HIT POINTS 117 (18d8 + 36)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

SAVING THROWS Wis +7, Cha +5

SKILLS Insight +7, Persuasion +5, Religion +3

SENSES passive Perception 10

LANGUAGES any two languages

CHALLENGE 6 (2,300 XP)

Divine Strike (1/Turn). When it makes a melee weapon attack, the apostle deals its choice of an extra 4 (1d8) necrotic or radiant damage to its target.

Faith's Reward. When the apostle casts *bless*, it gains the benefit of the spell even if it doesn't include itself as a target.

Spellcasting. The apostle is a 10th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The apostle has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance*, *resistance*, *sacred flame*, *spare the dying*, *thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bless*, *cure wounds*, *guiding bolt*, *healing word*, *shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *hold person*, *lesser restoration*, *silence*, *spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *beacon of hope*, *bestow curse*, *daylight*, *revivify*, *spirit guardians*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *control water*, *death ward*, *freedom of movement*, *guardian of faith*

5th level (2 slots): *flame strike*, *greater restoration*, *mass cure wounds*, *raise dead*

The apostle casts *shield of faith* and *spirit guardians* before combat.

ACTIONS

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Destroy Undead (2/Day). The apostle presents its holy symbol and intones a prayer. All undead within 30 feet of the apostle that can see or hear it must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



FIELD COMMANDER

Field commanders are the men and women who enact the battle plans of their superiors. They lead their forces from the front and stand as assuring bastions of victory in even the most chaotic melees.

FIELD COMMANDER

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

ARMOR CLASS 17 (breastplate, 19 with shield)

HIT POINTS 170 (20d8 + 80)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Con +5, Cha +7

SKILLS Athletics +8, Investigation +5, Perception +5, Persuasion +6

CONDITION IMMUNITIES frightened

SENSES passive Perception 15



LANGUAGES Common and one other language

CHALLENGE 10 (5,900 XP)

Aura of Courage. As long as the field commander is conscious, all allies within 10 feet of it are immune to being frightened.

Aura of Protection. As long as the field commander is conscious, all allies within 10 feet of it have advantage on saving throws.

Spellcasting. The field commander is a 14th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It knows the following paladin spells:

1st level (4 slots): *command*, *cure wounds*, *divine favor*, *heroism*, *protection from evil and good*, *shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *aid*, *find steed*, *magic weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *revivify*

4th level (1 slot): *death ward*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The field commander makes three attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if wielded in two hands. If the target is a creature, the field commander can expend a spell slot as part of the attack to add one of the following effects:

- The target takes extra radiant damage equal to 1d8 per slot level.
- The target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.
- The target must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. The target can make a new saving throw at the end of each of its turns, overcoming its fright on a success.

REACTIONS

Bolster Soldier. When the field commander sees an allied creature within 10 feet of it struck by a weapon attack, it can use its reaction to call encouragement, granting that creature 5 (1d10) temporary hit points.

FIRST SERVANT

A first servant is one of its deity's most powerful mortal allies on the Material Plane. First servants often operate outside the accepted hierarchy of their churches and hold positions of prominence as oracles and prophets of their faith, or as the direct harbingers of their gods.

FIRST SERVANT

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

ARMOR CLASS 17

HIT POINTS 162 (25d8 + 50)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Con +6, Wis +9, Cha +8



SKILLS History +6, Insight +9, Perception +9, Religion +6

SENSES passive Perception 19

LANGUAGES any three languages

CHALLENGE 12 (8,400 XP)

Armor of Foresight. As long as it doesn't wear armor, the first servant adds its Dexterity and Wisdom modifiers to its Armor Class (included in statistics).

Healing Hands (Recharge 5–6). As a bonus action, the first servant can touch a creature within 5 feet of it and cause it to recover 14 (4d6) hit points.

Spellcasting. The first servant is an 18th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17). The first servant can cast *bless*, *command*, and *detect magic* at will and has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance*, *mending*, *resistance*, *spare the dying*, *thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bane*, *cure wounds*, *divine favor*, *hex*, *protection from evil and good*

2nd level (3 slots): *augury*, *mirror image*, *prayer of healing*, *see invisibility*, *zone of truth*

3rd level (3 slots): *beacon of hope*, *counterspell*, *magic circle*, *slow*, *speak with dead*

4th level (3 slots): *arcane eye*, *banishment*, *compulsion*, *death ward*, *divination*

5th level (3 slots): *contact other plane*, *dispel evil and good*, *hallow*, *modify memory*, *screaming*

6th level (1 slot): *planar ally*, *true seeing*

7th level (1 slot): *divine word*, *resurrection*

8th level (1 slot): *control weather*, *holy aura*

9th level (1 slot): *gate*, *true resurrection*

The first servant casts *death ward*, *holy aura*, and *true seeing* before combat.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The first servant can use its Awe-inspiring Presence and then attack with its rod.

Rod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be blinded and deafened until the start of the first servant's next turn.

Awe-inspiring Presence. Each creature of the first servant's choice that is within 30 feet of the first servant and aware of it must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be unable to use bonus actions or reactions until the start of the first servant's next turn.

KUSHITE SORCERER

One hundred cruel and depraved sorcerers serve Nula Nagoa, the undead ruler of Kush. These members of the Court of the Eternal Lord are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the jungle kingdom.

When the inhabitants of Kush willingly allied with the demons and devils of the Lower Planes, their bloodlines became tainted. Many Kushite sorcerers have scaly skin, small horns, or forked tails; others have pupilless eyes of black, red, or gold. As they studied and absorbed the forbidden lore of their fiendish allies, their arcane spells took on a sinister aspect. *Magic missile* spells cast by a Kushite sorcerer might manifest as cruelly barbed darts, a *shield* spell could appear as a grinning demon's face, and *scorching rays* might become screeching rays, screaming with the agony of the damned as they strike home.

KUSHITE SORCERER

Medium humanoid (tiefling), any evil

ARMOR CLASS 16 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 58 (9d8 + 18)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Constitution +5, Charisma +7

SKILLS Arcana +6, Deception +7, History +6, Religion +6



DAMAGE RESISTANCES

fire

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

LANGUAGES Southern Trade Tongue, Abyssal, Nurian

CHALLENGE 6 (2,300 XP)

Spellcasting. The Kushite sorcerer is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The Kushite sorcerer has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *claws of darkness**, *fire bolt*, *mage hand*, *minor illusion*, *poison spray*

1st level (4 slots): *disguise self*, *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (4 slots): *mirror image*, *scorching ray*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic*, *fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *power word pain***

5th level (1 slot): *dominate person*

*See *Midgard Heroes Handbook*, p. 157, or *Deep Magic*, p. 247

**See *Midgard Heroes Handbook*, p. 186, or *Deep Magic*, p. 100

Empowered Spell (3/Day). When the Kushite sorcerer rolls damage for a spell, it can reroll up to 4 damage dice. It must use the new rolls.

ACTIONS

Poisoned Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Summon Minor Demon (1/Day). The Kushite sorcerer summons a dretch, which appears at an unoccupied point the sorcerer can see within 90 feet. The dretch disappears if it drops to 0 hit points or after 1 hour, whichever comes first. The dretch is friendly to the sorcerer and its companions. It rolls initiative and has its own turns, obeying any verbal commands issued by the sorcerer. If the sorcerer doesn't issue it any commands, it defends itself from hostile creatures but otherwise takes no actions.

REACTIONS

Hellish Rebuke (1/Day). When the Kushite sorcerer takes damage from a creature within 60 feet that it can see, the sorcerer can choose to surround its attacker with hellish flames. The creature must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

LIVING JUNGLE DRUID

After an absence of 400 years, druids have returned to the Living Jungle. The druids of the Circle of Orchids seek to restore the jungle to its original natural splendor by combating the vine lords and tendril puppets and preventing Yawchaka from being overrun by abnormal plants and aberrant beasts. But among their number are some that have fallen under the Green Walker's influence and are unwittingly sharing the druids' plans with their new master.

