

HOUSES OF THE BULL GOD™



A Savage Kingdom for

EXALTED

ZUB
UB
Cn

A large, stylized, light gray bull head is centered in the background, facing forward. The bull has a thick, curved horn on the left side and a smaller one on the right. Its eyes are large and circular, and its snout is prominent. The entire background is a solid light gray color.

HOUSES OF THE BULL GOD™

By MICHAEL KESSLER, GEOFFREY SKELLAMS, ANDREW WATT
AND VORONICA WHITNEY-ROBINSON



CREDITS

Authors: Michael Kessler, Geoffrey Skellams, Andrew Watt, Voronica Whitney-Robinson

Storyteller Game System Design: Mark Rein•Hagen

Developers: John Chambers, Geoffrey C. Grabowski

Editor: Ana Balka

Art Direction: Brian Glass

Artists: Leanne Buckley, Ross Campbell, Shane Coppage, Craig Grant, Pasi Pitkänen and UDON featuring Greg Boychuk, Noi Sackda, Chris Stevens and Jim Zubkavich

Cover Art: UDON featuring Roberto Campus and Jim Zubkavich

Cover Design: Brian Glass

Layout and Typesetting: Brian Glass

ART DIRECTOR'S SPECIAL THANKS

Gala "Best Intern evAr" Ferriere for her help with the logo design on this book and laying out the last two Exalted fiction novels, not to mention the rokkin' karaoke. Good job there.



1554 LITTON DR
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA
30083
USA

© 2004 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf and Exalted are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Houses of the Bull God, the Age of Sorrows, the Second Age of Man, Exalted the Dragon-Blooded, Exalted the Lunars, Exalted the Abyssals, Exalted the Sidereals, Exalted Players Guide, Games of Divinity,

Creatures of the Wyld, Exalted Storyteller's Companion, the Book of Three Circles, Savant and Sorcerer, Scavenger Sons, Savage Seas and Manacle and Coin are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

For a free White Wolf catalog call 1-800-454-WOLF.

Check out White Wolf online at

<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN CANADA



HOUSES OF THE BULL GOD™

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER ONE: THE LAND OF HARBORHEAD	8
CHAPTER TWO: THE IMPERIAL GARRISON	42
CHAPTER THREE: GODS, MONSTERS AND MANSES	70
APPENDIX: THE COURT OF THE ORDERLY FLAME	100





INTRODUCTION



The drama can only be brought to its climax in one of two ways — through the selective brutality of terrorism or the impartial horrors of war.

—Kenneth Kaunda, “Kaunda on Violence, pt. 2”
speaking of the situation in South Africa.

Houses of the Bull God introduces the prosperous Southern nation of Harborhead to **Exalted** games. A nation with a strong martial tradition, Harborhead has spent the past 400 years under the boot of the Scarlet Empire. Conquered by the legions of the Scarlet Empress while on the cusp of becoming a regional empire in its own right, the nation of Harborhead is a study in contradictions.

A nation of expansionist warriors, its imperial ambitions have been held in check by the Realm for centuries now. A nation whose people revile slaves as beneath contempt, it has itself been enslaved and its people turned into procurers of slave flesh to feed the insatiable appetite of the Scarlet Dynasty. A nation whose people worship Ahlat above all other gods, its native religion has come under repeated attack from proponents of the Realm’s Immaculate Philosophy.

While the Scarlet Empress ruled the Realm, the people of Harborhead, despite the occasional revolt, seemed prepared to accept their sorry lot. Having in many ways taken the place of the hereditary monarch in the minds of most Harborheadites, her continued existence as a figurehead softened the emotional impact of the situation. Also, it was her will that held the avaricious appetites of the Scarlet Dynasty in check.

With the Empress missing, however, things have gone from bad to worse in the satrapy. The local imperial government is rife with corruption and seems only to exist to siphon as much loot as possible from the already-strapped nation before civil war breaks out on the Blessed Isle. Resentment continues to grow among the native population, as imperial control grows lax and then oppressive by turns. At this point, revolt against the Realm’s corrupt regime seems inevitable.

Into this environment of unrest arrive the players' characters. It is through their efforts that Harborhead will either explode into open revolt or be brought to heel. The players' characters are in a position to establish themselves as a power to be reckoned with in the nation, either as the heroes of the revolution or the saviors of the rule of empire. Regardless, Harborhead's future is theirs to create.

USEFUL REFERENCES

Storytellers and players alike might use several of **Exalted's** prior supplements to get a better handle on the complex geopolitical web that makes up the South at large, especially **Scavenger Sons** and **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded**. The former details the other important powers of the region, including Varangia, a neighboring land that many Harborheadites long to conquer. The latter offers insight into the nature of the Realm and its attitude toward its various subject states, Harborhead included.

Also of interest to those wanting a better understanding of the forces at work behind the scenes in Harborhead are **Games of Divinity** and **Exalted: The Sidereals**. Both of these books elaborate on the political environment of favor-trading and one-upmanship that characterizes the modern Celestial Bureaucracy and provide more detail both on Heaven's five Celestial Bureaus and on the regional war gods (Ahlata included) and their mutual animosity.

In addition, **Savage Seas** and **Aspect Book: Fire** each touch upon subjects of arguably marginal import to the Harborhead satrapy. **Savage Seas** gives the details on the Realm's Fire Fleet, which patrols the waters of the South and whose ships use Kirighast's harbor to restock and rearm and whose sailors often take their leave in the capital. **Aspect Book: Fire**, on the other hand, gives readers a concise history of (and stats for) arguably the most important Dynast in Harborhead history next to the Scarlet Empress, the head of House Cathak, Cathak Cainan.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Houses of the Bull God offers players and Storytellers alike a Realm tributary on the verge of violent revolt, a far cry from the happily servile nation of An-Teng presented in **Blood and Salt**. Depending on their inclinations, the players' characters may choose to aid the natives in their struggle to throw off the shackles of imperial domination,

or they may choose to quash the seeds of rebellion before violent conflict breaks out.

The book is divided as follows:

The **Introduction** is what you're reading right now. It explains the book's contents and suggests how to best make use of the text.

Chapter One: The Land of Harborhead outlines both the geography of Harborhead and the politics of its people. Within are presented the various movers and shakers in Harborhead's native population, as well as an outline of the Cult of Ahlata and a breakdown of the nation's military strength, with special attention paid to the elite, all female Royal Guard.

Chapter Two: The Imperial Garrison reveals the heart of the Realm's presence in Harborhead, the Imperial Garrison of Kirighast. The government of the tributary, from the Imperial Satrap on down, is detailed, along with the makeup of the 47th Legion, whose presence ensures the empire's interests there remain protected.

Chapter Three: Gods, Monsters and Manses features an in-depth history of Ahlata, the Southern God of War and Cattle and patron of Harborhead, as well as write-ups of the various gods he employs and rivals he's slighted on his rise to greatness. Also presented in this chapter are the callous Lion Folk, fae scourge of the Southern savanna, and details of several of the 60 known Manses and Demesnes that dot the Southern satrapy.

Appendix: The Court of the Orderly Flame reveals the inner workings of this most famous of elemental fire courts. Formed in reaction to Swan Dragon's fall nearly 800 years ago, see how it has since flourished, becoming a Creation-wide power in its own right, without the approval of the Celestial Bureaucracy.

LEXICON

Below are a number of terms common to Harborhead and, to a lesser degree, the South as a whole.

Ahlata: The Southern god of warfare and cattle, Ahlata is also the patron god of Harborhead's *Five Peoples*.

amabosar: Each of these small, portly spirits is a rare and particularly ill-tempered type of fire elemental that tends to cause strife wherever it goes.

Borosintaba: Literally translating as "the Bull's Mountain," it is the high point on and around which the Harborhead capital, Kirighast, is built. At its highest point lies *the Fane of the Upswept Horns*.

bride of Ahlata: A Harborhead native who has dedicated her life to Ahlata's service and, quite literally, married the god. Ahlata's brides are the nation's fiercest fighters, striking fear into the hearts of Harborhead's enemies — and its own warriors. *The Royal Guard* is exclusively composed of brides of Ahlata.

Court of the Orderly Flame, the: The largest fire court in Creation, the Court of the Orderly Flame was

founded as an ambitious project to unite the world's fire courts but has been hampered since its inception by myriad enemies ranging from Heavenly bureaucrats to princes of the Fair Folk.

Cult of Ahlat, the: The central religion of Harborhead. Its adherence is seen as heresy by followers of the Immaculate faith, who work to curb its popularity among the native population.

Drums of the Leopard Seat, the: The Drums are an advisory council to the *Leopard Seat* consisting of members from Harborhead's most influential noble families.

Fane of the Upswept Horns, the: The Fane is the most influential temple of the *Cult of Ahlat* in Harborhead, located in Kirighast at the summit of *Borosintaba*.

Five Peoples, the: These are the five super-tribes into which the native population of Harborhead is divided. They are the Brakani, the Izhalvi, the Krantiri, the Shayanti and the Totikari.

Five Trophies of the South, the: These are five rare and dangerous creatures native to the South that are often hunted by Dragon-Bloods as proof of their martial prowess. The creatures are the abacasteri, the desert basilisc, the furnace rhino, the simhata and the *Lion Folk*.

flame duck: The flame duck is a spirited type of fire elemental known both for its feathered beauty and its skill in battle.

Guardswoman: A member of Harborhead's all-female *Royal Guard*.

Harborheadite: An native inhabitant of Harborhead.

hecatomb, the: The hecatomb is a sacred ceremony of the *Cult of Ahlat* during which 100 head of cattle are sacrificed to the Bull God.

Inkosintaba: Literally translating as "the King's Mountain," it is the high point on and around which the Imperial Garrison of Harborhead is constructed. At its summit lies the Imperial Satrap's Palace.

Ishadhi, the: A mysterious messianic figure of the *Harborheadites* who is thought by many natives to be destined to drive the forces of the Realm from Harborhead, freeing the *Five Peoples* from the yoke of imperial domination once and for all. The Immaculate Order considers the capture or killing of this individual and the disbanding of his growing army to be of the highest priority.

kraal: A pen for cattle.

Leopard Seat, the: This is both the name of the literal throne of Harborhead's ruler and the term for the ruler himself. The ruler is also simply referred to as the Leopard or the Seat.

Lesser Drums, the: Much as the *Drums of the Leopard Seat* advise Harborhead's ruler, the Lesser Drums serve as

advisors to the chieftains of the country's myriad tribes and form the backbone of Harborhead's military, bureaucracy and judiciary, with its members operating as officers, magistrates and judges throughout the country.

Lion Folk, the: These are the predatory lion-bodied Fair Folk that hunt the Southern savannas. During the day, they lazily roam their territories in lion form, seeking to learn the names of potential victims. Then, at night, they take lionlike humanoid form and call victims from their villages to hunt them across the *veldt*.

Lionhead Academy, the: Located in the heart of the Imperial Garrison, this 30-acre estate houses one of the finest primary schools in Creation. Each year, its graduates prove to be some of the best-educated young people the Scarlet Dynasty has to offer. However, despite its success, the academy is still viewed as a second-rate institution by the Dynasts of the Blessed Isle.

llamma-yu: A llamma-yu is a fire elemental that appears like a great flaming eye. Llammu-yu are only moderately intelligent and, if left to their own devices, can wreak great destruction.

Palace of the Golden Sahel, the: This is *Ahlat's* palatial estate in the Celestial City of Yu-Shan. Here, the god and his *war aurochs* dwell in splendor that is outrageous even by the standards of Heaven.

Pyric Minister: The highest-ranking member of the *Court of the Orderly Flame* in a given settlement.

Rain Princes, the: A coalition of nine Fair Folk that ran a precipitation-based protection racket in the First Age and later led an army of Fair Folk to invade the South during the Great Contagion.

Royal Guard, the: An elite military unit consisting of *brides of Ahlat* that is dedicated to the protection of the *Leopard Seat*.

Sacrifice War, the: A two-year-long native rebellion beginning in RY 686 that was instigated by a talon of imperial troops' interruption of a sacrifice of 100 Varangian by the Desert Pumas tribe. The conflict was marked by tremendous atrocities intended to break the rebels' resolve, including the utter annihilation of the Desert Pumas.

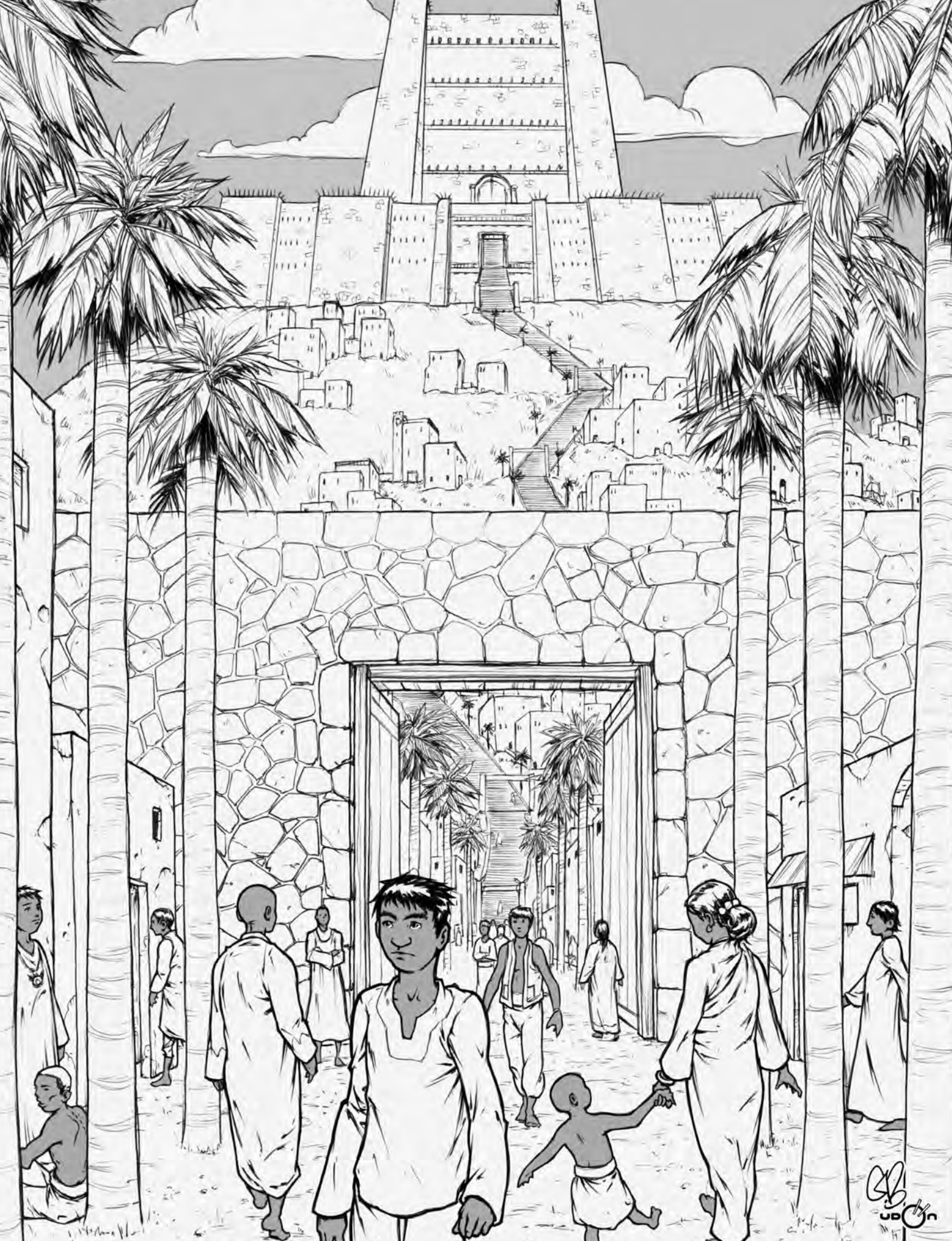
sahel, the: The coastal plain of Harborhead.


tauroboleum, the: The tauroboleum is a ritual bath taken in the blood of the 100 cattle slaughtered for the *hecatomb*.

veldt: The open, grass-covered plains common to the Southeast, often with bushes but featuring very few trees.

war aurochs: These are the spirit-bull servants and warriors of the god *Ahlat*.