LIVING JUNGLE DRUID

Medium humanoid (human), any neutral

ARMOR CLASS 11 (16 with *barkskin*)

HIT POINTS 58 (9d8 + 18)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)

SAVING THROWS Intelligence +3, Wisdom +5

SKILLS Medicine +5, Nature +3, Perception +5, Religion +3

SENSES passive Perception 15

LANGUAGES Southern Trade Tongue, Druidic, Nurian

CHALLENGE 3 (700 XP)



Nature's Champion. The Living Jungle druid has advantage on saving throws against the spells and other abilities of aberrations.

Speak with Animals. The Living Jungle druid can speak with the beasts of the jungle as if they shared a language.

Spellcasting. The Living Jungle druid is an 8th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). The Living Jungle druid has the following druid spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft*, *poison spray*, *shillelagh*
- 1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds*, *entangle*, *thunderwave*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *barkskin*, *poisoned volley**, *spike growth*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *call lightning*, *dispel magic*, *plant growth*
- 4th level (2 slots): *blight*, *dominate beast*

*See *Midgard Heroes Handbook*, p. 186, or *Deep Magic*, p. 98

Wild Shape (2/Day). The Living Jungle druid magically assumes the form of a tiger and can stay in this shape for up to 4 hours. The druid can revert to its normal form earlier by using a bonus action on its turn. The druid automatically reverts to its true form if it falls unconscious or dies. While in tiger form, the druid's statistics are replaced by those of a tiger, except the druid retains its alignment, personality, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores. The druid's attacks in tiger form are magical.

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit (+5 with *shillelagh*), reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage, or 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage with *shillelagh*.

MERCHANT CAPTAIN

Merchant captains lead trade caravans that deliver vital supplies and luxuries to communities far and wide. Sometimes regarded as glib-tongued shysters, merchant captains come from many walks of life and are as likely to be scrupulously honest merchants as they are to be silver-tongued devils.

Some merchant captains are retired or semiretired from active caravanning, and they continue to earn a living by financing or providing protection for caravans led by other merchants. All merchant captains, whether active or sedentary, have proficiency with land vehicles and with two musical instruments.

MERCHANT CAPTAIN

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

ARMOR CLASS 15 (studded leather)

HIT POINTS 104 (19d8 + 19)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Dex +6, Cha +6



SKILLS Deception +6, Perception +4, Performance +6, Persuasion +7, Sleight of Hand +6

SENSES passive Perception 14

LANGUAGES Common, two other languages

CHALLENGE 6 (5,900 XP)

Spellcasting. The merchant captain is an 8th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). It knows the following bard spells:

- Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *mending*, *vicious mockery* (2d4)
- 1st level (4 slots): *bane*, *charm person*, *disguise self*, *hideous laughter*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *enthrall*, *suggestion*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *hypnotic pattern*, *major image*, *tongues*
- 4th level (2 slots): *confusion*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The merchant captain casts *vicious mockery* and attacks with its rapier.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.



Fast Talk. When the merchant captain uses its action to confuse a creature with a barrage of jargon, quick speech, and big words, its target has disadvantage on the next Wisdom saving throw it makes before the end of the merchant captain's next turn.

REACTION

Inspiration (4/Day). As a reaction, the merchant captain can allow a creature it can see within 30 feet of it to reroll a failed attack roll, saving throw, or ability check. The creature must use the result of the second roll, even if it is lower than the original one.

QUEEN OF SCORPIONS (CHELAMMA)

The Queen of Scorpions is an exiled animal lord who manipulates the mortal world through a complex network of thieves and spies from her desert home.

Known as Chelamma by the nearby locals, the Queen of Scorpions was once a powerful member of the animal lords, until her appetites for blood and murder led to her exile. This punishment is an affront to her pride, and she plots revenge against the other animal lords and anyone they hold dear.

The Queen of Scorpions resides in Tirag Ajdir, an ancient desert temple that is a complex network of canyons filled with scorpions, spiders, and shrouded cultists. Assassin's guilds, thieves' dens, and other underworld organizations rely on the Queen of Scorpions for the deadliest poisons and most potent acids. She operates her shipments of poisons with the help of her shrouded cultists and a network of go-betweens. Only a select few of her customers are aware of the true identity of their supplier.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

The presence of the Queen of Scorpions warps the region containing her temple, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- The area within 5 miles of the temple attracts spiders and scorpions of all sizes. The Queen of Scorpions can choose to see or hear through the senses of any arachnid in this area and can speak through it while doing so.
- All arachnids within 5 miles of the queen's temple have advantage on all Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide.
- The Queen of Scorpions leaves no physical evidence of her passage when within 1 mile of her temple unless she wishes to. In addition, creatures and plants native to her domain don't cause her harm or cost her extra movement when she moves through the area.

If the Queen of Scorpions dies, these effects fade over the course of 1d10 days.

QUEEN OF SCORPIONS

Medium fey (shapechanger), lawful evil

ARMOR CLASS 17 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 142 (15d8 + 75)

SPEED 40 ft., burrow 20 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Con +9, Wis +7, Cha +8

SKILLS Arcana +8, Deception +8, Perception +7, Persuasion +8, Stealth +6

DAMAGE RESISTANCES bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES acid, poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, poisoned, stunned

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 120 ft., passive Perception 17

LANGUAGES all, telepathy 120 ft.

CHALLENGE 13 (10,000 XP)

Arachnid Passivism. No scorpions or spiders can willingly attack the Queen of Scorpions. They can be forced to do so through magical means.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Queen of Scorpions fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The Queen of Scorpions has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The Queen of Scorpions' weapon attacks are magical.

Rejuvenation. If she dies, the Queen of Scorpions' soul reforms on the Astral Plane. In 1d6 days, it inhabits the body of another scorpion on the Material Plane, which then becomes the Queen of Scorpions (with all of the hit points and abilities thereof). Only killing every scorpion on the Material Plane will prevent this trait from functioning.

Shapechanger. The Queen of Scorpions can use her action to polymorph into a Huge giant scorpion, a Medium human woman of unearthly beauty, or back into her true Medium, scorpion-tailed humanoid form. Her statistics, other than her size, are the same in each form—with the exception that only her scorpion and true forms retain her climbing and burrowing speeds. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying transforms with her. She reverts to her true form if she dies.

Speak with Arachnids. The Queen of Scorpions can communicate with scorpions and spiders as if they shared a language.

Spider Climb. The Queen of Scorpions can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Innate Spellcasting. The Queen of Scorpions' innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *invisibility* (self only), *pass without trace*, *poison spray*

3/day each: *giant insect* (scorpions and spiders only), *ray of enfeeblement*

1/day each: *etherealness*, *eyebite*, *freedom of movement*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. In human form, the Queen of Scorpions makes two scimitar attacks. In scorpion form, she makes three attacks: two with her claws and one with her sting. In her true form, she makes three attacks: one with her sting and two with her scimitar.

Claw (Scorpion Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 17). While in scorpion form, the Queen has two claws, each of which can grapple only one target.

Scimitar (Humanoid or True Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d6 + 6) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage.

Sting (Scorpion or True Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d10 + 6) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Acidic Bile (Recharge 5–6). The Queen of Scorpions spews acid from her mouth in a 60-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 45 (10d8) acid damage and is poisoned for 1 minute. On a success, a creature takes half the damage and isn't poisoned. A poisoned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Queen of Scorpions can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Queen of Scorpions regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

At Will Spell. The Queen of Scorpions casts one of her at will spells.

Burrow (Scorpion or True Form Only). The Queen of Scorpions moves up to her burrowing speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Scimitar (Costs 2 Actions; Humanoid or True Form Only). The Queen of Scorpions makes one scimitar attack.

TARKUN THE DESSICATED

Once a powerful and well-to-do fey lord, Tarkun had aspirations that were too high for his abilities. When his coup against a fey lady failed, Tarkun was stripped of his power and banished into the desert, where the lady believed he would perish. Weakened and dying, Tarkun reached deep within the wastelands around him, tying the power of the ley lines he found there to the very fiber of his being. While the effort twisted and marred his once-beautiful form, he found not only a fountain of life but new power at his fingertips. The sands now answer the call of Tarkun the Dessicated.





Tarkun controls an ever-growing army of apaxrusl (see page 268), which he can communicate with telepathically at any distance as long as they are within his desert. Able to speak through any of his minions' mouths, Tarkun can also experience their senses. He also shares this connection with his zalikum (see page 278), named Hevn.

The desert has given him new power and granted him life, but Tarkun is trapped within its confines. He cannot leave the desert by any means, mundane or magical. With his powers, he is slowly pushing that barrier outward, covering the surrounding lands in sand. He strives for a future when he has regained his former power and can smother the fey courts in his sandy retribution.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

The desert creeps along with Tarkun wherever he goes, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Sandstorms are common within 6 miles of Tarkun.
- If Tarkun spends 24 hours within 1 mile of a plant that is not acclimated to surviving in the desert, the plant wilts and dies at the end of the 24 hours.
- If Tarkun spends 1 week within 1 mile of an oasis pond or small lake, the body of water dries up at the end of the week.
- If Tarkun spends 1 month within 1 mile of a non-desert biome, the biome becomes a desert at the end of the month.

If Tarkun dies, plants that died don't return to life, but the other effects fade over the course of 1d10 days.

TARKUN THE DESICCATED

Medium fey, chaotic neutral

ARMOR CLASS 16 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 85 (10d8 + 40)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Dex +5, Wis +4, Cha +7

SKILLS Deception +7, Insight +4, Perception +4

DAMAGE RESISTANCES acid, necrotic, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with cold iron weapons

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES fire

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, frightened

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 14

LANGUAGES Southern Trade Tongue, Elvish, Infernal, Umbral

CHALLENGE 8 (3,900 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Tarkun fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Rejuvenation. If killed in a desert, Tarkun's body reforms from the desert sands in 24 hours, regaining all his hit points and becoming active again. His new body appears anywhere within the desert confines of his realm. Only the complete removal of his body from the desert prevents this trait from functioning.

Sand Stride. Tarkun can burrow through nonmagical sand at his walking speed. While doing so, he doesn't disturb the material he moves through. In addition, difficult terrain composed of sand doesn't cost him extra movement.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Tarkun makes two attacks.

Desiccating Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) fire damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become cursed with Tarkun's desiccation. While cursed, the target can't regain hit points, and its hp maximum decreases by 10 (3d6) for every 24 hours that elapse. If the curse reduces the target's hp maximum to 0, the target dies, and it rises 10 minutes later as an apaxrusl under Tarkun's control. The curse lasts until removed by the *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Searing Sand Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) fire damage.

Engulfing Sand Wave (Recharge 5–6). Tarkun releases a wave of rippling sand. Each creature within 20 feet of Tarkun must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone and buried. On a success, a creature takes half the damage and isn't knocked prone or buried. The buried target is restrained and unable to breathe or stand up. A creature, including the target, can take an action to make a DC 15 Strength check, ending the buried state on a success. The area becomes difficult terrain.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Tarkun can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Tarkun regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Move. Tarkun moves up to his speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Desiccating Touch (Costs 2 Actions). Tarkun uses his Desiccating Touch.

Blinding Sandstorm (Costs 3 Actions). Tarkun creates a whirling sandstorm in a 10-foot-radius, 40-foot-high cylinder centered on a point he can see within 60 feet of him. When a creature enters the area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, it must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. Flying creatures have disadvantage on the saving throw. A blinded creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. The sandstorm lasts for 1 minute, until Tarkun uses this legendary action again, or until Tarkun dies.

WARLOCK OF THE GENIE LORD

Warlocks of the genie lord gain their abilities through magical pacts forged with powerful djinni and efreeti lords. These warlocks often summon lesser elementals to do their bidding, and regardless of their alignment, they tend to exude a commanding presence and an air of superiority.

WARLOCK OF THE GENIE LORD

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

ARMOR CLASS 15 (studded leather)

HIT POINTS 78 (12d8 + 24)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	19 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Con +5, Cha +7

SKILLS Acrobatics +6, Intimidation +7, Nature +4

DAMAGE RESISTANCES acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder

SENSES passive Perception 11

LANGUAGES Common, Primordial

CHALLENGE 5 (1,800 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The warlock's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can innately cast the following spells (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks), requiring no material components:

At will: *detect magic*, *false life*, *levitate*, *silent image*

1/day each: *conjure elemental*, *flesh to stone*, *etherealness*, *slow*

Genie Lord's Favor. When the warlock takes damage of a type it has resistance to, it can deal an extra 10 (3d6) points of damage the next time it casts a spell that deals acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage. The extra damage is of the same type as the damage dealt by the spell the warlock is casting. If the warlock's spell affects multiple targets, the warlock selects one target to take the extra damage.

Spellcasting. The warlock is a 13th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). It regains its expended spell slots when it finishes a short or long rest. It knows the following warlock spells:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*

1st–5th level (3 5th-level slots): *blight*, *chromatic orb*, *conjure minor elementals*, *dimension door*, *expeditious retreat*, *fire shield*, *fly*, *gaseous form*, *gust of wind*, *mirror image*, *wall of stone*, *water breathing*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.



appendix c: southlands magic items

Although most of the magic items described in this appendix were originally created by a particular culture or kingdom, examples of many of these treasures can be found throughout the Southlands.

Ankh of Aten

Wondrous item, rare

This golden ankh is about 12 inches long and has 5 charges. While holding the ankh by the loop, you can expend 1 charge as an action to fire a beam of brilliant sunlight in a 5-foot-wide, 60-foot-line from the end. Each creature caught in the line must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 5d8 radiant damage and is blinded until the end of your next turn. On a successful save, it takes half damage and isn't blinded. Undead have disadvantage on this saving throw. The ankh regains 1d6 expended charges daily at dawn.



Apron of the Eager Artisan

Wondrous item, common

Created by the dwarven craft brotherhoods of Sebbek Sobor, this leather apron has narrow pockets within which one type of artisan's tools is stored.

If you are wearing the apron and you spend 10 minutes contemplating your next crafting project, the tools in the apron magically change to match those best suited to the task at hand. Once you have changed the tools available, you cannot change them again until the next dawn.



Ashes of the Fallen

Wondrous item, rare

Found in a small packet, Kushite sorcerers created this coarse, foul-smelling black dust from the powdered remains of a celestial. Each small packet of the substance contains enough ashes for one use.

When you use your action to throw the ashes in the air, they spread in a 15-foot cone. Any spellcaster in the cone must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become cursed for 1 hour (or until the curse is ended with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic). Creatures that do not cast spells are unaffected.

A cursed spellcaster must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw each time they try to cast a spell. On a successful save, the spell is cast normally. On a failed saving throw, the spellcaster casts a different, randomly chosen spell of the same level or lower from among their prepared spells. If the spellcaster has no suitable spells available, they do nothing.

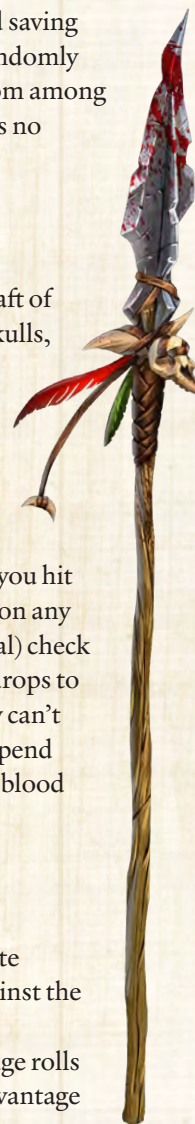


Bloodrinker Spear

Weapon (spear), rare

Prized by the gnolls of Dabu, the upper haft of this spear is decorated with tiny animal skulls, feathers, and other fetishes.