CHAPTER ONE
THE LAND OF
HARBORHEAD



Stretching along a 1,400-mile-long seacoast and extending the fingertips of its control almost two thousand miles into the interior, the Satrapy of Harborhead is geographically diverse, politically fractious and ethnically troubled. Five nationalities have vied for control of the region for centuries. Three major cities — Kirighast, Tiraktou and Bent Creek — represent new economic and cultural islands in a sea of tumultuous tribal divisions and rivalries. The whole territory hums with new energy and vibrancy, but deep hatreds and crosscurrents of poverty threaten to pull the whole country into misery and catastrophe. The gulf between rich and poor widens, and the line between free person and slave blurs. Nearly everyone recognizes that the Realm, which has guaranteed stability and order for 400 years, will not stay forever. Harborhead has not yet decided whether to become a rising new power in Creation or to fall into anarchy and civil war.

THE FIVE PEOPLES

Though foreigners rarely make distinctions between the various citizens of Harborhead, few of the citizens themselves fail to acknowledge these differences. The Harborheadites all consider their allegiance to be with one of five nationalities, or Peoples. The Five Peoples shape the politics and culture of Harborhead more than any other factor, and the different Peoples define themselves at least as much by who they are not as who they are.

Raiding and ethnic strife between the Peoples is rampant. Often, the causes for an individual raid date back years or decades. The Peoples pride themselves on their military prowess in small units, which are often little more than bandit gangs stealing cattle. From time to time, commanders in the army manage to bring whole companies or brigades of soldiers into the fray, and then, massacre and atrocity become common as dung beetles in a kraal.

At the core of the strife between the various Peoples are two critical factors. First is their common devotion to Ahlat and the necessity of sacrificing large numbers of cattle on a regular basis to the Southern God of War and Cattle. While the reasons for these sacrifices have faded from mortal awareness (largely as a result of Ahlat's own connivance), the necessity of perpetuating them lingers. As a result, monthly cattle butcheries spring up in which tribes kill each other's cows. It is better, after all, to slay another tribe's cows and live, than to kill one's own and starve.

The second critical factor is that the Peoples are not geographically separated. Villages belonging to a tribe of one People are often within walking distance of the tribes of all the other Peoples. While each People does have a preferred region within Harborhead's loose boundaries, the water needs of cattle and mortals require the mixing of the tribes of each People. These close relationships result in some intermarriage and harmonious dealing, but far

more suspicion and dangerous tension. Though the major cities of Harborhead are integrated, the minor cities and market towns are often segregated into neighborhoods of tribal affiliations and Peoples.

Each of the Peoples may be regarded as a super-tribe, an agglomeration of smaller tribes united by common ancestors, stories, songs, drum rhythms and small gods. The Brakhani, the smallest of the Peoples, have over 300 smaller tribes gathered under their banner, each of which has its own tutelary spirit, its own ancestral heroes and its own music. Though the whole of Harborhead speaks one language, there are multiple dialects, and the music and tales of one People are rarely appreciated by another.

THE BRAKHANI

The Brakhani are the smallest People by population and live mostly in the wooded hills in the back country of Harborhead. Their way of life is based mostly on cattle herding and growing wheat and cotton. They also raise oranges, bananas, cacao and other fruits in groves on long terraces that follow the curves of the terrain. The terraces around their villages and towns are squeezed between the Totikari and the Krantiri, who see the Brakhani as the most suitable target for aggression, for slave taking and for cattle raiding.

The Brakhani have skin like dark chocolate and curly black hair that they let grow wild to about shoulder length. They have a reputation as bead-makers and love to wear bracelets, necklaces, anklets and headpieces decorated with their wares. They use the more valuable beads as money for minor purchases, which they find more convenient than using silver or jade. The Brakhani women weave long caftans of bright cloth for the tribe members to wear, but only the Brakhani men weave the strips of brocade that adorn their clothes and caps.

Regarding bravery as the most important value in their culture, the Brakhani send their young people out during a rite of passage to face various wild animals in single combat with only a long knife. Each young person is expected to hunt down a dangerous creature in the area — a hyena, a jackal, a leopard or similar predator — and face it in single combat. Not everyone is successful, but many are. These victorious youths are expected to assume leadership positions among their tribes and People, and each often wears a claw or a set of the teeth from the kill around his neck. The stories of these adventures become part of the personal record of a person and are often recounted again and again. Of all the Peoples, the Brakhani are often portrayed as the most independent and self-reliant.

Like the Izhalvi, the Brakhani are devotees of the Unconquered Sun. However, where the larger People place special emphasis upon the Celestial Incarna, the

Brakhani regard him as only the most important (and therefore *busiest*) divinity in their pantheon. They celebrate his major days with much pomp and ceremony, but they devote at least as much attention to the intermediate small gods who watch over their houses and fields, their hunts, their individual tribes and the graves of their ancestors. Common totems for Brakhani tribes include Vulture, Giraffe, Ibis and Lion. They also regard Ahlat as a special protector of the People and revere him at six major sacrifices spaced throughout the year, including one that lasts for the whole of Calibration.

DREAMS OF FLAME, BRAKHANI WARLEADER

Thick-set and burly, Dreams of Flame is dark for his People and even more heavily scarred than is normal. He wears a pair of bracelets made of iron beads and disdains the custom of flashy jewelry so common among his kindred. His mouth is set in an almost perpetual frown, and Dreams of Flame only smiles when he sees one of his followers alive after a battle.

Dreams of Flame is the commander of the Yellow Ridge Tower, a critical Brakhani fortress overlooking a main road. He commands a force equivalent to three talons armed with spears, oxhide shields and long knives and a much smaller force of horsemen, who act as his scouts and messengers. At the start of his tenure at the Yellow Ridge Tower 20 years ago, he saw little action and tended to remain close to his station.

In the last five years, however, Dreams of Flame has been deploying his forces farther and farther afield. Raids against Brakhani villages and towns have become more savage, with many more casualties and grave injuries. Many of these raids came from the Totikari and the Krantiri, but at least as many appear to have been perpetrated by Shayanti bandits. Rather than keep his men bottled up, Dreams of Flame began sending out more patrols and employed his light cavalry more often, keeping watch against further incursions. At the same time, he knows that his wide-ranging patrols leave the Yellow Ridge Tower and the road dangerously open, and he does not know how to protect both his People in their villages and their principal artery to the outside world at the same time. He begins to believe that an offensive against the raiders might be preferable to waiting to defend against them. Most of his soldiers agree.

The Brakhani enjoy patronage and alliance with the Izhalvi but are rivals with the Totikari and the Krantiri. These two rival tribes control much of the territory on the frontiers of Brakhani holdings, and as a result, the Brakhani are often targeted in raids by tribes from these groups. The Brakhani are proud and rarely call on the Izhalvi for aid unless renegade units from the army of Harborhead become involved or paramilitary groups more organized than the average bandits appear. Then, the Brakhani use their considerable prestige to demand help from their allies.

THE IZHALVI

The Izhalvi are the largest of the Peoples but also the most geographically scattered and the least organized. As such, they are often targeted for cattle raids and punitive attacks by the other Peoples. Their widely scattered communities serve as tempting targets. Some elders among the other Peoples have discouraged this practice, but many others encourage it. The Izhalvi have much wealth, control much land and have many possessions, but they are politically disenfranchised. Only one Izhalvi tribe is eligible to have its family become the Leopard of Harborhead, and no Izhalvi has held the office in 200 years.

The Izhalvi are native to the wooded uplands of Harborhead, and they have skin the color of creamy coffee and a distinctive slant to their almond eyes. Their faces appear flattened to outside observers, with high foreheads. The Izhalvi often braid their long black hair into thick cords strung with beads of gold and semiprecious stone. Men tend to wear a single metal bracelet on each wrist, while women wear elaborate layers of necklaces and heavy earrings. Their men most commonly wear heavy kilts of black linen or cotton, with a wide red belt of dyed leather, while women wear layers of black robes that leave only their faces exposed. Izhalvi priests wear tall cylindrical hats of black felt adorned with small numbers of faceted white beads sewn on in the shape of the glyph of the god they serve.

The Izhalvi claim to be the descendants of the Unconquered Sun and Gaia, and in their mountain villages and towns are numerous rock-cut temples to these two Celestial Incarnae. Primarily farmers rather than herders, the Izhalvi are notably less dominated by the Cult of Ahlat, and they tend to view him more as a cattle spirit than as a god of war. When performing rituals or celebrating, the Izhalvi perform long and elaborate dances around fires to the rhythms of drums and wordless song, and they make music that echoes off the rocks and the mountains.

The primary cultural imperative among this People is respect for one's elders. As an Izhalvi grows older, her black hair whitens, and she expects obedience from those who are younger than her. In a similar fashion, she seeks to obey those whose hair is more thoroughly whitened than her own. Regardless of family relationship, respect for the elderly is a critical part of Izhalvi culture, and obedience to their directives is both desired and expected. Disobedi-

ence is shocking, and the offender can expect to be called to account by anyone standing nearby who happens to witness the grievance.

The Izhalvi regard the Shayanti as occasional persecutors but seem quite philosophical about it. When one has so much, after all, others are, quite naturally, jealous. The Totikari are traditional targets for the Izhalvi raiding, largely on the strength of a humiliating military defeat of the Krantiri that occurred in RY 323 at the Fords of the Kishwa. The traditional allies of the Izhalvi are the Brakhani, with whom they share a love for the Unconquered Sun.

JADOUM, IZHALVI PRIEST OF THE UNCONQUERED SUN

Surprisingly short for a priest of the Unconquered Sun, Jadoum has animated black eyes with golden flecks and an irrepressible love of laughter and puns. His gap-toothed grin makes him look a little stupid, but a keen intellect shines behind his eyes. His jokes are always clean, for he has the honor of the Unconquered Sun to uphold, not to mention his own good name.

Jadoum is the chief priest of the Round House, one of the holiest shrines to the Unconquered Sun in Harborhead. As a prominent cleric, he regularly travels to visit other shrines in major Izhalvi communities in order to bless weddings, to celebrate the births of important children and to consecrate tribal chiefs or lay their predecessors to rest.

While quite a talker, Jadoum is also a good listener. He is able to discern what others are thinking as well as what they are saying out loud. As a result, he has some idea that the ethnic tensions among the various Peoples are rising to a fever pitch, for perhaps the first time since the Realm came to the land. On the surface, he refuses to believe that the country will erupt in civil war, but he also suspects, in his heart of hearts, that a massively violent episode is about to erupt in Harborhead. Even when he speaks with Izhalvi elders about this problem, though, he is greeted with polite silence or blank stares. Many fear that the aging patriarch is losing his mind.

THE KRANTIRI

Gathered in villages along the coastline, the Krantiri are the third largest of the tribes, but are almost as disorganized and loose as the Izhalvi. Part of this diffused political power results from the work that the Krantiri do — as fisher folk, they lack many of the intertribal bonds that unite the



other Peoples in Harborhead because their labor carries them onto the sea, where they compete directly with each other for the same types of edible fish. Fractious and dissolute, and more inclined to raid amongst each other than against other Peoples, the Krantiri look to the Shayanti traders and merchants in their midst for leadership and guidance. Often, they never suspect that the raids against them are orchestrated by their own Shayanti associates, who make use of the resulting anger and vengeance raids to further their own goals. The Krantiri are very much the clients of the Shayanti, if not their pawns.

Physically, the Krantiri tend to be short, with skin the color of shelled almonds and black, black eyes. Their hair is darker than that of most denizens of Harborhead, and they wear little personal adornment or clothing, preferring to work half-nude in the hot, humid conditions that prevail along the coast. Wealthy Krantiri adorn themselves with pearls and strings of shells to suggest their wealth comes from the sea — even if it does not. Most of the Krantiri's boats are designed for inshore work, and they do not think of themselves as an ocean-going people. Few Krantiri will spend a night out of sight of the shore where their home village stands.

The Krantiri value cleverness above all else, which makes it doubly ironic that they are so often outmaneuvered by their Shayanti allies. Their stories are full of practical jokers and tricksters, and they laugh as much at their own foibles as at the foreigners who fall for their cleverness. Sometimes, the Krantiri's enjoyment of a jest gets them in trouble. Cathak Lazera, the Commander of the Imperial Garrison, ordered an entire town massacred after a prankster loosed a troop of baboons in his encampment.

The Krantiri are also fond of dance-plays and make extensive uses of masks and giant puppets of woven grass in performances of their oral history. Their tribes revere Monkey, Dolphin, Cormorant and Osprey, among others, as their principal totems.

The Krantiri experience mild rivalries with the Izhalvi, largely at Shayanti prompting. However, their principal difficulties are with the landlocked Brakhani, who are always trying to find safer routes to the coast so they can trade their products with a wider market. Often, this means trying to supplant a Krantiri village — or at least establishing trading rights there. The Shayanti discourage this as well, wishing to maintain a lock on trade as much as they can.



PEARLESCENT SMILE, KRANTIRI PERFORMER

Pearlescent Smile's youth was spent as a pearl diver on the coast, and he still has the narrow waist and huge chest so common to that profession. Even at his advanced age, he retains bright, straight teeth that seem to sparkle in the hot Southern sun, and he has a mischievous smile that makes his visitors check that their purses are still clipped on their belts.

Pearlescent Smile gave up pearl diving in his late 20s after a diving accident and chose storytelling as his new profession. His flexible body is well-suited to the antics of the profession, and he leaps about, gyrating and laughing, as he tells stories of Krantiri heroes. His manager, a fat Shayanti circus maestro named Drabidis,

often helps him to choose stories. Of late, Pearlescent Smile's performances have detailed a series of Krantiri victories over Izharvi oppressors, and the nature of the Krantiri pranks have become a little crueler than those in the traditional versions of these old tales.

Pearlescent Smile loves the applause and rewards that come from his performances. He loves telling stories of Krantiri heroes, and he doesn't much care that his scripts are ethnically biased, even grossly prejudiced, against the Izharvi. He knows that his performances stir up hatred and resentment, but so long as he is paid and gets out of town before the violence starts, he pretends that it doesn't involve him at all.

THE SHAYANTI

The Shayanti are, at present, the most politically powerful of the Peoples, though they are the fourth largest by population. In cities and towns across the satrapy, the mayors and city councilors belong to the Shayanti People.

Many of the wealthiest denizens of Harborhead belong to this People and have the closest relationships with the imperial leadership or with the Guild. The Shayanti maintain close contacts with each other over wide regions, communicating by messenger, letter and, sometimes, sorcery. Not only do the Shayanti work to be the principal



players in Harborhead's relationship with the Realm, but they also maintain most of the permanent links with the Guild and use their widespread contacts to be the primary middlemen for all trade in Harborhead.

Physically, the Shayanti are tall, with skin the color of mahogany. Their long noses are often hooked, and their dark hair forms a closely curled cap upon their skulls. Males and females alike wear earrings of bronze, silver or gold, according to their economic status, and scar their cheeks and shoulders with tribal markings of lines and dots. The bridge of the nose is sometimes pierced, as well, and filled with a plug of dyed ivory or ebony. Red and black are popular colors among the Shayanti. The elders of the Shayanti also wear orange turbans wrapped around steel caps with a single spike rising from the crown of the head. Their priests have a symbol tattooed upon their chins of three white horizontal lines with three dots between the top and second line and another tattoo upon the right cheek of the symbol of the god they serve.

The Shayanti claim descent from Shaya, a great warrior from the age of the Dragon Kings. Their principal epic is performed frequently throughout the year, especially at the dark of the moon, and tells how Shaya led his people out of the desert to settle in the coastlands of Harborhead. Many children can quote long passages from the epic and wandering storytellers will recount the whole tale over four nights for a Resources • payment. The warrior-poets of the Shayanti are a terror on the byways of Harborhead — it is a happy custom of these bandits to slay their foes and, then, to insult the dead with scornful poetry.

The Shayanti believe that family is the first and most important responsibility of any person among the People. Foreign visitors to Shayanti villages must be adopted into a family, so that they are properly joined to the web of kinship, though these relationships are more likely to be described as “third cousin of my sister's son” than “my brother.” Each relationship, out to seventh cousins and up to three removals, has specific responsibilities and inheritance rights in Shayanti custom, and they are often reluctant to admit someone too closely into these relationships. Not only does a family member share in inheritances, after all, but in the duty to avenge insults and murder against other family members.

Each Shayanti tribe not only worships Ahlat, but also a pantheon of minor divinities and heroic ancestors. A Shayanti village or neighborhood always contains a shrine built alongside the main temple to the Lord of Battles where these small gods are acknowledged and worshiped. Common tribal tutelary spirits are aspects of Spider, Hummingbird, Ant and Zebra, and Shayanti hunters often claim to be the chosen of Leopard.

The Shayanti regard the Totikari and the Izhalti as their principal rivals among the peoples. The Krantiri, a coastal people, are their traditional allies.

SPARKLING IRIS, SHAYANTI MERCHANT

Tall and graceful, Sparkling Iris has a beautiful smile and wide, elegant lips. Her cheeks are marked with a series of fine dark scars that make her more desirable to Shayanti observers. Foreigners are often a little put off by her fierce appearance.

Sparkling Iris is a dealer in cloth, beads and precious stones, and her shop is thought to be one of the finest places to buy high-quality rugs and wall hangings. She is on the road for most of the spring and early summer, buying and selling wares and renewing her stock. In the winter, she stays closer to her home in Tiraktou and deals with anyone who can afford her high prices.

As a traveler, Sparkling Iris carries messages for her Shayanti kin all over Harborhead, and for a fee, she will carry the letters and goods of others. She is scrupulous about delivering messages but uses a number of sorcerous skills she has to read the messages of non-Shayanti undetected. Any useful information she collects is then passed on to elders in her own family and, thence, to the rest of her People.

Sparkling Iris is charming and polite, but she harbors a deep hatred for the Izhalti and their fellow clients, the Brakhani. In too many business deals with them, she feels she came out the worse. In private, with other Shayanti only, she will express a desire to see their kind wiped from the face of Creation.

THE TOTIKARI

The second largest of Harborhead's Five Peoples, and occupying most of the southern and eastern parts of Harborhead, the Totikari inhabit the edges of the jungles in the Summer Mountains and much of the dry plains to the south of those Mountains. More definitively nomadic than the other Peoples, most Totikari journey hundreds of miles every year, often to the same watering hole in the same month, year after year and decade after decade. More insular than the other Peoples, the Totikari have no natural allies among the others, but their way of life brings them into conflict with both the Izhalti, who would like to turn the Totikari's ranging grounds into cattle ranches, and the Shayanti, who would like to collect taxes and trade more reliably with a settled populace.

The Totikari are of medium height and medium build, with black shiny skin like polished ebony. Well built and well proportioned, they are lean and muscular — and famous throughout the South as runners and trackers. “Rare as a fat Totikari” goes the saying, and their lives are proverbially hard in their long journeys across

their territories. Wearing little besides loincloths and heavy belts on their waists, the men use spear-throwers to hurl their savage weapons double the normal range. The women wear layers of cinnabar beads carved with the thousand names of Ahlat and hunt apostate Royal Guardswomen for sport. The most independent of Realm control, this People would not be considered part of Harborhead at all but for the fact that they love war almost as much as the rest of Peoples and that they consider Ahlat's Fane in Kirighast to be a place of holy pilgrimage to which each of them must travel at least once in their lifetimes. Tribal totems for the Totikari include Elephant, Snake, Gazelle and Cheetah.

The Totikari regard generosity as the most important cultural value among their kindred. Any member of the People will gladly give a visitor anything that might be asked for — a daughter to marry, a slave, a gold bracelet, a baby lion — if some other gift is offered in turn. They hate to pay taxes but will gladly give a tax collector double what is needed if it is asked for in the right way and there is at least some semblance of a return for their gift.

The Izhalvi regard the Totikari with little more than contempt for their nomadic ways and covet the wide-open spaces of their territory, which could fatten many herds of Izhalvi cattle. The Shayanti are frustrated that there are few towns where they can set up trading outposts and that the Totikari are difficult employees, making mining, cattle ranching and farming marginal moneymaking opportunities, at best. The Totikari regard the settled Peoples as weaker and more sedentary, and they take slaves and cattle with impunity from communities whose locations they have known for generations.

ZEBRA'S SWIFTNESS, TOTIKARI SAFARI SCOUT

Zebra's Swiftness is lean and well-built like all of her People, and when she smiles, her teeth are startlingly white. With more than 10,000 animal kills to her credit, Shayanti safari outfitters and foreigners who have heard of her reputation often seek out the young woman as a native guide. On several occasions, she has been an honored guest of the Satrap and the Leopard Seat, where she regaled ignorant visitors with tales of daring and survival in the Far South. Following these affairs, she came home burdened with many presents, which she promptly shared with her family and friends. As a result, she is widely regarded as a sterling example of the honor of the Totikari, and her opinion is sought on many issues.

It is easy for outsiders to dismiss Zebra's Swiftness as an ignorant savage, even when she is seated in her ebon splendor in the dining pavilion of the Leopard or the Satrap. Therefore, she has heard and remembered many things of what passes for politics in the more civilized regions of Harborhead. Of late, the rising ethnic tensions have interested her deeply. Her advice to the Totikari elders is simple — why should the Shayanti, the Izhalvi, the Brakhani or the Krantiri have all the green lands? Let the Totikari raise armies and militias of their own and take whatever they want from the soft green places! She has helped to form over 40 bands of raiders, many of them led by colleagues in the business of scouting for Realm big-game hunters. Now, she and her People are scouting for themselves, targeting the rest of Harborhead rather than their Varangian neighbors as the government would like to believe.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS (ARRANGED BY PEOPLE)

Brakhani: Bead-Maker, Fruit-Tree Tender, Weaver, Priest of the Unconquered Sun, Tribal Shaman, Sorcerer, Porter, Knife-Maker, Hunter, Native Guide, Tanner, Mason, Professional Duelist, Army Recruit, Slave

Izhalvi: Priest of the Unconquered Sun, Stone Carver, Ironworker, Brickmaker, Tribal Elder, Farmer, Ranch Owner, Ranch Hand, Army Recruit, Bandit, Slave

Krantiri: Boatbuilder, Crabber, Fisherman, Mussel-Digger, Pearl Diver, Storyteller, Pirate, Jokester, Prankster, Sailmaker, Oar-Maker, Beachcomber, Roper, Chandler, Sailor, Captain, Ship's Officer, Slave

Shayanti: Slave Trader, Priest of Ahlat, Royal Guardswoman, Trader, Guild Intermediary, Mayor, Town Councilor, Official of Harborhead, Bureaucrat, Publican, Innkeeper, Harbormaster, Army Officer, Farmer, Cattle Ranch Owner, Cattle Ranch Hand, Safari Outfitter, Money Changer, Realm Tribute Collector, Tribal Elder, Potter, Goldsmith, Traveling Warrior-Poet, Silversmith, Tribal Totem Shaman, Sorcerer, Scholar, Con-Artist, Slave

Totikari: Shaman, Distance-Runner, Native Guide, Scout, Outrider, Raider, Gatherer, Hunter, Tracker, Slave

FOUR REGIONS

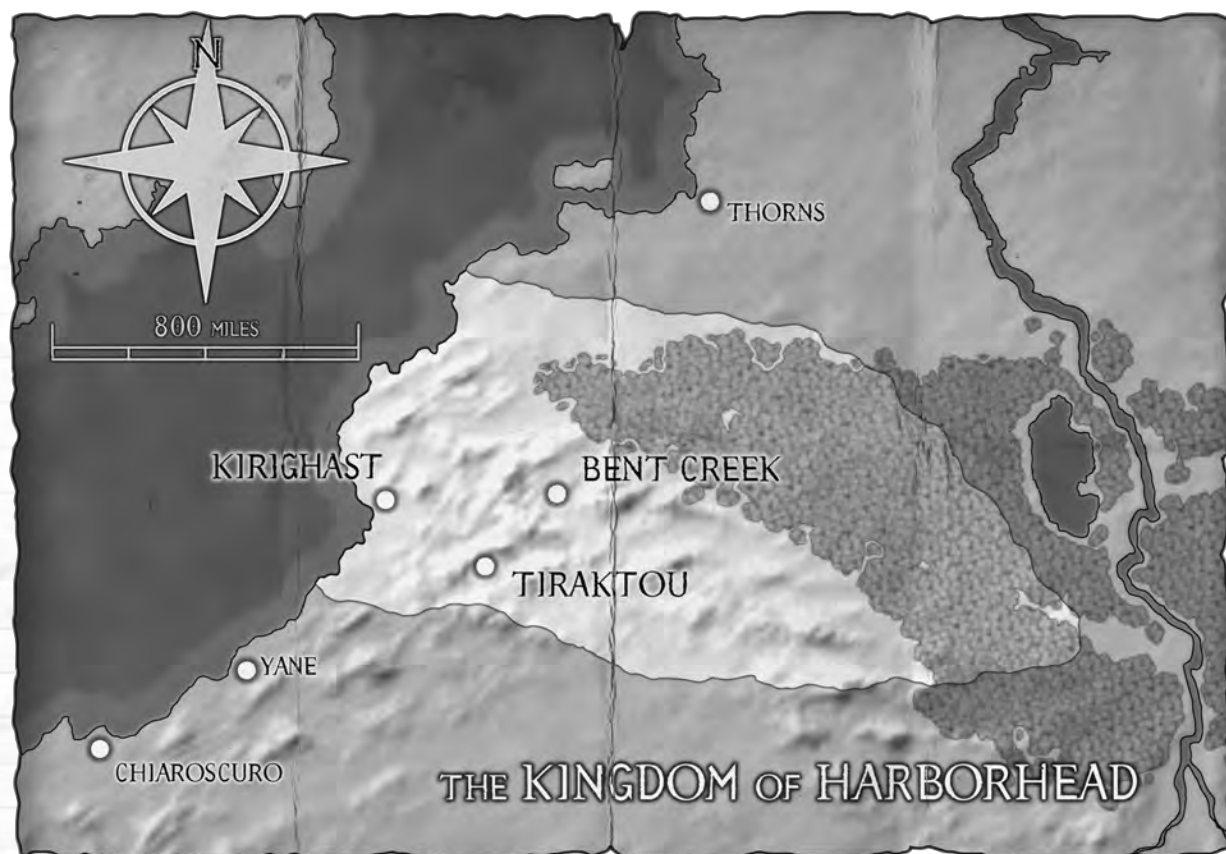
Relations among the Five Peoples become more complex because the satrapy has only a relatively small area for its 12 million people to live. Moreover, the whole territory of Harborhead is divided into four major geographical regions — the coastlands, the dry plains of the deep interior, the wooded foothills of the Summer Mountains and the rainforest highlands in the deep vales of the Summer Mountains themselves. The Peoples of Harborhead have been moving between these regions for centuries. Each tribe has adopted some customs relative to where they live, while retaining their allegiances to the People to which they belong and the traditional ways of their kin. The results are a tangled web of rivalries and alliances — Shayanti nomads and Totikari sailors, Krantiri caravan masters and Izhalvi sorcerers. From one perspective, the country looks confused. From another angle, it looks deceptively integrated.

The coastlands of Harborhead are composed of a strip of land between the sea and the first high hills, often between 40 and 150 miles wide. The actual seacoast is varied, with numerous rocks and small islands lying just off the coast, long flat beaches between rocky headlands, coral reefs and sheltered bays. High cliffs south and west of Kirighast receive the thunderous surf stoically, and huge water-filled caves dot the long coastline. Here, villages built of white stone cling to the steep cliffs, and piles of rocks extend out to form artificial harbors. North and west

of Kirighast, numerous small rivers and estuaries have created a long but narrow marshy region, where the Krantiri build their houses and boats from bundles of tall grasses. Deep-water ports in this region are few and far between and must be regularly dredged.

Further inland, the countryside is dotted with small and relatively tame woods interspersed with green fields and cattle ranches. Numerous villages and market towns dot the land. Even here, though, where rain is relatively frequent, the deciding factor of where to build a village or town is the proximity of a suitable source of clean water. The influence of the Elemental Pole of Fire occasionally taints wells with the taste of sulfur or smoke, even this far north. The pole's taint can persist for months, or even years, requiring sedentary populations to pack up and move suddenly. Due to the coastlands' lack of potable water, there are vast uninhabited stretches where there are virtually no towns, though the countryside seems quite suitable for grazing or farming.

There are also numerous mining operations in the coastlands. Close to the sea, there are rich veins of copper, silver, gold, tin and iron. And since transportation is less difficult, these veins are more heavily worked than those in the heartland. Plumes of smoke rise from smelters and foundries, and bronze is used as much for sculpture and cookware as iron is in this region. Many of the statues in the village shrines are of high-quality bronze, and almost every free person except the poorest is armed with an iron-tipped spear and a bronze knife at the very least.



All the same, there is considerable poverty in the coastlands. Most of the land belongs not to the farmers, but to great estates owned by wealthy Shayanti or Izhalvi families or by great men and women of the Realm. Many of the free people here work for nominal salaries, but the number of slaves working these vast ranches and plantations is increasing, and there are more refugees on the move in the coastlands these days. Moreover, Shayanti publicans assess taxes for the satrapy and the Realm most heavily in this region. These taxes are disproportionately levied on land belonging to the citizens of Harborhead and virtually not at all on properties owned by citizens of the Realm.

ADVENTURE SEED

Target Character Type: Dragon-Blooded, God-Blooded, Heroic Mortal, Solar

The numerous bays and tiny harbors scattered on the coastline make patrolling the seas extremely difficult, and numerous pirates operate out of the coastlands' many isolated places. Trade with the Realm, between East and West and even from town to town within Harborhead are all subject to occasional pirate raids. The pirates are difficult to catch, as they rarely prey on anything but lightly armed merchant vessels, and the profits from their adventures more than outweigh any risk.