You have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. When you hit a creature with this spear, you mark the target for 1 hour. Until the mark ends, you deal an extra 1d6 damage to the target whenever you hit it with the spear, and you have advantage on any Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Survival) check you make to find the target. If the target drops to 0 hit points, the mark ends. This property can't be used on a different creature until you spend a short rest cleaning the previous target's blood from the spear.



Chainbreaker Blade

Weapon (any sword), rare

This blade is a favorite weapon of the pirate captains of the Free Islands who fight against the slavers of Shibai and the Spice Coast.

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic sword. You have advantage on attack rolls that are used to break chains, manacles, and other similar metal objects, and any such objects have vulnerability to the slashing damage dealt by this sword.



Crimson Carpet

Wondrous item, uncommon

This rolled bundle of red felt is 3 feet long and 1 foot wide, and it weighs 10 pounds. You can use an action to speak the carpet's command word to cause it to unroll, creating a horizontal walking surface or bridge up to 10 feet wide, up to 60 feet long, and 1/4 inch thick. The carpet doesn't need to be anchored and can hover. The carpet has immunity to all damage and isn't affected by the *dispel magic* spell. The *disintegrate* spell destroys the carpet.

The carpet remains unrolled until you use an action to repeat the command word, causing it to roll up again. When you do so, the carpet can't be unrolled again until the next dawn.



Crocodile Armor

Armor (leather), rare

While you wear this magic armor fashioned from crocodile skin, you gain a +1 bonus to AC. In addition, you can hold your breath for 15 minutes, and you have a swimming speed equal to your walking speed.



You also have advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks when interacting with subek or werecrocodiles, but you have disadvantage on all other Charisma checks made during an interaction with such creatures.

Eye of Horus

Wondrous item, uncommon

The *Eye of Horus* helps you determine reality from phantasms and trickery. While wearing this magical gold and lapis lazuli amulet, you have advantage on saving throws against fear and illusion spells and effects.



Eyes of the Portal Masters

Wondrous item, rare

While you wear these crystal lenses over your eyes, you can sense the presence of any dimensional portals within 60 feet of you and whether each one is one-way or two-way. Once you have worn the eyes for 10 minutes, their magic ceases to function until the next dawn. Donning or removing the lenses requires an action.



Fly Whisk of Authority

Wondrous item, uncommon

If you use an action to flick this fly whisk, you have advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) and Charisma (Persuasion) checks for 10 minutes. You can't use the fly whisk this way again until the next dawn.





Headrest of the Cattle Queens

Wondrous item, uncommon

This polished and curved wooden headrest is designed to keep the user's head comfortably elevated while sleeping.

If you sleep for at least 6 hours while using the headrest, you regain an extra spent Hit Die, and your exhaustion level is reduced by 2 (rather than the usual 1) when you finish a long rest under the proper conditions.

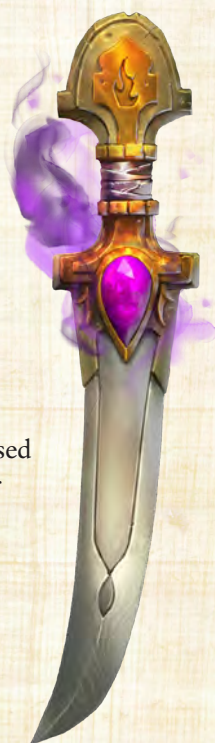


Jambiya of the Ebon Night

Weapon (dagger), uncommon

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

This rune-covered curved magic dagger is the result of demonic tutelage over Sar-Shaban royals. When you hit a creature with this weapon, it must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become cursed for 1 minute. While cursed, whenever the creature makes an attack roll or saving throw, it must roll 1d4 and subtract the number rolled from the attack roll or saving throw.



Keffiyeh of Serendipitous Escape

Wondrous item, very rare

This checkered cotton headdress is indistinguishable from the mundane scarves worn by desert nomads. As an action, you can remove the headdress, spread it open on the ground, and speak the command word. The keffiyeh transforms into a 3-foot-by-5-foot *carpet of flying* that moves according to your spoken directions provided that you are within 30 feet of it. Speaking the command word a second time transforms the carpet back into a headdress again.

Kijani Seedling

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This 1-inch-thick, 2-foot-long green vine, topped with a leaf, is an immature kijani seedling. When you attune to the seedling, you allow it to attach itself to your body with its tendrils and bury its roots into your veins, nerves, and bones. The seedling is flexible enough to squeeze in beneath your clothing or armor as long as part of it remains exposed to the open air; the seedling will move itself to stay in sunlight when possible.

While you are attuned to the kijani seedling, you don't need to sleep, magic can't put you to sleep, and you are immune to the ravaging disease (see page 272). You can communicate with plant creatures within 30 feet as if you shared a common language and can use *Speak with Plants*, as the spell, for 1 hour per day.

You also gain proficiency in the Arcana, History, Nature, or Religion skill (your choice when you attune to the seedling).

The seedling is a symbiote and cannot be removed while you're attuned to it. You can remove your attunement to the seedling if you are in physical contact with another creature that is willing to attune to it in your place.

If the seedling remains attuned to a host for long enough—typically 10 years or so—it will eventually detach itself and rapidly grow into a mature kijani.

Kissing Blade of Tik'mbesi

Weapon (dagger), legendary (requires attunement by a creature of non-good alignment)

Crafted while orcs still thrived on Midgard, by a great mage whose name it bears, this roughly serrated, single-edged knife made of snowflake obsidian was used by orc priests of the White Goddess to torture captives while they lived, and then to finish skinning, jointing, and boning them after they died. The knife bites deeply, but so painlessly that living creatures it harms often don't realize how injured they are.

You gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls while wielding this weapon. When you hit a living creature with it, it deals an extra 10 (3d6) slashing damage that bypasses

any resistance your target has to slashing damage, and you have advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) and Charisma (Persuasion) checks against the injured creature for 1 minute. This benefit ends early if you attack a different target.

Labrys of the Raging Bull

Weapon (battleaxe or greataxe), rare

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this double-headed magic axe. While you wield the weapon, you have advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks to shove a creature, and you can shove a creature up to two sizes larger than you.



Litham of Breath

Wondrous item, uncommon

While your face is protected by this sturdy covering, you automatically succeed on Constitution saving throws to avoid gaining levels of exhaustion during a siltstorm.

Mantle of the Lion

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

Treasured by the warriors of Omphaya, this splendid lion pelt is designed to be worn across the shoulders with the paws clasped at the base of the neck.



While wearing this mantle, your speed increases by 10 feet, and the mantle's lion jaws are a natural melee weapon, which you can use to make unarmed strikes. When you hit with it, the mantle's bite deals piercing damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier, instead of the bludgeoning damage normal for an unarmed strike.

In addition, if you move at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hit it with a melee attack on the same turn, that creature must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If a creature is knocked prone in this way, you can make an attack with the mantle's bite against the prone creature as a bonus action.

Mask of the Leaping Gazelle

Wondrous item, uncommon

Favored by warriors and hunters on the grasslands of Narumbeki, this painted wooden animal mask is adorned with a pair of gazelle horns.

When you wear this mask, your walking speed increases by 10 feet, and you can make a long jump of as much as 25 feet with a 10-foot running start.



Mbira of Strong Emotions

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This musical instrument consists of a wooden board with two dozen staggered metal tines attached to it that are plucked by the user to produce a tune.

When you play the mbira using your action, you can evoke a particular emotion in creatures within 30 feet that can hear your music. You are immune to this effect, and you can designate up to four allies in the area who also are not affected. Each other creature must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or become affected by the music (and can choose to fail this saving throw if so desired). An unwilling creature can attempt a new saving throw each round to resist the effect. If an affected creature moves farther than 30 feet away from the mbira, the effect ceases for that creature, but an unwilling creature can continue to attempt the Charisma saving throw.