One such band of pirates, the Ochre Sails, operates out of a hidden base in the marsh country north and east of Kirighast. Led by the Teleu, a little god in charge of interrupted journeys, the pirates have recently become emboldened under their divine patron to attack Guild and Realm shipping alike. Both the Guild and the Realm have found common cause against the Ochre Sails and are looking for ways to shut the pirates down and shift the portfolio of their patron. Unless the god herself is stopped or redirected, there will always be pirates in this area. The Guild in particular is looking for a more permanent solution to the problem.

THE WOODED HILLS

Above and further south from the coastlands is the rolling hill country, covered by stands of tall hardwoods and softwoods. Here, broad valleys are terraced, supporting plantations of fruit and nut trees, which themselves shade coffee and cacao trees. The villages and towns there are still built of mud-brick, but brightly colored cloths hang to dry in the windows, and there seems to be slightly more prosperity here than in the coastlands. This region is mostly inhabited by the Izhalvi and the Brakhani, and the two tribes live together in relative harmony and cooperation, at least for the moment. Both Peoples recognize that they need each other to harvest the trees and to bring their produce to

market. However, each People believes (all evidence to the contrary) that they have specific, legitimate and historic rights to the land currently occupied by the other People.

Water remains as much of a problem in this region as it does in the coastlands. The fruit and nut trees have insatiable demands, and given that most of these trees are on the estates of the wealthy, the orchards and groves have their water needs met with elaborate aqueducts and cisterns. Such systems are usually built to the disadvantage of the common people and less-prosperous farms. This just increases resentment against the Realm and other absentee landlords.

The hill towns of Harborhead all follow a general plan. A shrine of glazed brick tops the hill or sits high on the shoulder, surrounded by a temnos wall defining the sacred precinct. This precinct usually contains a porch for avoiding the worst of the midday sun and an altar for animal sacrifices, which are usually offered monthly. The temple itself usually contains two chambers: an inner room featuring a cult statue of Ahlat or the Unconquered Sun and an outer room with an altar for incense offerings. Beyond the sacred precinct, a sloped or stepped plaza is set below the entrance to the shrine, facing east so that it gets the good early morning sun and is in shadow by late afternoon. A main road lined with shops and the houses of prominent citizens snakes down from the plaza to the main gate. Numerous side alleys, where less dignified citizens dwell, open off this main street.

ADVENTURE SEED

Target Character Type: Dragon-Blooded, Heroic Mortal, Solar

The 40-foot-high golden statue of the Unconquered Sun in the Brakhani town of White Hill has been regarded as one of the cultural landmarks of the hinterland, and one worthy of a special visit, for hundreds of years. That the caretakers of the shrine subscribe to the tenets of the Immaculate Order only makes the rock-cut temple more popular with visitors in the Realm.

Now, the statue has gone missing, taken from a stone building without a single door large enough to allow for the object's removal. Sorcery and Charms reveal no clear clues as to what happened. The Brakhani citizens of White Hill are outraged and furious, blindly accusing anyone they feel had the motive and opportunity. Several Shayanti merchants in the area have been lynched, leading to protests and vengeance killings against lone Brakhani. Even Cathak Ferro, a Dragon-Blooded commander in the legions of the Realm, is not above suspicion. The gentleman came into possession of a large sum of money of uncertain provenance not long after the statue went missing. The Brakhani community has offered a substantial reward for the idol's return. In the meantime, violence around the now-empty shrine continues to escalate.



THE DRY PLAINS

Gradually, the woods on the hills become sparser, the countryside flattens and the clustered villages spread out into the more open fields and sporadic forests of the veldt. Other than the capital, no place in Harborhead has a greater concentration of indigenous people, even with those folk spread across the savanna. It is in the open, golden-green fields that life continues much as it did before the Empress formally recognized the nation nearly four centuries ago, with little sign of what visitors from the Realm would call formal civilization.

The dry plains are the open savannas of Harborhead. Nowhere else in the kingdom is the land more obviously affected by the weather patterns than here. In the weeks after the rainy season, the veldt is an emerald green, and animals and people alike enjoy a few weeks of abundance and rebirth. During this time, the various species whelp their pups, cubs and babies, so that they can grow and build up their strength for the approaching dry season, when only the strongest survive.

Crops, such as cassava and tobacco, which were planted at the end of the dry season, begin to sprout, and there is a sense of renewal to the land. From the coffee trees to the sugar cane, everything is in bloom. Water is abundant, and there is the least amount of competition amongst the wildlife of the veldt.

Further south, life in the almost desert-like sahel is slightly different. Here, tribes rely more heavily on cattle for subsistence and, because of the nature of where they choose to live, spend almost no time on crops. More nomadic than their veldt cousins, they also spend less time on warring against their neighbors. It is not because these tribes are less warlike than those to the north, but due to simple odds. Being almost constantly on the move, they rarely run into others. However, when someone discovers a good source of water and sinks a well, it can become a point of contention and a piece of real estate more than one tribe would want control over.

In the wet season, the Totikari nomads remain semi-stationary. Kraals spring up and take root in traditional spots, where acacia trees can be harvested to form fences of thorny branches and where mud or abundant cattle dung may be gathered for building huts. Customarily, huts are built in groups of four or five within an acacia fence: One hut accommodates the principal husband and wife pair, one is for the unmarried girls, one is for secondary couples, and finally, one or two huts near the kraal's gate house the unmarried male youths. Another area within the kraal is cordoned off for the cattle to use at night. Two to six family groups typically share a kraal. It is also typical for more families to share a kraal if there is sufficient water. The huts are made from mud or dung and grass, with thatched roofs. Occasionally, if a herder was fortunate

enough to find some, there might be one or two roofs of rusted, corrugated metal that wink in the sunlight, but these are rare in the veldt. Typically, families will sleep together in one hut and share a community hut for cooking and drying food.

The veldt is dotted with these kraals during the wet season. The grazing is good, and there is no need for the cattle to range too far to eat well. However, hanging like a dark cloud on the horizon is the absolute knowledge that the "green time," as the Totikari refer to this season, will come to an end. So, during this season, every member of the kraal works together to harvest and squirrel away as much of the temporarily abundant supplies as possible. Crops are harvested, and there are many forays made to hunt the animals while they are fat and sated. The cookhouses' fires burn through the night as the women smoke the meat to preserve it for later in the year. But the "green time" only lasts for a few short months. Then, it is time to goad the cattle into moving, and the nomads set out on long journeys in search of grass and water, often leaving the land looking stripped and bare behind them.

ADVENTURE SEED

Target Character Type: Dragon-Blooded, God-Blooded, Heroic Mortal, Solar

The Waterhole of the Elephant has been a popular destination for safaris of imperial citizens for more than 100 years. Located only two weeks' walk south of the city of Kirighast, it is conveniently sited for busy personnel to go on a short adventure and return home again without being too far from any of the decision-making processes.

However, the presence of so many hunters, so often, puts enormous pressure on both the water supply and the supply of animals worth hunting. The constant presence of humans is pushing away many of the herds of large beasts, and in turn, the predators are going elsewhere. The large safari parties are using up the available water far faster than it is replenished. The Totikari tribes that depend on the Waterhole of the Elephant during the dry season are becoming desperate and are looking for ways to drive away the powerful Dragon-Blooded who visit for a few days and leave, never realizing the impact of their safaris — in dead herds, in a despoiled landscape, in a drying countryside and in an impoverished people. The nomads are proud hunters, and negotiating for the return of their waterhole is not their style. They will try violence first.

THE JUNGLE UPLANDS

In the east, the Summer Mountains rise steeply from the plains and the hills, jutting heavy knuckles of rock Heavenward. These massive pinnacles of stone act as rain-catchers, pulling moisture from the sky and drawing it down into deep valleys where it nurtures a rain forest of startling wildness and variety. The Totikari and the Brakhani, who live in close proximity to these jungles, call it the “hundred-thousand greens” for the diversity of shades that seem to appear in this forest.

The observant divide the jungle into three layers, noting that little sunlight ever reaches the thin brown soil at ground level, where elaborate ferns grow to a height of seven or eight feet. Far more light reaches the middle layer of the forest, where brilliantly petaled bromeliads and hanging vines spread broad leaves to the sky. Above even this layer is the high canopy, where birds of elaborate plumage perch among wild, colorful flowers that spread their petals six or more feet across.

Strange flora and fauna have evolved in the jungle uplands. One of the most famous types of tree, for example, is the ant tree, which has a trunk of silvery bark and laurel-shaped leaves gathered in clusters of 12. This tree has a lacy network of tunnels or tubes throughout its trunk and principal branches, which are the home of a colony of large and aggressive army ants. If the tree is attacked, or even touched, the ants swarm out of these tubes and counterattack the person or animal that dared touch their tree.

The oppressive heat and humidity of the jungle creates an inviting atmosphere for rot, mold and numerous parasites. Damp seeps into shoes and boots, which, when combined with sand or dirt, reduces feet to raw and skinless meat. Tiny worms and ticks drop from overhanging branches or burrow into exposed feet from the ground, eating their way under the skin to plant eggs or to change to their next life cycle. Buzzing gnats and mosquitoes slurp blood from unprotected flesh. Undergarments turn to rags in a day or two, rubbing sensitive places raw on long trips, and most clothing becomes moldy over the course of a week. Malaria and other diseases are rampant.

Despite the oppressive and dangerous conditions, the jungles of Harborhead do offer some significant rewards. Numerous plants from the jungle are highly useful medicinal remedies for a variety of diseases. One of the only known medicines useful against the Great Contagion’s pneumatic form, a bromeliad known as yellow boot-tongue, grows only in the middle layer of the jungle, and it cannot be cultivated in captivity, only harvested from the forest.

Numerous lesser plants can be brewed into teas or made into poultices to ease aches and pains, to aid memory or to relieve the cramps of childbirth. The interaction of the hot, moist environment with the riot of plant life also produces a number of spices and herbs useful for cooking,

from the seedpods of the fire-spice tree to the ash-colored cucumbers found growing in the high canopy.

Some cultivated species can also be grown in cleared patches in the jungle. Coffee, cacao and other shade-grown plants often do well in this environment, and there are numerous plantations cleared out from the wilderness. A number of groups of Harborheadites and imperial personnel make good livings from harvesting the riches of the jungle.

ADVENTURE SEED

Target Character Type: Dragon-Blooded, Heroic Mortal, Solar

High in the mountains, on a ledge overlooking a deep river gorge, are the ruins of a mighty city of stone, filled with half-crumbled pyramids and monolithic heads with three monkey faces. In ancient times, this city was a tribal center for the Totikari. It was abandoned during the Great Contagion, and the jungle reclaimed it. Difficult to reach and filled with many poisonous plants, animals and insects, most sane folk avoid it.

Recently, however, a team of Shayanti explorers have been systematically searching and defacing the ruins. They have come out three or four times already with weapons and armor of jade and orichalcum and artifacts left over from the First Age. The sale of these artifacts caused great excitement in Kirighast and impelled more explorers to search for more ruins. The Totikari regard these intruders as grave robbers and worse and ambush them whenever possible.

THREE CITIES

Harborhead has three major cities, the most famous of which is its capital and principal port, Kirighast. With a million and a half people dwelling here, Kirighast is one of the largest cities in the South. Here, one may experience both genteel charm and human tides of despair. Four hundred miles southeast of Kirighast is Tiraktou, a cosmopolitan and scenic caravan stop that used to be a popular tourist destination but is now a blister of increasing disloyalty against the Realm. Two hundred and fifty thousand people live in Tiraktou, and many cast their eyes northeast these days, wondering what will happen around Thorns. Four hundred miles east-southeast of Kirighast is the city of Bent Creek, a lately created boomtown of 400,000 inhabitants. Far from the coast and far from the influence of the Realm, Bent Creek is nonetheless of vital concern to the Imperial Satrap, for the jade mines here simultaneously assure his fortune and provide the rebels of Harborhead with a fragile and immovable target.



KIRIGHAST

For most of the last 300 years, Kirighast has been a city divided. Squatting on a broad peninsula, the capital of Harborhead is famous for its two steep-sided hills, the one to the north called Inkosintaba, or King's Mountain, and the one to the south known as Borosintaba, or Bull's Mountain. Inkosintaba is the center of the Imperial Garrison, and the Satrap's palace of gleaming white stone shines in the afternoon sun atop the peak. Borosintaba stands slightly lower, but it is crowned by the Fane of the Upswept Horns, the temple of Ahlat.

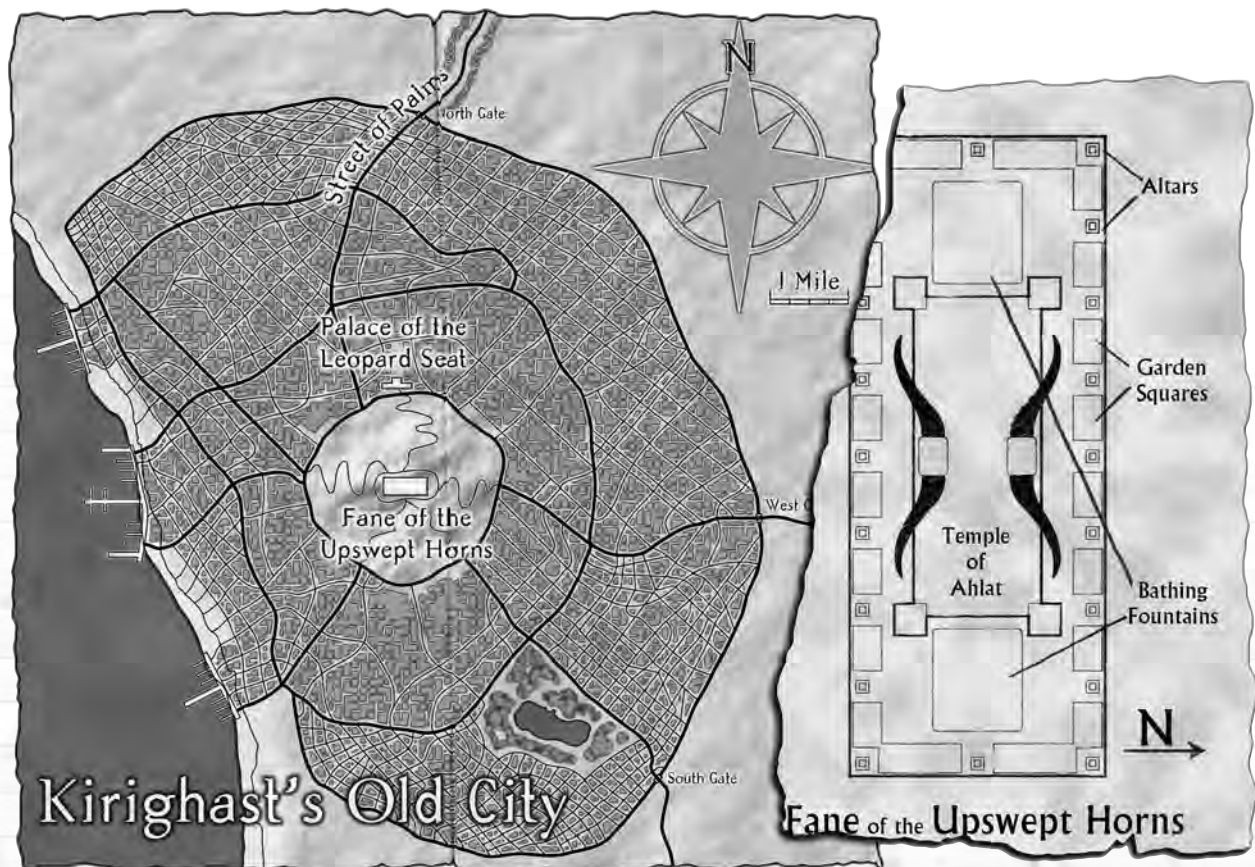
Technically, the worship of Ahlat is forbidden under the laws and guidelines of the Immaculate Philosophy, but even after 300 years, the Immaculate Order has not made a significant dent in the heretical worship of the God of War and Cattle. Kirighast itself thus epitomizes the ongoing struggle between the ideals and beliefs of the Realm and of Harborhead. The land may be subdued and pacified by imperial control, but the Realm has never ruled the hearts and minds of the people or swayed them away from their ancient gods.