Each time you use the instrument, choose one of the following emotions. Every creature that fails its saving throw, whether willingly or otherwise, is affected.

Anger. Creatures become less friendly toward other creatures in the area, not including you and your allies. Friendly creatures become indifferent; indifferent creatures become hostile.

Fear. Creatures become frightened by your music and try to move farther than 30 feet away from it.

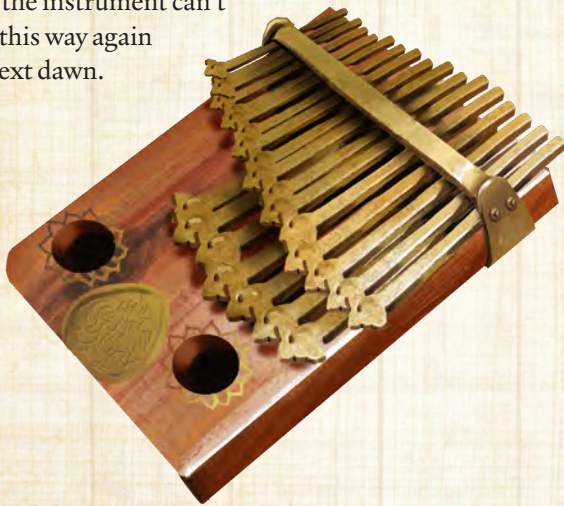


Joy. Creatures are overcome with pleasant thoughts. Hostile creatures become indifferent; indifferent creatures become friendly.

Tranquility. Creatures become charmed. They stop whatever they are doing to listen quietly to your music.

The emotion lasts for as long as you remain in the same location and continue playing music. After you have been playing for 1 hour, you must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw to continue. For each hour you continue to play after the first, the DC increases by 1 and you gain 1 level of exhaustion.

Once you have used the mbira to evoke one of the four emotions, the instrument can't be used in this way again until the next dawn.



Morregi Divination Board

Wondrous item, rare

This circular wooden disc has a raised rim carved with geometric patterns and the face of the three-eyed titan Amhara. A small cloth bag containing sixteen dried palm nuts accompanies it.

You can use the divination board to ask Amhara a single question concerning a specific event or activity scheduled to occur within the next 7 days. While seated on the ground, you use your action to toss the palm nuts onto the board and ask your question. As you study the pattern



formed by the palm nuts, you hear the truthful answer to your question in your mind, supplied by the GM in the form of a short phrase or cryptic rhyme.

The divination board doesn't account for any possible circumstances that might change the outcome, such as the casting of spells or the loss or gain of a companion. Once you have consulted the board, it cannot be used in this way again for 7 days.

Pocket Oasis

Wondrous item, very rare

When you throw this 5-foot-by-5-foot square of black cloth into the air as an action, it creates a portal to an oasis hidden within an extradimensional space. A pool of shallow, fresh water fills the center of the oasis, and bountiful fruit and nut trees grow around the pool. The fruits and nuts from the trees provide enough nourishment for up to ten Medium creatures. The air in the oasis is pure, cool, and even a little crisp, and the environment is free from harmful effects. When creatures enter the extradimensional space, they are protected from effects and creatures outside the oasis as if they were in the space created by a *rope trick* spell. The effect lasts for 24 hours or until all the creatures leave the extradimensional oasis, whichever occurs first. Any creatures still inside the oasis at the end of 24 hours are harmlessly ejected. Once used, the *pocket oasis* cannot be used again for 24 hours.

Prayer Mat

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement by a cleric or paladin)

This small rug is woven with intricate patterns that depict religious iconography. When you attune to it, the iconography and colors change to those appropriate to your deity.

When you spend 10 minutes praying to your god while kneeling on this mat, you regain one expended use of your Channel Divinity. Once you have used the mat, it can't be used again until the next dawn.



Rod of the Infernal Realms

Rod, very rare (requires attunement by a sorcerer, warlock or wizard)

This iron rod, often wielded by arcane spellcasters from Kush or Sar-Shaba, is topped with the withered, clawed hand of a demon or a devil.

While holding this rod, you gain a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls, and the save DC for your spells increases by 2.

Frightful Eyes. While holding this rod, you can use a bonus action to cause your eyes to glow with infernal fire for 1 minute. While your eyes are glowing, a creature that starts its turn or enters a space within 10 feet of you must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC or become frightened of you until your eyes stop glowing. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Once used, you can't use this property again until the next dawn.



Sandals of the Desert Wanderer

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

While you wear these soft leather sandals, you have resistance to fire damage. You ignore difficult terrain caused by loose or deep sand and can tolerate temperatures of up to 150 degrees Fahrenheit.

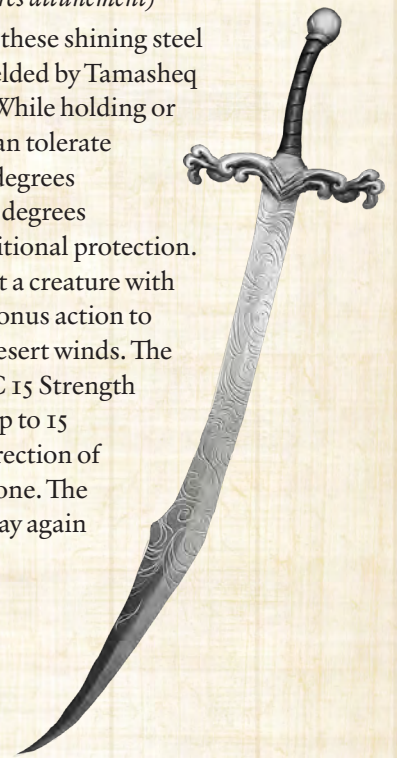


Scimitar of the Desert Winds

Weapon (scimitar), rare (requires attunement)

Created by the Wind Lords, these shining steel scimitars are sometimes wielded by Tamasheq chieftains and imajaghans. While holding or carrying this scimitar, you can tolerate temperatures as low as -50 degrees Fahrenheit or as high as 150 degrees Fahrenheit without any additional protection.

Wind Strike. When you hit a creature with the scimitar, you can use a bonus action to call upon the power of the desert winds. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 15 feet away from you in the direction of your choice and knocked prone. The scimitar can't be used this way again until the next dawn.



Saddle of the Cavalry Casters

Wondrous item, uncommon

This magic saddle adjusts its size and shape to fit the animal to which it is strapped. While a mount wears this saddle, all other creatures have disadvantage on opportunity attacks made against you or your mount. You have advantage on any checks to remain mounted, and on Constitution saving throws you make to maintain concentration on a spell when you take damage.



Shield of the Seven Heavens

Armor (shield), very rare (requires attunement)

Prized by paladins, this shield is inscribed with the names of the seven Ishadian virtues: humility, diligence, courage, temperance, generosity, kindness, and peace.

While you hold this shield, you have a +2 bonus to AC. This bonus is in addition to the shield's normal bonus to AC. You cannot be charmed, frightened, or possessed, and you have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects produced by fiends.

When a creature misses you with a melee attack, you can use your reaction to make an attack with the shield. If the attack hits, you push the creature 10 feet away from you in a straight line.



Slippers of the Cat

Wondrous item, uncommon

While you wear these fine, black cloth slippers, you gain advantage on Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks to keep your balance. When you fall while wearing these slippers, you land on your feet and can make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage.

Spice Box of Zest

Wondrous item, very rare

This small, square wooden box is carved with scenes of life in the City of Brass. Inside, the box is divided into six compartments, each holding a different magical spice. A small wooden spoon is also stored inside the box for measuring. A *spice box of zest* contains six spoonfuls of each spice when full.

You can add one spoonful of a single spice per person to a meal that you or someone else is cooking. The magic of the spices is nullified if you add two or more spices together.

The spices have the following effects on those consuming the meal and last for 1 hour unless otherwise indicated:

Baharat—Your Strength score increases to 21.