Kirighast today consists of two walled compounds and a vast sea of squatters' hovels that fills much of the intervening space. Kirighast's Old City is a graceful collection of structures within walls 100 feet high, which enclose the Fane of the Upswept Horns and the Palace of

the Leopard Seat, the home of Harborhead's traditional government. The wealthy citizens have their homes here and live in stately elegance. Inkosintaba, enclosed by a wall of stone, is the home of the Imperial Garrison and the Satrap of the Scarlet Empress. The Imperial Garrison controls the deep-water port of Kirighast and also a smaller harbor for the use of the military. The two cities are each complete in every way, with their own water systems and defenses, their own policies and procedures and their own modes of living.

Almost two separate worlds, the two walled towns communicate with one another along the fashionable Street of Palms, a five-mile-long road that connects the two cities' main gates. This street is lined with a quadruple row of coconut palms on either side, with a beautifully landscaped park surrounding and setting them. The houses of wealthy Harborheadites face the Street of Palms, and a gracious market quarter spreads out from the street.

Beyond the ragged and vaguely defined edges of the Market Quarter and approaching as close as a long bowshot to the two walled cities is a maze of dirt-packed roads and alleys, all filled with a mass of humanity — thousands upon thousands of Harborheadites, hoping to find employment, an angle, a chance to feed themselves and their families.



TIRAKTOU

Four hundred miles south of Kirighast lies Tiraktou, a caravan city on the high plains with access to the most reliable water source for a good 100 miles in any direction. The city is situated on the principal trade route with the southern parts of Varangia, and as a result, it is a seething hot spot of independent thought and action. The city is a vast slave emporium, handling up to 10,000 individuals a day — men, women and children taken in raiding parties across the border or against the various Peoples of Harborhead itself. There is a thriving business in eunuchs here, as well, both the sale of them and the making of them, to watch over harems and to keep accounts.

The city consists of a large square, two miles on a side, with two principal streets running north to south and east to west. Tiraktou was a colonial establishment in the First Age, designed to house, at most, 50,000 people. Today, almost 200,000 people crowd within its walls of plastered stone. At certain times of the year, the Totikari gather in tent cities outside the walls for a trade fair that lasts most of Resplendent and Descending Water. Then, the population can swell to as much as 500,000 people.

Most of the blocks of Tiraktou's gridded streets are divided into quarters, and each of these contains one caravansary, a large house built around a courtyard that contains offices, a stable, storerooms for goods and food, guest rooms for rent and a private residence for the family who owns the caravansary. Trade is a way of life in Tiraktou, and few are not involved in supplying caravans, in guarding caravans, in leading or guiding caravans, in loading and unloading caravans or in cheating caravans.

The Guild is heavily involved with all the principal trade markets in Tiraktou, selling and buying slaves, weapons, rugs, spices, gems, metal ore and metal goods, timber, paper, jewelry, salt and even tents for nomads. The Guild has five major caravans that regard Tiraktou as a terminus for their routes and over 400 smaller ones. At least one Guild-sponsored run enters or leaves the city gates every week, and the Guild regards the city with an almost proprietary fondness.

The presence of the Guild, and all the trade, naturally leads Tiraktou to be a center for the exchange of ideas, and a lively university is springing up in the cafés and taverns on the side streets. A recent fire destroyed two city blocks, and during the rebuilding, the students and teachers acquired their first building. A whitewashed structure three stories high with ogival colonnades on three sides, the *madders* contains living quarters for six teachers and 40 students, four classrooms and a library with over 40 books. The shrine to Ahlat on the first floor, facing the Fane of the Upswept Horns in Kirighast, was not quite an afterthought. The whole building proceeds and flows from that one designed intention.

With so much money in circulation in Tiraktou, and so many ideas, the city has, in the normal course of events, become the center of intellectual resistance to the Realm's domination of Harborhead. Southern independence is the talk of the town in cafés, at dinner parties, in the bazaar and in the lines of people waiting to enter the gates.

For the moment, this breezy conversation remains just talk. The Realm has built a small garrison fort at a distance of three miles from the walls of Tiraktou, where six talons are based under the command of a Fire-aspected Dragon-Blooded officer named Cathak Lioun, a distant nephew of the Satrap. The distance from the city is supposed to prevent the populace from realizing how tightly the Realm controls it, and also to give the garrison an hour's warning in the event of an uprising. This is Lioun's first command after graduating the House of Bells, and while he puts on a brave face for his soldiers, Lioun is frankly worried about the situation. His orders are clear — to keep an eye on the Guild's operations, to prevent a full-scale invasion of Varangia and to keep southern Harborhead loyal to the Realm in deed, if not in word. While Lioun has a fairly large host, he knows that he is too far from the capital to be reinforced in the event of a serious uprising. As a result, he tends to keep his head down. His absence from social events in Tiraktou is noted, however, and only inflames rebellious talk.


BENT CREEK

Even deeper into the interior from the coast and further east is the city of Bent Creek. Largely a Realm-made, jade-hunger-driven boomtown, Bent Creek sprawls across three stream valleys in a ramshackle arrangement of houses, shops, taverns, boarding houses and brothels. The city has virtually no public buildings, nor a principal marketplace. The tawdry, lawless crowds of Creek Street serve as the judge, jury and city council, using bravado, fists and, occasionally, weapons to solve the problems of the day.

Officially, Peleps Howdarn is the chief imperial overseer at Bent Creek, but he spends much of time worrying about the physical security of his precious jade mountain. Howdarn does not have much time to concern himself with the needs of the growing population of miners, suppliers and hangers-on who have glommed onto his project. It is nearly impossible to plan and govern a city at the same time as one is running the largest mining project in the Southern Threshold.

As a result, the governance of Bent Creek has fallen largely upon Mnemon Peasa, a haughty and elegant woman exiled by the Empress in RY 634 and forbidden to return to the Blessed Isle on pain of death for conspiracy to defraud the Realm. Her involvement in the plot was minor, but it ruined her reputation. No one was willing to take her into his household or to allow her a post in the





bureaucracy, for fear of falling under the Empress' suspicions. In Bent Creek, however, where a talented Dragon-Blooded can rise far no matter what previous black marks are laid against her, Peasa has become the de facto mayor and imperial governor of the city.

Until recently, Peasa used her new post to her advantage, extorting levies on goods coming into the city and on jade leaving the city, but for once in her life, she is not spending the profits on herself. Instead, the money has gone into building an adequate water supply for the town and paving a few of the principal streets. That she has accomplished these tasks with the leavings and castoffs from the mines seems like nothing less than a miracle.

At present, some of her more recent endeavors have suffered delays and inattention. The city's opera house lies half-completed and open to the sky, as does the new city hall. Peasa's attention, like that of so many other Dragon-Blooded, is directed at the Blessed Isle and the question of succession. Her only real goal at Bent Creek was to do such a fine job that her banishment would be rescinded. At heart, she is a loyal citizen of the Realm, and she misses her old school friends and family, whom she has not seen in years or, in some cases, decades. Her haughtiness is merely a mask hiding a little girl who desperately wants to go home.

TWO CASTES

Regardless of tribe or People, the denizens of the Satrapy of Harborhead believe that they each fall into one of two castes. The first of these castes is that of the warrior. All freeborn citizens of Harborhead undergo training in weapons, from the wandering Totikari tribesman to the voluptuous Shayanti merchant in Kirighast. The right to use and carry arms is the basic birthright of every free person, and everyone who can carry weapons does so because to carry a weapon is to be identified as freeborn. By extension, carrying a weapon means that one knows how to use it. A weapon-bearer is expected to know how to defend herself and to defend her body and her honor whenever either is threatened.

And then, there are the slaves. The essential distinction between freedom and slavery for the Peoples of Harborhead lies in the right to bear arms. Slaves may not bear weapons, not even so much as a knife for cutting their food. A bondman has no personal rights and no personal honor. Though an owner may choose to defend a slave as she would a helpless infant, a slave may not legally protect himself in any way.

To be a slave in Harborhead admits failure in battle and cowardice. A man who dies in battle has honor and may be recognized as a valiant soldier by Ahlat on his way to the next life. If a man surrenders on the battlefield, however, or is captured in a raid, the victors make their prisoner pass under an ox yoke, usually on his hands and knees. The victim thus admits cowardice and enters the

servile caste. He may be bought or sold in his lifetime anywhere in the satrapy and even to slavers from beyond the country's borders.

Harborhead recognizes no corruption of blood, legally. The child of a slave mother or father is not automatically a slave. Indeed, by law and custom, the children of slaves are to be raised with the same rights and responsibilities as the freeborn, trained to bear weapons at an early age. In practice, however, many descendants of slaves remain in bondage, not simply for one generation, but for two or three or more. Part of the reason for this derives from the voracious slave appetites of the Realm. The vast majority of high-quality slave labor finds its way to the wharves of Kirighast, where it boards ship for the Realm, the East or almost anywhere else in Creation.

As a result, the labor needs of Harborhead are tightly stretched, and even slave-taking raids against neighbors within and beyond the satrapy's official borders cannot ease the strain completely. More and more slaves in Harborhead are being born to slavery, with potentially disastrous consequences. The theoretical freedom of one's descendants made slavery in this life bearable in some ways — that one died in freedom and was buried in freedom provided a certain spiritual comfort in a warrior society. Now, that last bit of liberty is being gradually stolen, and the number of slaves who are smart enough to recognize their eroding chances is growing. Balancing their disgruntlement, however, is the fact that more and more slaves are being born in bondage and lack the training in weaponry from their youth that is the mark of slaves taken in battle.

ONE SHAME

All dichotomies between regions, all divisions between Peoples and tribes, all animosity between free persons and slaves can also be left to one side. At some deep level, the denizens of Harborhead know they are a conquered people. The Realm tolerates their centuries-old way of life, of farming, cattle raising, raiding and slave-taking, only so long as it continues to serve the Realm's interests. This shames the people of Harborhead deeply, at every level of society — rich and poor, young and old, tribesman and city-dweller. The Peoples know, with absolute certainty, that the wealth of their land is being systematically stripped, that the tribes of Harborhead are being bent beneath the ox yoke and that their ancient traditions are regarded with voyeuristic disdain by the vastly superior Dragon-Blooded and the supposedly civilized lords of the Realm.

No one is quite sure who is at fault. Of late, the Shayanti have been blaming much of the present state of affairs on the Izhalvi and the Brakhani, who held the reins of power at the time the Realm seized control. The tribesmen of the dry plains blame the people of the coasts and the cities for not resisting more vigorously, while the city-folk blame the tribesmen of the hinterland for not aiding

them when the imperial legions first appeared. Everyone views the absence of the Scarlet Empress as a potential windfall for Harborhead. However, the more clear-sighted see that there is also much opportunity for generations of terrible violence.

THE HISTORY OF HARBORHEAD

Harborhead has a long, violent and extraordinary history, which many scholars have speculated upon, both in Creation and in Heaven. At the time of the Realm's intervention, they speculate, Harborhead was on the verge of becoming an empire in its own right, perhaps the equal to the Realm in stature and power. Yet, lacking any real mechanism for governance equal to its hunger for conquest, this empire would have collapsed under its own weight and internal rivalries before a generation had passed. Speculating on what might have been, though, is a game for scholars. The actual history of Harborhead provides several lessons for even the most hard-headed supporters of the Realm and would-be rebels in the Threshold.

THE FIRST AGE

Harborhead, like many Threshold territories, began as a province of the Old Realm in the First Age of Man. Wealthy and genteel, its warm coastal beaches were filled with sunbathers and pleasure seekers. Its towns were home to raucous parties in the hot, humid nights. A favorite destination of tourists who sought relaxation and idleness, Harborhead billed itself to Creation as "the world's foremost garden." Kirighast was the capital, even then, and the Street of Palms was lined with resort hotels with ocean views, with fancy restaurants and with pavilions where the wealthy could dance the nights away. The province's interior was full of huge farms and ranches, where the food to feed the vast arcologies of Chiaroscuro and elsewhere was grown. The landscape was almost idyllic, and few visitors were unmoved by the pastoral and peaceful aspect of the countryside.

Then came the Usurpation, and then the Great Contagion. Seven hundred and fifty years ago, disease wracked the countryside, the farms and ranches fell into ruin, and the towns died in the plague. Mortals returned to nomadic lives in the dry plains, and in the hills and coastlands, people eked a bare and Spartan existence from the soil.

THE AGE OF POCKET KINGDOMS

For 300 years after the Contagion, Harborhead remained a backwater of tiny kingdoms, usually little more than city-states — and, sometimes, not even that much. Each of these historic kingdoms shared much in common with its neighbors. A warleader arose, assembled an army, conquered the surrounding territory and built a palace with

the plunder. His successor was lazy or corrupt or ignorant and was overthrown. No one was able to hold the kingdom together. The palace was sacked by another warleader from a neighboring region, and the cycle began again.

The example of the village of Athaba is indicative of this period. A massive platform, half a mile on a side and supporting four large towers and the ruins of a palace-temple complex, is all that remains of this kingdom's capital. Six hundred years ago, Gerath the Great and his son Manisi ruled everything within 100 miles of Gerath, a kingdom of several hundred thousand people. Today, stone steles eight feet high mark the boundaries of their kingdom, and everyone virtually ignores them. Only scholars have heard of Gerath, and Athaba today is a village of only 20 families.

During this time, the Izhalti and the Brakhani began to emerge from obscurity and become settled peoples in the hill country. The Krantiri begin to appear as a definable ethnic group along the coastline. The Shayanti and the Totikari were moving northward from out of the Far South, with the Shayanti coming more out of the Southeast and possessing traditions of agriculture and metalworking. The Totikari were definitely nomadic at this time, as they are today. The shared culture of each of the Peoples took shape at this time, and all of them revered Ahlat above all other gods, as the divinity in charge of warfare and raiding and, above all, cattle.

THE GOD-BLOOD AND THE FANE

Into this wild world of political and social upheaval continuing from one generation into the next, a young Bride of Ahlat from the Izhalti People named Leaping Impala gave birth to a young daughter whom she named Blood on the Horn in RY 362. Though she did not know it, the father of her child was the War God himself, Ahlat, in a mortal disguise.

The Lord of Cattle, tired with the pocket kingdoms and the petty violence, realized, at long last, that, to expand the importance of his divine portfolio and increase his income, he needed to regularize and nationalize the scale of warfare in the South. None of these tiny city-states had the material resources or the manpower to raise huge armies or to fight massive battles. As a result, their sacrifices to his honor were somewhat smaller than he would have liked. And so, he meddled.