Cassia—You no longer suffer the effects of exhaustion.

Cloves—You cannot become frightened.

Fiery Chilies—You can use a bonus action to exhale fire in a 15-foot cone. The target must make a DC 15 Dexterity

saving throw, taking 3d6 fire damage on a failed save or half damage on a successful one. The effect ends when you use your fiery breath or after 1 hour, whichever comes first.

Saffron—You become charmed by the next creature you see 10 minutes after eating the meal. If the creature is of a species and gender you are normally attracted to, you regard it as your true love while you are charmed.

Turmeric—You have advantage on saving throws against spells.

Staff of the First Labyrinth

Staff, very rare (requires attunement)

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Created in the days of the Moon Kingdom of Tes-Qamar, these staves are highly prized by minotaur librarians and scholars. When you hit a creature with the staff, you can choose to banish it to an extradimensional labyrinth unless it succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. The creature remains trapped in the labyrinth for the duration (concentration, up to 1 minute) or until it escapes the maze. The target can make a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check as an action to attempt to escape the labyrinth. If it succeeds, it escapes and the spell ends (a minotaur automatically succeeds). When the effect ends, the creature reappears in the space it left or, if that space is occupied, in the nearest unoccupied space. When you use this property of the staff, it can't be used again until the next sunrise.

Vessel of Deadly Venoms

Wondrous item, rare

Originally created by the Serpent Masters of Lignas, this small jug weighs 5 pounds and has a ceramic snake coiled around it.

You can use an action to command the vessel to produce one of three types of poison, which pours from the mouth of the snake.

The word "blade" yields a dose of serpent venom, enough to coat a single weapon.

The word "consume" creates a dose of assassin's blood, an ingested poison.

The word "spit" produces a stream of poison that is expelled at a creature of your choice within 30 feet. The target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the target takes 2d8 poison damage and is poisoned until the end of its next turn. On a success, the target takes half the damage and isn't poisoned.

Poisons created by the vessel must be used within 1 hour or they become inert. Once you have used the vessel, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Different versions of the vessel containing other standard poisons may exist, at the GM's discretion.

appendix d: southlands random events

Broad and vast, the Southlands feature a variety of environments rife with adventure opportunities. Each entry on the following lists sets the scene for an interaction between the player characters and the denizens of the place they're exploring.

To use one of these lists, roll a d8 to get a random result or choose an entry you prefer. The monsters on each list are arranged by challenge rating in ascending order. An asterisk (*) after a name indicates a creature from *Tome of Beasts*; ** indicates *Tome of Beasts 2*; and *** indicates *Creature Codex*.

TOMB EVENTS

Whether one is the burial place of a Tamasheq noble, a Nurian princeling, a gnoll warlord, or a mad titan, both carefully constructed and unintentional tombs lie scattered across the Southlands.

- 1 Several **anubians*** guard the luxurious votive offerings left at a tomb-shrine to Anu-Akma.
- 2 In star-painted chambers, a **venomous mummy*** awaits a lover's return from the Oasis of Figs.
- 3 An **ostinato*** uses its song to command a Tes-Qamari **tophet*** against intruders.



- 4 Picking over the remains of a sacked caravan, a **death vulture**** feeds among corpses.
- 5 Several **sarcophagus slimes*** lie puddled in a tomb's corners, the only remnants of unsuccessful thieves.
- 6 Lingering near a Tamasheq tomb, a **rotting wind*** ensures looters don't breach the walls.
- 7 Fashioned from the riches of Glorious Umbuso, a **hoard golem*** guards a titan's burial site.
- 8 From a sunny perch, a **gypsosphinx*** gazes out over a Nurian necropolis.

NURIA EVENTS

Over centuries, the servants of the God-Pharaohs raised monuments and toiled to create the legacy of the Southlands' divine scions, given both flesh and dominion over the River Nuria.

- 1 A band of **scorpion cultists*** attempts to kidnap travelers near the riverbank south of Per-Xor.
- 2 Guarding a lonely shrine along the Mhalmet Road, two **imy-ut-ushabti*** protect travelers and offerings.
- 3 When creatures wander near a rubble pile, a lurking **prismatic beetle swarm*** pours out.
- 4 Concealed in the reeds, flood-maddened **subek*** abandon their ferry to hunt unwary innocents.
- 5 Just outside a village, a **possessed pillar*** dedicated to Ninkash denies entry to armed visitors.
- 6 **Shabti*** maintain a funerary temple to Horus attached to their dead master's cliff tomb.
- 7 Roaming a necropolis dedicated to Anu-Akma, an **ammut***** defends the tombs of Per-Kush.
- 8 Stalking the empty aisles of a souk, a **smaragdine golem*** hunts heretical thieves for the Emerald Order.

CRESCENT DESERT EVENTS

The rolling dunes shift and curl as Khamsin the south wind howls through the desert between humble Siwal and black-hearted Mhalmet.

- 1 At a rocky wadi, a **cactid*** hunts creatures and people who come to drink.
- 2 **Miragers*** lurk outside a ruined Moon Kingdom temple, preventing petitioners from reaching the spring inside.



- 3 Keeping away bandits, a **ravenala*** tends a shallow well and a stand of sickly blue palms.
- 4 A dune **mimic*** awaits the next caravan along the Lion Road.
- 5 Three **blemmyes*** set up shop in a fig orchard, selling salvage and stolen goods.
- 6 Tending a herd of camels, a **desert giant*** gazes out under the shadow of Khensu's pyramid.
- 7 Trying to lure unsuspecting miners in the Khephani Salt Flats, an **oozasis*** offers false sanctuary.
- 8 A pair of territorial **sandwyrms*** harass anyone who crosses their nesting ground.

JUNGLES OF KUSH EVENTS

Sultry heat washes over travelers, thick with scents of copper and brimstone, humming with ambient magical power. The sorcerers of Nangui nominally hold sway over these lands.

- 1 A seemingly safe jungle trail leads to a waiting **carnivorous sod****.
- 2 A Narumbeki messenger falls prey to a **tendrill puppet*** and a **bulbous violet****.



- 3 A bloom **hydra**** hunts above the trails between Kanjar and Suadu.
- 4 An exiled **white ape*** steals workers from the Burning Fields as tribute to the Green Walker.
- 5 A **vine lord*** and four **alliumites***** poison the river running toward Kanjar.
- 6 An **arborcyte***** guards the grave of its former body and the glowing staff within.
- 7 Infused with the waters of the Well of Urd, a **lotus golem***** searches for a stronger ley line.
- 8 Raiding for its Nangui master, an **alnaar demon***** smolders a path through the Yawchaka jungle.

CORSAIR COAST EVENTS

The swift coastal currents run thick with privateers, merchants, and pirates. Some of these travelers seek their fortunes in distant island ports, while others come hunting for blood and salvage.

- 1 Migrating from a nearby archipelago, a **Zanskaran viper*** tries to steal warmth from an encampment's fire.
- 2 A band of **lemurfolk*** rifles through backpacks for sweets under cover of darkness.

- 3 Chasing thieves who have looted their nest, a clutch of **jaculi*** hunts villagers.
- 4 Terrorizing merchants along the Spice Road, several **coral drakes*** swoop in out of the sun.
- 5 Working to protect a local lizardfolk community, a **mangrove treant**** chases off intruders.
- 6 Lurking along a trail in the Viungo Jungle, a **titanoboa*** waits in ambush.
- 7 A **carnivorous ship**** pursues a trio of privateers around the Cape of Golden Dreams.
- 8 Serving as a raiding platform for lizardfolk, a **spinosauros*** rushes a tilting watchtower.

DABU AND NARUMBEKI EVENTS

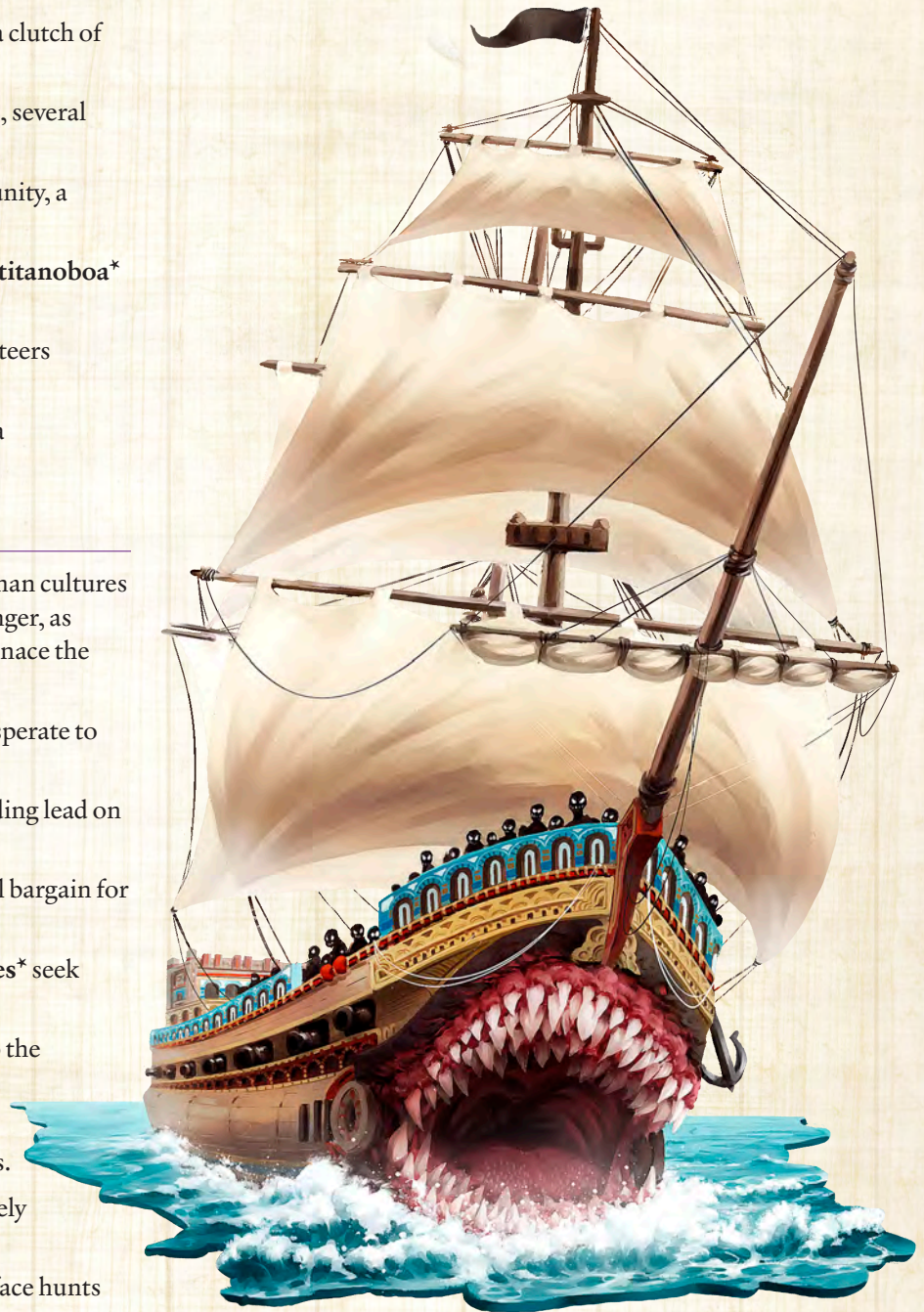
The vast, picturesque savanna of gnoll and human cultures offers equal parts scenic beauty and bloody danger, as tosculi, vine lords, and other strangenesses menace the grasslands.

- 1 A **serpopard*** stalks a Narumbeki patrol desperate to reach the safety of their fort.
- 2 A merchant takes goods between villages, riding lead on a flotilla of **tusked skyfish***.
- 3 A **bouda*** needs sacrifices for a ritual but will bargain for a victim.
- 4 Two **tosculli warriors*** and six **tosculli drones*** seek captives to take to their hive-queen.
- 5 Three **mngwa***, driven insane by exposure to the Abandoned Lands, hunt for fresh meat.
- 6 Two **gnoll havoc-runners*** and four **gnoll slavers***** seek captives for the slave markets.
- 7 A mated pair of **anzu**** attack indiscriminately as they seek their stolen eggs.
- 8 A **bonespitter**** drawn to activity at the surface hunts its next meal.

DOMINION OF THE WIND LORDS EVENTS

From the Palace of the Spirits' echoing passages to Kel Azjer's scenic vistas and beyond the Citadel of the Spider Prophet's labyrinthine corridors, even the stones listen in Tamasheq lands.

- 1 Desiccated Tamasheq bodies lead to a dwindling oasis where **gray thirsters*** wait in ambush.
- 2 Six **acid ants***** guard an old watchtower clearly marked with Ankeshelian glyphs.
- 3 Two **kezai**** dwell on either side of a rocky trail, ready to attack anyone who approaches.



- 4 A **desert troll***** guarding a mountain pass can be befriended with song or clever games.
- 5 In a ruin-choked canyon, a **salt devil*** and two **bilwis***** guard a rune-inscribed stone.
- 6 Two **fragrites***** trap a Tamasheq scouting party in the entrance to a rediscovered Umbuso ruin.
- 7 An **incinis***** guards a glowing obelisk carved with draconic script floating above a magma pool.
- 8 Believing it has found the desecrators it seeks, an **elemental locus*** surges into view.



OCEAN EVENTS

Dangers lurk above and below the waves of the Middle Sea to the Showka Passage, the Tethys and Western Oceans, the Straits of Zawra, or the Burning Shores.

- 1 A **kelp drake**** lingers near a pier, hoping to steal a fisherman's catch.
- 2 Emerging from the surf to stalk foraging sailors, a **tidehunter**** looks for snacks.
- 3 Lairing in a flooded cave within a narrow strait, a **sea dragon*** extorts passing ships.
- 4 A **keelbreaker crab**** moves in after a terrible storm and begins harassing local shipping.
- 5 Enraged after pearl divers looted its magical oyster beds, a **kelp eel**** threatens travelers.
- 6 A ravenous **devil shark***** capsizes smaller vessels and feeds on the hapless crews.

- 7 Roaming south near Hartani Bay, an **isonade*** is spotted lingering amid several shallow wrecks.
- 8 The lookout spots a longboat of bleating goats left to placate a **timingila**** that breaches moments later.

MOUNTAIN EVENTS

Vast spines of rock stretch continent-wide, be they the stark Chelamites of the Wind Lords, the snow-capped Mbaza of the Narumbeki Gap, or Omphaya's imposing Yoyera Mountains.

- 1 A **mountain nymph**** will reveal a shortcut if a nearby **cave drake**** is slain.
- 2 Three **agnibarras***** guard a volcanic vent and guide streams of lava toward nearby settlements.
- 3 A **fellforged*** guards a forgotten dwarven arcane forge in the caves east of Aerdvall.





- 3 In an Umbuso ruin, two **ramag*** hide from a patrolling **dread walker excavator****.
- 4 A **nkosi pridelord*** and six **nkosi*** ambush anyone who approaches the Abandoned Lands' border.
- 5 A **degenerate titan*** protects an unconscious companion from the **monolith champion*** they awakened.
- 6 A shapechanged druid in elephant form cries for help as he flees four **ngobou***.
- 7 A newly freed **ancient titan***, succumbing to madness, rampages toward the nearest village.
- 8 With a bellow of fury, a **tricenatorus**** charges across the grasslands at the nearest foe.