Blood on the Horn proved to be a great warrior. It was no surprise, really, since she was God-Blood and shared her father and mother's aptitude for violence. By RY 385, she was a name to be reckoned with. With her personal magnetism, charisma and abilities, she assembled a great army and conquered the coastlines and the highlands. Once this power base was united, she began the process of administering it, dividing it into districts and territories and creating a bureaucracy to tend to this little empire. To help unite the country religiously, she restored the Fane of





the Upswept Horns at Kirighast in RY 392 and promoted it as the center of the Cult of Ahlat while she led an army across the Southeast. Eventually, she united the territory of what would become Harborhead.

The Realm chose to ignore most of the events of Blood on the Horn's rise to power. The Empress was busy with events in the East and the North and the occasional conspiracy arising in the Realm. Choosing to keep the legions out of the conflict, she watched from the Blessed Isle and ignored the rising kingdom of Harborhead in the South.

THE REALM INTERVENES

In RY 416, the Empress could no longer turn a blind eye to the situation in the Southern Threshold, however. A contingent of mercantile representatives and official diplomats from House Cathak were slaughtered in the independent coastal city-state of Ivrore during a punitive expedition by forces loyal to Blood on the Horn. Deciding matters had gotten out of hand, the Empress dispatched a substantial force of six legions and almost 100 Dragon-Blooded to bring the new kingdom under the Realm's control. The Empress ordered that Blood on the Horn was to be killed or captured, but that the mechanism she had created for governing Harborhead was to be preserved intact.

The fighting went on for six years, with the legions plodding through the countryside chasing much faster and lighter infantry and cavalry units and hunting the missing Queen of Harborhead only with difficulty. At last, in a pitched battle at Hudu Towasi in RY 422, Blood on the Horn fell in single combat with the Dragon-Blooded champion Mnemon Pardus, and the kingdom of Harborhead surrendered, becoming a tributary of the Realm.

RECENT HISTORY

The Realm focused its attentions during the war on capturing towns, water sources and cities. Where it could not keep control of these resources, it laid waste to the sites, preventing them from being of use to the forces of Harborhead. As a result, by the end of the war, the Realm was substantially in control of the whole mechanism that Blood on the Horn had created for ruling and administering Harborhead. These local bureaucracies often only needed a few imperial supervisors to keep their nationalistic impulses in check. Moreover, Harborhead's recent emergence as a nation prevented the appearance of many nationalistic impulses at all. Far more often, ethnic divisions tried to pull the new tributary apart.

The early years of the Realm's control were marked by substantial ethnic violence, as the Izhalvi and the Totikari tried to break away from the puppet government installed by the Empress and her advisors. The first major rebellion erupted in RY 474, when the Realm planned to raze the Fane of the Upswept Horns and begin demolish-

ing the cult of the Cattle God as distasteful to the Immaculate Philosophy. Putting down the rebellion and its aftershocks occupied the legions' attentions for the next eight years, and plans to raze the Fane were abandoned in the meantime.

The second major rebellion occurred in RY 535, after the execution of a prominent cleric of Ahlat who was a little too outspoken against the Immaculate Philosophy. The Realm viewed it as a minor execution, while Harborhead viewed it as a significant martyrdom. This time, with fewer legions to devote to the cause, the suppression of the revolt took more than 15 years, and the Realm demonstrated the power of atrocity on several occasions to shock populations into submission. At Kente, a village northwest of Bent Creek, the right hand of every villager was cut off, and all of them but one was blinded. At Urtu, the whole population was forced to dig a mass grave for themselves, in which they were buried neck deep and left for the vultures. At Ashas Enu, a Dragon-Blooded sorcerer reversed the bend of every person's elbows and knees, and their tongues were cut out as a further horror.

The third major rebellion occurred in RY 686, 82 years ago. A patrolling talon of imperial troops interrupted a sacrifice to Ahlat of 100 captive Varangian slaves in the hinterland, and in response, much of the southern plains rose in rebellion. The Realm adopted a much more stern policy at this time, and the revolt took only two years to suppress. The Totikari tribe responsible for the sacrifice, the Desert Pumas, was exterminated to the last child, and the sahel quieted down almost immediately.

The Izharvi were the largest ethnic group in the nation, and therefore, they tended to be more heavily represented among the rebels. Though the attitudes of this single ethnic group as a whole tended to favor the Realm's presence, imperial officials found it difficult to justify retaining them in power when the other Peoples appeared to be so much more loyal. Gradually, the Realm adopted a policy of choosing native officials from the other Peoples. Where possible, the Imperial Satrap steered important posts for natives to members of other ethnic groups. For a time, the Brakhani were thought to be pliable. Gradually, however, the Shayanti, who have been favored with the Realm's trust and attention for most of the last 100 years, displaced them.

Even so, it was difficult to rule the country without Izharvi support. Until two years ago, the Royal Family of Harborhead was Izharvi. The presence of this figurehead family helped to secure the complaisance of the Izharvi. As a result, there have been no major outbreaks of rebellion since the so-called Sacrifice War, and the Izharvi have not been involved in any rebellion against the Realm in more than 200 years.

RECENT HISTORY

Forty years ago, Peleps Howdarn discovered the imperial green jade bed at Bent Creek, and since then, the Realm's interest in Harborhead has magnified greatly. The vast riches represented by this strike resulted in outlays of capital to build roads into the hinterland and to expand ports to transport these riches back to the Blessed Isle. With the presence of new roads came new opportunities for ordinary Harborheadites. Thousands of people streamed toward the capital in search of wealth and prosperity, resulting in the shantytowns of Kirighast.

Yet, an equal number of people have swelled numerous market towns into minor cities. The population of Harborhead began urbanizing and is gradually becoming more sophisticated. The new infrastructure has made numerous other economic ventures potentially profitable, with cattle ranching, mining and orchard-keeping rising as important secondary industries to match the phenomenal growth of Bent Creek.

This construction and attention joined regions that formerly had little chance to communicate or trade, and the result has been an expansion of Harborhead's self-consciousness and national identity. The Five Peoples have each had the chance to unite with distant tribes and to rediscover long-lost branches of their family trees. The Izharvi rediscovered their allegiance to the Unconquered Sun by visiting ancient rock-cut shrines, the Brakhani made an industry out of visiting the shrines of their ancestors, and the Shayanti indulged in a newfound interest in the poetry of their people.

Underlying all this resurgent interest in their past, the Peoples of Harborhead continued to hone and practice their military skills. The raids between Peoples went on, and a steady flow of slaves entered the labor markets all over the country. Since Harborhead has no tradition of second-generation slavery, much of this labor stayed in the South, where it was used to develop tree farms, plantations and orchards, to work mines and refine ore and to process leather and wool into usable products. Difficult slaves were sold to the Realm or the Guild, keeping the local slave populace subservient.

The Realm had other sources for many of these goods. Harborhead's products were not inferior by any means, merely not needed. Indeed, the quality of Harborhead-made products threatened to overwhelm the Blessed Isle's own industrial capacities. Cloth, metal goods, leather goods, furniture and more could all be produced much more cheaply in the South than on the Blessed Isle — when combined with a flood of jade from Bent Creek, it was more than the Realm's economy could bear.

HARBORHEAD TODAY

The Empress had a variety of legislative and regulatory solutions to this problem in mind. As a matter of fact, two



possible plans were on her desk the day she vanished. One was to assume personal control over all Harborhead commercial operations and make the territory into her personal property. Another called for the central planning of the Harborheadite economy by the Satrap in consultation with the Empress, to provide specific goods as the Realm required. Both of these provisions have been lost in the shuffle to decide exactly what to do about the Empress's absence.

Uncertain what else to do, the Greater Deliberative has drastically reduced the tax burden on Harborhead, accepting only payments in jade. Harborhead has been given, in essence, blanket permission to trade with entities other than the Realm in order to prevent its cheaper goods from flooding the markets of the Blessed Isle.

In consequence, Harborhead has gradually assumed a more equal relationship with the Realm than that of other tributary states. While other Threshold kingdoms are militarily restive, few of them have a resource that the Realm wants quite so much as the Blessed Isle needs Harborhead's jade. In the process of improving the flow of Harborhead's jade to the Isle, however, the Realm has also developed Harborhead's other economic potentials quite by accident.

For the moment, the Realm remains in control of Harborhead. Its dragons, talons and wings are stationed at important towns and critical crossroads throughout the country. The Realm maintains the ability to suppress a minor revolt almost anywhere but in the deep, dry South, where only the Totikari travel frequently. Yet, the principal Realm officials in Harborhead look around at the new sophistication of the country, its new industrial and economic capabilities and its new sense of nationalism with a wary and unhappy eye. Real control of the nation has somehow slipped away from them in the last few years, and no one from the Realm knows how to retrieve it.

At the same time, however, as the Realm is only too eager to remind the Peoples at every opportunity, the Harborheadites themselves do not seem to be clearly in control of their own destiny yet. They need the Realm's guidance at least a little longer.

Few among the Peoples are actually listening any more. They are busy enjoying their newfound prosperity, living newly meaningful lives and wondering what, if anything, to do about Thorns.

GOVERNMENT IN HARBORHEAD

The government of Harborhead is a strange amalgam of the political structure cobbled together by Blood on the Horn and various reforms and programs established by her successors at the suggestion of the Satrap of the Realm. In its initial design, it suffered from a certain elitism that would have suited a short-lived empire quite well. The

reforms encouraged a certain degree of Realm-style Dynastic politics that have further destabilized the country.

While the Dynasty functioned well enough on the Blessed Isle under the Empress, the Great Houses' rivalries threaten to pull the Realm apart in her absence. In Harborhead, the situation is similar, but there, the underlying ethnic tensions make a delicate situation into a high-wire act. The nation's loyalties are divided along ethnic rather than geographical lines. The Five Peoples strike out against one another for real or imagined abuses in the past and support their principal families and tribes at the expense of the others. With so many Peoples living cheek-by-jowl throughout the land, however, the result is increasing ethnic violence as the different tribes sort out their political claims with the sword, dagger and club rather than with words.

At the core of Harborhead's political troubles is the issue of the Realm's official standing in the satrapy. Officially, all Realm personnel are present in Harborhead solely as advisors and dignitaries. In practice, they are present as conquerors and governors. The satrapy's officers and bureaucrats are hamstrung by the need to wait for imperial overseers to approve their decisions before officially implementing them. Sometimes, Harborhead officials turn this to their own personal advantage, taking bribes to carry out some action, then explaining that their hands were tied by their imperial masters. This practice increases resentment against the Realm's presence while enriching Harborhead's own political elite. Often, the moneys earned in this way are set aside to serve the political officers' ambitions when the Realm leaves. Those ambitions often involve rulership not of the whole country, but only those parts that their People have some claim to — and their claims usually involve displacing the current residents.

THE LEOPARD SEAT

The official center of Harborhead's political life is the Leopard Seat, the throne of the kingdom and, in theory, its highest court and its chief executive. The Leopard Seat was the personal throne of Blood on the Horn, and it was captured when the Realm's legions sacked her camp after the Battle of Hudu Towasi. The Empress graciously returned the Leopard Seat to the people of Harborhead, and her representative has personally installed every successive ruler of Harborhead upon the Seat since then.

The Leopard Seat is office, title and object. The Seat itself is a wooden platform approximately six feet high, which can be assembled or disassembled in about four hours. The steps to the backless chair upon the dais, the chair and the canopy over the chair are all covered over with full leopard skins, and the posts of the canopy are further decorated with peacock plumage and golden leopard sculptures. Held together with only lengths of rope and wooden pins, the Leopard Seat is usually established in the

Royal Palace in Kirighast, but the monarch moves at least twice a year to other locations. Once during the month of Ascending Air, the Seat is moved to Wildebeest Waterhole for the Leopard's Hunt and the annual submission of the Totikari People to the Leopard Seat. The second occasion usually occurs during Descending Water, when the Satrap and the Leopard make a joint visit to some distant region of the satrapy, to show the flag, decide a few court cases and prove that the government is still alive and kicking.

In addition to being a specific chair, the Leopard Seat is also an office and a title. The King or Queen of Harborhead is styled "The Leopard" or "The Seat," not because of any personal resemblance to the great cat, but simply because of where he or she sits. The Seat is also considered the court of last resort in Harborhead. Any citizen may appeal any decision made by any lower court to the Seat, who may then decide whether or not to hear the petition. At certain times each month, the Leopard Seat is open to all comers, and the Leopard may be asked to rule on any number of things, such as to help two brothers divide their dead father's herd of cows or to settle a boundary disagreement between neighbors. The Seat also functions as the chief executive of Harborhead and the commander of the kingdom's armed forces. His words have the force of law, and annual summaries of his decrees are published in all of Harborhead's major cities and towns on the last day of Calibration.

In practice, the Leopard Seat does what the Imperial Satrap commands. As the most visible and most seemingly powerful citizen of Harborhead, few figures in the government are subjected to quite as much scrutiny from the Realm as the Leopard and his principal advisors. His decrees are usually written for him by imperial scribes and signed without fuss. Often, copies of these orders are on their way to their recipients before the Leopard is even appraised of their contents, meaning or purpose.

OSHOM KURGAZ, THE LEOPARD

The present Leopard of Harborhead is Oshom Kurgaz, a Shayanti nobleman with substantial estates southwest of Kirighast, on the coast. He was the Chamberlain of the Palace for over 20 years, an honorary title at best, given simply because of his power and wealth. His Shayanti colleagues among the courtiers elevated him to the Seat two years ago.

When the Empress still communicated with her clients in Harborhead, the tradition had been for the Leopard to be chosen from among the adult males of a particular noble Izhalvi family. The last 46 Leopards had all come from House Reshoom, which claimed the patronage of the Empress and distant, humble kinship with her. The absence of an actual blood relationship was ignored. The Empress allowed the fiction, graciously, and acknowledged the Reshooms as long-lost relatives, when she acknowledged them at all. It allowed her to write to them,

asking them to carry out her decrees as a family favor, rather than as the dictates of a monarch to her subjects. It also forced the Reshoom monarchs to write to her as distant, humble cousins, which gave her the freedom to ignore their requests as unbefitting her high station.

After the Empress disappeared, though, Leopard Reshoom Keshara used her putative kinship with the Empress to make demands of the Realm that proved difficult to ignore. Even as a minor relative of the Empress, her legal standing was equal to that of many in the Greater Deliberative, superior to that of several senior officials in the Thousand Scales back in the Realm and far above that of even the Satrap who was supposed to be controlling her. Three hundred and fifty years of tradition and order said that the Leopard of Harborhead was the relative of the Empress and had to be treated as such. When Keshara began to exploit that traditional posture as a source of genuine authority on behalf of her country, it became necessary to stop her. The Satrap arranged for her tea to be poisoned one night, and a palace coup captured most of her family in bed. Now, many of them languish in the dungeons under the Satrap's palace, though some few have escaped.

The Satrap told the palace officials to choose a new Leopard, one of suitable wealth and noble station but from a Shayanti family rather than an Izhalvi family and one without genuine ties to the Reshoom. The courtiers of the Leopard Seat chose Oshom Kurgaz, knowing that he would be the pawn of the Satrap and divorced from any genuine power base among the Peoples of Harborhead except for the Shayanti. Lacking legitimacy in the eyes of the average citizen, Oshom hides in the palace from nearly everyone. He is a prisoner of the Royal Guardswomen who hate him but are sworn to protect him, of the imperial advisors who watch his every move and of the priests of



Ahlat who almost certainly can have him removed as easily as Keshara was.

Uneasy indeed is the Leopard upon his seat.

Oshom is a heavysset man in his early 40s, unbearded and given to sweating profusely. He wears much gold, including a gold-studded cap of leopard skin and a matching tunic whenever he appears in public. He has begun to stammer under the pressures of his office, one that he often secretly aspired to but now dreads. He often appears to be on the verge of shaking to death, and his eyes are glazed like those of a cornered antelope.

THE DRUMS OF THE LEOPARD SEAT

The Drums of the Leopard Seat are the principal advisors to the Leopard. Coming to Kirighast from all over the satrapy, the Drums are all members of the wealthiest and most noble families of Harborhead, chieftains and merchants descended of long lines of chieftains and merchants. Within the hierarchy of the court, it is their solemn duty to advise the Leopard on matters of policy and law and, then, to help him promulgate his decrees in their home territories.

Officially, the Drums are supposed to be geographically representative. That is, each of them represents a large swath of Harborhead's territory, and each of them is responsible for communicating the Leopard's wishes to the region he represents. In practice, however, the Drums are ethnically divided. Clever Gazelle, the Shayanti Drum of the South Hills district, usually communicates only with the Shayanti of his region and often fails to deliver critical messages to the other Peoples within his territory.

The Drums are also supposed to function as a council. Yet, with between 50 and 100 members at any given time, they act more often as a series of ethnic factions trying to sway the Leopard to one course of action at the expense of another People. These maneuverings involve matters as small as a minor boundary dispute or the ownership of a cow or as large as whether a whole tribe should have to move to make room for another tribe. Days and weeks are tied up with endless discussions and parcelings-out of water rights.

Matters are not helped by the open membership of the Drums. Any family that meets the high monetary requirement, namely the ability to maintain a drum ensemble year-round, is eligible to send a representative to join the Drums. Most of those who can afford to do so are chieftains of tribes or respected merchants, and those who represent their interests in the capital often maintain a second Drum ensemble in Kirighast to prove their standing to the Leopard and the other courtiers. Resources ●●●● is sufficient to maintain a Drum ensemble of six to twelve members in one's household.

Since the deposition of the Reshoom family as the royal household, the Drums of the Leopard Seat have operated as a fractious and dissent-filled aristocracy, arranging provoca-

tions and battles between their supporters in the streets and seeking to embarrass and discredit one another in the halls of the Royal Palace. Many of them realize that there is no real power in the Leopard Seat anymore and that Oshom is a figurehead and a puppet for the Satrap. Yet, the Drums understand that Harborhead cannot be ruled without their help and cooperation. They are starting to realize, as individuals and as a group, that the Realm needs them more than they need any imperial oversight.

YASURBO, SHAYANTI DRUM

Yasurbo is at present the most important Shayanti among the Drums. Tall, handsome and in his mid-30s, he presents himself as a voice of reason and probity when he advises the Leopard. He is sufficiently important that he meets with the Satrap once a week at a luncheon. Representing his father, a tribal chief on the Varangian border, Yasurbo displays the good manners and dutiful aspect of a loyal eldest son.

Yasurbo was lately appointed to an important post in the government of Harborhead as a result. He is the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and as such, he consults regularly with the Satrap and with the Leopard. Yasurbo uses this position as a screen for many of his activities, and he regularly presents the Satrap with plans for various border adjustments with Varangia or expansions into the Far South or across the Summer Mountains. Yet, when his plans are politely denied, Yasurbo expresses disappointment but appears to go away happy that he has been of some use. The ruse has worked, and the Realm believes Yasurbo to be dutiful and obedient.

Behind the scenes, Yasurbo has worked to increase ethnic strife between his own People and the Izhalvi. He has a gang of several thousand armed supporters in the capital, who use the shantytown surrounding the capital as both a base of operations and a cover for their marauding. They attack businesses and households, using intimidation or murder to cow the Izhalvi into submission. On several occasions, they have instigated riots in their rivals' neighborhoods that the imperial forces have had to put down, raising the Realm's suspicions against the Izhalvi. In addition, Yasurbo has used Oshom's elevation as an opportunity to mend fences with the Totikari and has promised them several large swaths of Izhalvi territory in the South in exchange for help in persuading the Leopard to follow one course of action or another.

IDLE TIGER, TOTIKARI DRUM

Of all the Drums, Idle Tiger most resents that the rump of Oshom, "that fat wildebeest," rests on the seat of power and feels that the Totikari were far more deserving of the honor. While not exactly stupid, the 62-year-old Totikari with his squinting eyes is a little confused about the nature of the Leopard Seat these days. He honestly believes the



2019.5

Realm is here in Harborhead only to help out and that its representatives will leave easily when the time comes.

Idle Tiger was appointed by the Satrap and the previous Leopard to be Harborhead's Minister of the Treasury. The nomad has difficulty counting above 100 and often needs his subordinates to explain numbers above 50,000 to him several times so that he understands. It is of course for the Realm's convenience that he is the satrapy's main financial officer, since it makes it much easier to exact tribute without much fuss. Many of the other Drums seethe with fury when presented with the real numbers, which are all too appallingly clear.

As the oldest among the Totikari Drums, he has pride of place when they gather, and his juniors respect him. Some wonder privately, however, if he is just a little too far gone to be leading their faction. Idle Tiger himself knows their concerns and, for his own part, wishes he were in the Far South hunting zebras again. All this talk in the hot sun wearies him, and there are so many other things he wants to be doing with his last years.

LAUGHING DOLPHIN, KRANTIRI DRUM

Smiling, sane and level-headed, Laughing Dolphin is the Minister of the Army for the satrapy. In his middle 50s, the Krantiri elder began as a warleader for a tribe abutting the Summer Mountains. His forces have fought other mortals, Lunars, rogue Dragon-Blooded and even the dead

with distinction, if not always to victory. When he became a Drum 12 years ago upon retiring from active command on the frontier, Laughing Dolphin was the logical choice to become the army's overall commander.

Alone among the Drums of his People, Laughing Dolphin deplores the ethnically divided state of Harborhead and works as hard as he can to integrate the army. It is his hope that a unified military and perhaps a war with Varangia or a war against the Realm — or against anyone, really — might unite the country and prevent its long slow slide into ethnic strife and civil war. He has tried to find numerous subordinates who feel as he does and to place them in critical commands around the country. However, he knows that at least half of his "loyal" commanders are probably lying to him and have agendas set as much by their tribe and People as by his own office.

Laughing Dolphin has a second difficulty, and this is that he is watched constantly. Neither the other Drums nor the Satrap trust him very much. As a war hero, he has the standing and the widespread following to lead a rebellion or to arrange a palace coup. Not only does he have the standing, but he has the means — the army of Harborhead would be defeated in time by the legions, but it would take time and money and significant sacrifice, things the Realm has no intention of using up right now. It is easier to watch one man's every move and kill him if necessary than to keep the whole country in serfdom.

Laughing Dolphin seldom laughs any more, though he was famous for doing so in battle. His chest and arms are laced with battle scars, and there is a deep ragged gouge in his left cheek where a basilisc attacked him during a desert campaign 20 years ago.

THE LESSER DRUMS

Beneath the Drums of the Leopard Seat and scattered all over the country are thousands and thousands of families who meet the property requirement set by Blood on the Horn 300 years ago and can support a Drum or two in their retinues. (This requires Resources ●●●.) These Lesser Drums, as they are called, form the backbone of the military, the bureaucracy and the judiciary of Harborhead. The Drums of the Leopard Seat call upon these Lesser Drums to provide magistrates for the market towns, captains and sergeants for the army, record-keepers for the tax offices and district governors.

Three hundred years ago, all of the mechanisms for operating the government of Harborhead were decentralized and tribally based. A chief would appoint his own warleader, serve himself as the local judge and send on whatever tribute he felt appropriate to the Leopard Seat. The chief dealt almost exclusively with his own tribe, occasionally communicated with nearby tribes of his own People and raided the tribes of rival Peoples whenever he thought he could get away with it.

The Realm has changed all that. The Lesser Drums, often the descendants of the families of minor chiefs, do all the things that their fathers did before them. Now, however, they do so within a chain of command that makes them answerable to and responsible to the central government, at least in theory. The Drums in Kirighast have large and powerful families out in the hinterlands, and these families can make things quite uncomfortable for Lesser Drums who step out of line or embarrass them in the eyes of the Leopard or the Realm.

As a result, over the last 300 years, the Lesser Drums have become an almost professional force of bureaucrats, army officers, tax collectors and magistrates. They are still often divided along tribal lines and owe their allegiance to the major Drum families above them, from whom they get patronage and responsibility. Yet, three centuries have molded a strong tradition of service to the satrapy that may very well outlast the departure of the Realm. It is in this class of middle-managers that the decision will be made to split Harborhead in civil war or to expand into empire, when the Realm departs.

THE ARMY OF HARBORHEAD

What little the rest of Creation knows about Harborhead is that it is considered a warlike nation, with an elite, all-woman guard at the head of its army, though one of simplistic means. This is true and untrue at the same

time. Harborhead's history is steeped in battles against outside forces. Yet, conflict between Peoples and tribes has been a fact of life for centuries, even more so than border conflicts. The Peoples of Harborhead have always regarded their principal enemies as being their own neighbors, rather than distant foes beyond the nation's borders. This internal strife has always been and continues to be the nation's downfall as much as it is a source of income.

Throughout time, Harborhead's Peoples have always hated each other on some level. The desperate need for cattle to feed the appetites of Ahlat, the search for water and arable land and the constant pressure of cultures in conflict have prevented the Peoples from merging and assimilating into one another. Even today, the biggest obstacle for the people of Harborhead is not foreign domination or manipulation, but simple tribalism. Inherently, the people of Harborhead are quite willing to despise each other.

The Scarlet Empress recognized that and was secretly relieved when Blood on the Horn met her untimely demise because she had given Harborhead a goal to strive for and raised the people to look beyond their ready hatred of each other. She had also given them a resource of some value throughout Creation for the first time: slaves. After the death of the Queen, the Empress shifted the direction of Harborhead from one of conquest to one of service to the Realm. She was more than willing to allow the nearly unified nation to devolve into petty bickering and squabbling once more, so long as it continued to take slaves and sell them to the Realm to pay the tribute she demanded. The Empress gave the Peoples the illusion that they were still a warrior state when, in reality, Harborhead had become a mere procurer of slave flesh.

ARMY ORGANIZATION

There are five official, theoretical armies stationed throughout Harborhead, one to each of the natural geographic divisions of the country, and one stationed outside the capital. However, four of these armies are only nominally united. Each of these forces is, in fact, broken down into commanderies, captaincies and garrisons stationed on the borders and at critical crossroads and passes within the country. Even the Capital Army is divided, camped in 40 separate locations along the main roads into Kirighast or quartered in the capital itself. Officially, this is so each army does not exhaust the water and food resources of a given location, but in fact, it serves as a mechanism of imperial control. None of the armies can be united without orders from the capital or be assembled without the Realm's awareness.

On paper, each of the five official armies contains 100,000 men. For practical purposes, each army is divided into 20 commanderies of 5,000 men apiece. Each commandery is further parceled out into 25 captaincies of

200 men each. The first five captaincies in each commandery are placed under the overall authority of an officer with the title high captain, and this force is composed of light infantry and cavalry—a quick-response force. These captaincies are usually quartered at a permanent fort in a central location along with the army headquarters for the region. The remaining 20 captaincies are established at border forts and watchtowers. Sometimes, a captaincy may be broken into centuries, fifties or twenties. It is an unspoken reality of military service in Harborhead that the smaller the force, the more likely the chance of the unit turning to banditry or becoming a local power in ethnic strife. Military commanders have a delicate balancing act to play, therefore, between dividing their forces to defend their assigned territory and keeping their forces united to prevent ethnic violence. Not all commanders even regard ethnic violence as something they wish to prevent, which just adds to the military's headaches.

Ideally, each captaincy consists of 160 infantry soldiers, each armed with an oxhide shield, two short stabbing spears of iron, an iron short sword and a long knife. To this central force are added 20 archers with short bows or 20 slingers. There are also 20 light-cavalry soldiers, armed with javelins and long knives. Captains are encouraged, however, to vary the composition of their forces depending on their assignment and region. Some choose to reduce their infantry to have more archers and cavalry, while some choose to scrap archers in favor of horsemen, and some concentrate only on infantry.

In addition, all of the theoretical numbers are further modified by the nature of Harborhead's warrior culture. Some captaincies are vastly understrength because their commanders do not exercise their forces often enough, and likely army recruits choose to join raiding parties rather than

the official army. Other units, particularly border garrisons, are often overstrength because the army supplements its official pay rates with unofficial plunder from raiding. A unit's paper numbers in the capital may differ by as much as 20 percent from the actual force in the field.

THE CAPITAL ARMY

The one force that is always closest to its paper strength is the Capital Army. Garrisoned at 40 camps in and around Kirighast, the force is the most integrated in terms of ethnicity but the most hamstrung by the Realm, as well. None of these garrisons, composed of 250 soldiers at each station, are permitted to do more than patrol within their assigned district. Together, they form a police force for Kirighast and the surrounding countryside up to about 100 miles from the city center. In theory, this should put a force of 20 soldiers within a mile of any possible disturbance and, therefore, able to respond quickly. In practice, however, much of this force is dedicated to patrolling the major roads and suppressing banditry, to keeping order in the marketplaces and to securing the Royal Palace and the Fane. The famous all-woman Royal Guard comprises three full commanderies of the Capital Army, and these rarely stir far from their barracks on the Bull's Mountain.

RECRUITMENT AND MORALE

The army of Harborhead is traditionally paid out of revenue from the slave trade with the Realm. When Harborhead struck one of its many bargains with the Empress, it agreed to continue its practice of taking slaves from defeated enemies. A set percentage of these slaves, usually about half, became the property of the nation, which sold them only to the Realm. In turn, imperial


HARBORHEAD'S OFFICER CORPS

Harborhead's officer corps is drawn largely from the families who belong to the ranks of the Lesser Drums. The vast majority of them come from the Shayanti and the Brakhani ethnic groups, but there has been a recent surge in the number of Totikari in the service, particularly in the cavalry and in scout forces.

The official rank scale is as follows:

- General — commands an army — 100,000 troops
- Commander — commands a commandery — 5,000 troops
- High Captain — commands a high captaincy — 1,000 troops
- Captain — commands a captaincy — 200 troops
- Centurion — commands a century — 100 troops
- Sergeant — commands a fifty — 50 troops
- Pennon — commands a twenty — 20 troops

Each officer listed here usually has from one to ten subofficers to assist with signals and relaying orders. These junior officers are given a variety of titles, such as standardbearer, herald or simply officer, but everyone knows that they do not fall into the main chain of command, and all of them are considered junior to a pennon in the actual command structure of a military unit. Upon the death of a commander in a battle, the high captain is supposed to assume command, not the commander's herald.



traders then resold these slaves in the markets of Kirighast to anyone they chose. Since the Empress's disappearance, payment from the Realm for the slaves has been quite irregular, and corruption has prevented much of this money from flowing all the way down to the ordinary soldier. Army pay, therefore, is often in arrears by as much as five or six months. This situation puts pressure on the officer class to divide their forces more completely, so that their juniors can supplement their income with raiding and banditry. The resulting chaos usually prompts the Satrap and the Leopard Seat to release funds to the army, and then, the situation stabilizes for a time. However, the cycle has been repeated eight times over the last five years, and on each occasion, the situation has worsened over a larger portion of the country before the Satrap or the Leopard acted. At the core of the problem are simple economics: The Satrap is trying to conserve his funds in the event that his forces are called back to the Blessed Isle to fight in a civil war, and the Leopard has no extra funds with which to pay the army.