- 4 A **trollkin shaman*****, with a **trollkin reaver*** and a **trollkin grunt*****, seeks fresh eyes for a ritual.
- 5 Three **spellhounds**** catch the scent of spellcasters and begin the hunt!
- 6 An **undead phoenix***** spreads corruption from a perch in the Dusar Kankara Mountains.
- 7 From its lair in the Mlimo Peaks, a **wind dragon*** terrorizes a nearby ramag monolith.
- 8 A cataclysmic **mountain giant***** guards an ancient Umbuso treasure said to have power untold.

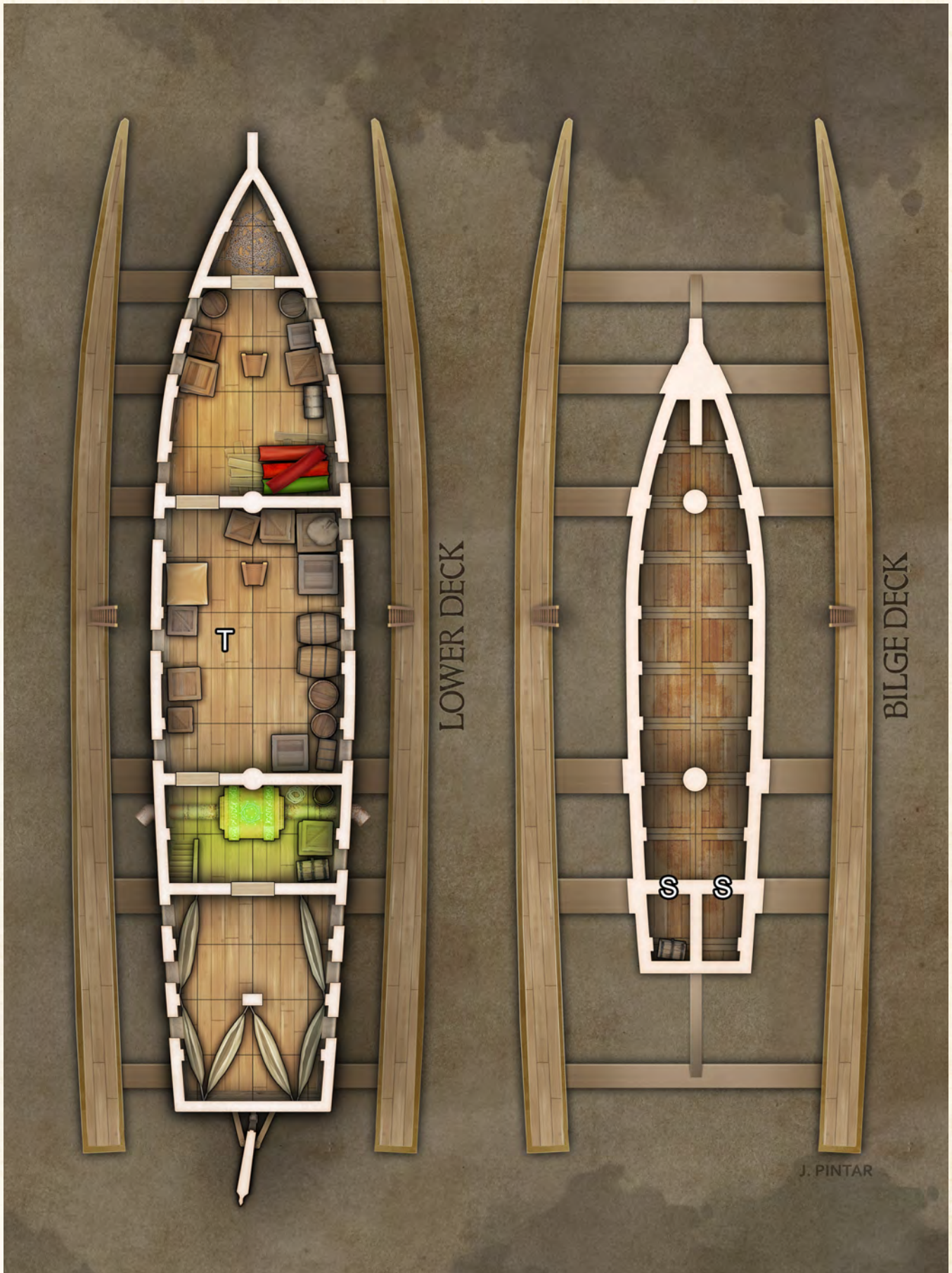
ABANDONED LANDS EVENTS

Extensive ruins punctuate the broad savannas and rolling hills of the former heartlands of Glorious Umbuso, now mostly shunned or furtively scavenged by the desperate and reckless.

- 1 A swarm of **compsognathus**** takes down a **nodosaurus***** before turning to new prey.
- 2 Three wounded **tosculi jeweled drones***** guard a cask of royal jelly recovered from trollkin raiders.







J. PINTAR

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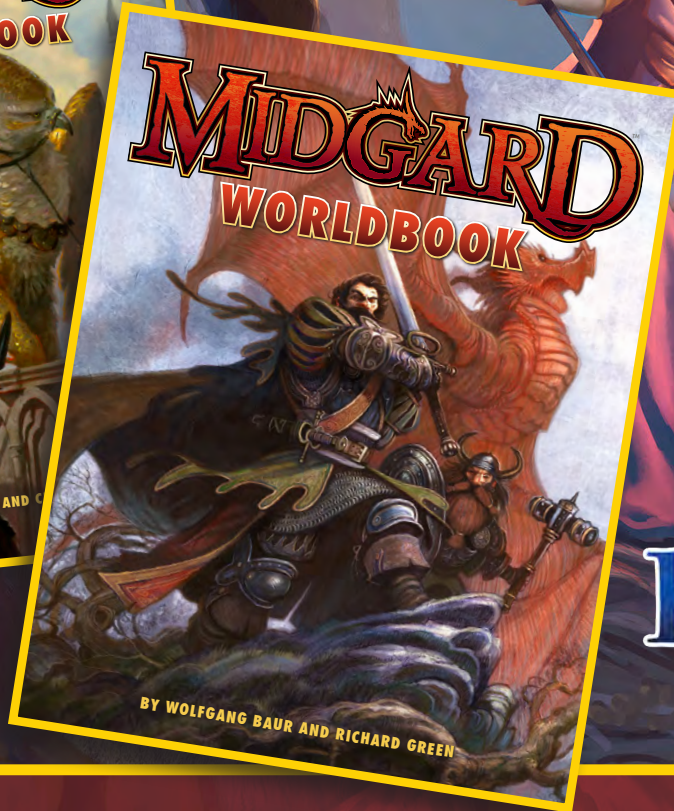
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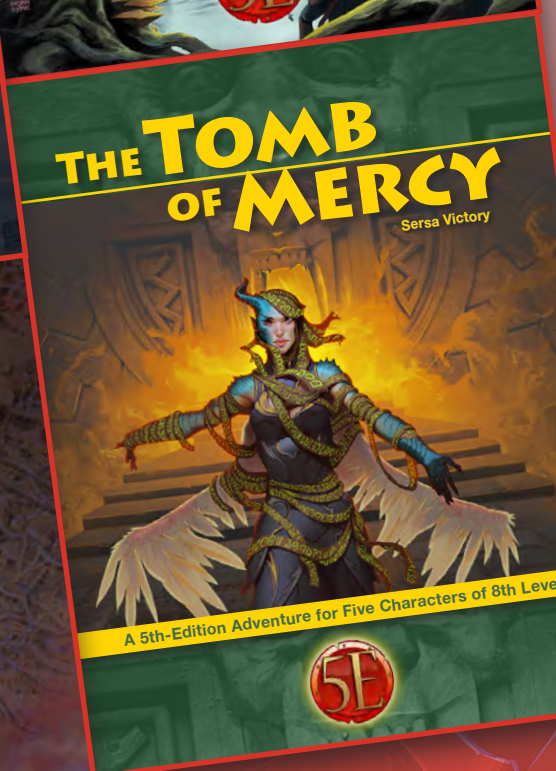
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