One solution would be to reduce the overall number of soldiers in the armed forces of Harborhead. This course of action would increase the number of trained military personnel not under orders to some sort of central authority, however, raising the risk of ethnic violence, banditry and civil war. Another proposed solution involves deploying the army eastward against Thorns and the Deathlord Mask of Winters. No one is quite eager to do that, either. The Satrap knows he would have to command the imperial legion to accompany the army of Harborhead on such an expedition, and that entails all sorts of political maneuvering back home on the Blessed Isle.

The army still actively recruits new members into its ranks, and both men and women may apply. There are a series of physical tests that must be met, but considering that very few natives of Harborhead live a life of ease, only the most infirm are unable to meet the criteria. Once enlisted, a new recruit spends his days drilling with various weapons. This aspect of military life is not that different from that practiced by those not enlisted. Most every inhabitant of Harborhead, whether Kirighastian shopkeeper or veldt herder, spends some portion of her day in drill practice. Just as the tribalism that runs so rampant in the nation seems to be in the natives' blood, so too is the desire to go to war.

Weapons range from the simpler spear, bow and arrow, machete and war axe to firewands, firedust grenades and specialized slings. Only the elite Royal Guard has ready access to the last few items, however. The first few can be found amongst the everyday tools of all Harborhead natives, and most can wield them with deadly precision.

Mastering weapons and camouflage is a part of all recruits' training. To maintain a sense of discipline, new recruits are also given the most menial work available.

Cleaning out barracks and maintaining the surrounding grounds is a daily part of their job. Captaincies often go out on maneuvers and practice tactical operations at the level of twenties and fifties. However, the Realm has prevented most operations at the level of the commandery or army. While the officer corps spends a lot of time planning theoretical battles at this scale, the actual men in the field have little experience fighting or obeying orders at that scale. Whenever the Realm permits operations of this size, all of Harborhead's units are usually paired with imperial advisors who serve as mediators and interpreters of the orders from higher up the chain of command. As a result, the army has few experienced officers capable of high responsibility, and even these have had few chances to practice their skills without imperial supervision. The Harborheadite military's tactics are thoroughly known to the Realm and well understood by even the most junior legionary.

THE ROYAL GUARD

While many question the purpose of such a large army of such compromised effectiveness, there is still one sector of the army that has clearly not lost purpose. The Royal Guard, an all-female force of three commanderies attached to the Capital Army, provides security for the Fane of the Upswept Horns, the Royal Palace and Kirighast's Old Town. The Guardswomen's red-and-black kilts, tasseled cloaks and horned steel caps wrapped in red-and-black turbans mark the Royal Guard as being almost as divinely inspired as militarily motivated.

If a Guardswoman takes a lover outside the Guard while in service to Ahlat, the crime is punishable by death. She and her lover are taken to a location known only to the Royal Guard and the priests of Ahlat. Once there, they are laid spread-eagle on the ground, and a rope is tied to each of their four limbs. Bulls are then tethered to the other ends, and the animals are goaded into scattering in every direction. In this way, the judges believe Ahlat forgives the loyal brides the sins of their fallen sister through the expiation of blood.

Even more than the standing army, the Royal Guard trains constantly. The Guardswomen are motivated by loyalty and devotion to the god Ahlat, but regular — and good — pay helps to keep them loyal. Stationed in several separate barracks near the Royal Palace, the Royal Guard is divided into eight watch-groups — two sleeping, four training and two on guard duty. In addition to proficiency with the spear and bow, the chosen weapons of Ahlat, the Royal Guard uses slings, firedust grenades and firewands.

Even in these uncertain times, the brides of Ahlat are viewed as the truest examples of Harborhead warriors and are sometimes called out to fight various battles for the Realm. Varangian forces, for example, hate encountering the Royal Guard on the battlefield, for their presence

hardens the resolve of the rest of the Harborhead army, as the Guardswomen often decimate their own side's forces after a defeat. In fact, it is often easier to risk capture in battle than the Guard's fury afterward. Not even the Realm's legions are eager to face the Cattle God's harem, for the brides are known to offer human captives instead of cattle to their husband and to drink the blood of their defeated foes.

Though Guardswomen join the Guard at the pleasure of the Leopard, their oaths are made to the War God, and all Guardswomen become ritually wedded to the Lord of Battles. As such, none may take a lover nor seek any relationship outside the ranks of her fellow brides. Since the inception of the Royal Guard, those in the elite fighting force have always had a choice to depart the guard in time of peace. However, since Harborhead is often officially "at war," it may be years before a woman has an opportunity to leave military service. By the time she's discharged, the love interest that sparked her desire to quit has often gone on to marry someone else.

While in service to Ahlat, though no lover may be taken from outside the Guard's ranks, a blind eye is turned toward any relationships that develop within the ranks. It is viewed as only natural that these women who serve, train, fight and even die together might turn to one another for comfort. Ahlat has not forbidden relationships such as this.

At the age of 27, all Royal Guardswomen must retire. It is believed that, after that age, their bodies are no longer at their prime, but on the decline and, therefore, are no longer the perfect vessels for Ahlat. In the past, they have received a more than generous pension, and many retirees live a very comfortable life. They have no difficulty in finding husbands if they choose, although some stay with the women they bonded with while in the Guard.

Officially, the Realm regards the Royal Guard as an ill-conceived military and religious aberration. However, the wedded relationship between Ahlat the War God and the individual women of the Royal Guard prevents the Satrap from being *too* officially displeased. Ahlat is an important divinity in the Celestial Hierarchy, and though Harborhead worships him out of all proportion to his actual standing, he is nonetheless an important enough being to be acknowledged with an official celebration in the calendar of the Immaculate Order. One cannot simply command a major god to divorce 15,000 wives. It is just not easily done, and insisting forcefully might involve the Dragon-Blooded irrevocably in the business of Heaven. Neither the gods nor the Sidereals would welcome such interference, and so, the Satrap and his subordinates smile grimly when they meet a Royal Guardswoman and keep their mouths shut. The one thing the Realm has been able to persuade the Guard to do is to cease recruiting outcaste Dragon-Blooded into the three commanderies. In ex-

change, however, the Realm has provided the Guard with numerous firewands and other powerful weapons. Senior imperial military commanders are not sure this constitutes a balanced trade and worry that the Realm got the worst of the deal. At present, only nine outcastes are present in the force. All are being actively recruited by the Realm to join as soon as they reach the mandatory retirement age of 27. Four of the women, at least, are likely to enter imperial service in the next two years.

THE THREE COMMANDERS

Nominally under the direct command of the Leopard, the Royal Guard is controlled by its three commanders: Shalandra of the Izhalvi, Kurungha of the Shayanti and Stalking Lioness of the Totikari. Each of them commands a force that is drawn primarily, though not exclusively, from the ranks of her own People.

The three commanders in many ways represent the three major streams of thought within Harborhead today. Shalandra believes that the wrongs inflicted upon Harborhead by the Realm are in the process of being righted. Kurungha believes that Harborhead is about to come apart in ethnically driven civil war and that she may have to fight her former companions to secure her People's place in the country. Stalking Lioness believes that Harborhead's armies will have to fight first Varangia in an imperialistic conquest and then the Realm in a war of liberation. These three strains of thought are widely held throughout Harborhead, among all social classes. Few in the Realm are aware that these opinions even exist among these women in the highest levels of the military, which they have policed so carefully.

SHALANDRA

Tall, lithe and as graceful as a cheetah, Shalandra of the Izhalvi was appointed to her post by the previous Leopard. She is loyal to the old Reshoom family rather than the man masquerading as the Leopard, and she despises Oshom and the Satrap as betrayers of her beloved People. Yet, at the time of her enrollment in the Guard, she took an oath to support the Leopard and the Realm. Twelve years ago, it seemed as though the Realm and Harborhead would be joined together forever, just as she herself was joined to Ahlat. Her present hatred of the Realm's current advisors and officers does not release her from the oaths she swore to the War God, though. Shalandra believes enough in both the concept of honor and her own personal dignity to remain true to her oaths even in this time of deepening crisis.

Shalandra chooses to find a road through the muddle by holding herself and her commandery responsible to the offices of the Satrap and the Leopard Seat, rather than to the officials who presently occupy them. Women of her commandery have foiled four



assassination attempts against Oshom or members of his family. At the same time, Shalandra makes clear to the presumptive Leopard that she and her women are only trying to prevent the custom of assassinating the Leopard Seat from becoming Harborhead's standard method of choosing its leadership.

Shalandra has been using her influence and prestige to attempt to learn the fate of the Reshooms, the former royal family, but the other two commanders and their subordinates have hampered her investigation. They hope to persuade Shalandra to abandon her loyalty to the Realm. Kurungha, in particular, believes that she will have to find an assassin's blade for her colleague's heart before too much longer.

KURUNGHA

Short and stumpy, with crooked teeth and an ungainly walk, but powerfully built, with thick arms and legs like knotted cords, Kurungha of the Shayanti looks too small to be a Royal Guardswoman. Yet, during her first campaign 30 years ago, she personally took 40 foreskins from Varangian foes and a matching set of 40 right breasts. Having lost her own right breast to an arrow wound when she was 13, she regards it as fitting justice to take the breasts of her female adversaries. When she reached retirement age 25 years ago, Ahlat appeared personally and demanded

she remain within the Guard. Since then, she has risen through the ranks slowly but steadily until she became a commander of the Royal Guard.

Kurungha believes with all her heart that civil war is inevitable. Ahlat told her as much 25 years ago, or so she believes. The truth is somewhat murkier. Ahlat told her civil war was one option. She herself chose to hear that it was the only path open to her country. She also believes Ahlat told her it would be her duty to lead the Shayanti to victory in the civil war. The War God actually told her that the Shayanti would need her help to survive a civil war. The long-ago memory of an awesome and amazing moment in her life when the Lord of Battles spoke to her alone has become warped so that she remembers what she needs to believe.

The Shayanti commander has not foresworn all contacts with her birth family, as is customary. Instead, she uses her privileged position within the military and the government to keep them apprised of troop strength and caches of weapons and war materiel, and she urges various Shayanti commanders by letter and in personal meetings to be ready to fight the other Peoples. In her eagerness to carry out her husband's imagined directives, she has been preparing her People for civil war largely by helping them acquire the means to start the war themselves.



STALKING LIONESS

With her long hair tied back by a cord of flax and cowrie shells and her right eye replaced by one of polished onyx and a faceted ruby, Stalking Lioness presents a fearsome aspect to the world. Of the three commanders of the Royal Guard, she is the most vocal and aggressive, urging war against Varangia, Thorns, *anybody*, rather than delay or permanent peace. The only power she does not advocate attacking is the Realm itself. So far, she has not said anything to betray herself along those lines.

Yet, Stalking Lioness believes passionately that Harborhead faces a choice: Either it can traipse lightly down the road to civil war, or it can set out to conquer its neighbors and win its independence from the Realm. The warrior culture of Harborhead, its division into Five Peoples, its scarce water and its domination by the Realm — these are facts, the realities of life within Harborhead. Those warriors must be turned against some outside force on the borders, against each other internally or against the Realm.

To fight the Realm is to commit suicide, or so Stalking Lioness believes. The Realm's legions have the Dragon-Blooded, superior weaponry, significant field experience and more than enough vigor to put down any rebellion by the Peoples. Not only is there a significant force camped on Harborhead's own soil, but the Realm has sorcerers and additional legions available only a short distance away. Harborhead might win an engagement or two by surprise, but it could never hope to win against the retaliatory strike.

To fight amongst themselves, Stalking Lioness believes, is also ruinous. Though some of the Peoples have significant reserves of wealth and military strength, no one People has sufficient power to win the whole country. Yet Harborhead has spent all its resources and wealth over the last 40, 50, even 100 years, on becoming one nation. Its roads, mines, manufactories, cattle ranches, farms, orchards and towns form an economic and social network that cannot survive the rigors of a civil war. The infrastructure is too fragile, too new and too rigorously tied to one capital city. One People trying to claim everything would result in no one having anything.

Stalking Lioness uses her prestige as a commander of the Royal Guard to collect information on Harborhead's neighbors. She and her planning staff arrange training battles against mock-Varangian units and occasionally — when they think they can get away with it — against mock-imperial talons and legions. She uses her political connections to urge war with Varangia, noting that the absence of the Empress is as good a reason to fight a border-adjustment war as any. The slaves might also pay off the army for a few solid years, putting some of the worst of that crisis off. Her ideas have been greeted with refusal for many years, but a number of the Drums of the Leopard Seat have been listening to her carefully. Her opinions are gaining momentum, and the longer the

Realm delays in formulating a clear policy about Harborhead's future, the more likely Stalking Lioness's plans will come to fruition.

THE CULT OF AHLAT

Where the Lesser Drums represent a new vision of Harborhead, the Cult of Ahlat, centuries old and entrenched in its power and dignity, represents the nation's most ancient traditions. Despite the relatively recent establishment of the priesthood in its present form by Blood on the Horn, the theology of this Hundred Gods Heresy has been fixed in the hearts and minds of the people for almost 1,000 years. Few aspects of Harborhead culture give the Satrap and the officials of the Realm so many nightmares as the constant smoke from the sacrificial altars at the Fane of the Upturned Horns and the celebration of war as form of spiritual communion.

At the core of Harborhead's worship of Ahlat is the concept of the hecatomb, the offering of 100 head of cattle as a sacrifice. Surrounded by wailing mourners who drown out the screams of the animals, a priest cuts each animal's throat with a stone knife and catches the blood in a basin. This blood is then sprinkled ritually upon the worshipers. The bones, gristle, entrails and fat are then offered upon the altar. The remainder of the meat is offered to the worshipers to consume in carnivorous savagery, sometimes without cooking. The hecatomb is often followed by the tauroboleum, a ritual bath for the priests and select initiates in the collected blood of the 100 cattle.

The offering of the sacrifice by a tribe or a town has enormous consequences. The fertility of the tribe's surviving cattle is guaranteed for an indefinite length of time, usually a few months but, sometimes, as long as a year. The fertility of the tribe's women is also assured. There are a significant number of healthy multiple births among the Peoples of Harborhead, and these often follow hecatomb sacrifices by nine months or so. Twins and triplets are most common, but sometimes, there are even more children. The warriors of a tribe who participate in the tauroboleum gain an extra health level for three months (this is figured as an extra -1 health level).

In addition to all of this, which is enough to give the average imperial advisor or visitors the shivers, numerous women from the many tribes dedicate themselves to be the daughters or brides of Ahlat, the bull-headed god of cattle and warfare. Refusing to marry any mortal being, they devote their virginity to the Southern God of War until the age of at least 27 and dedicate their lives to studying the martial arts. A tribe that has at least nine such brides is seemingly blessed by the War God, so successful are they in raiding and cattle-taking.

Indeed, therein lies the rub. While the benefits of sacrificing to Ahlat are quite impressive, they are ephemeral. None of the benefits of sacrificing to Ahlat last a



reliable length of time, and none of them can be counted upon. This one god has so dominated the culture of Harborhead that all relationships between the mortal and the divine are twisted as a result.

To a monk of the Immaculate Order, the results are as plain as the sun crossing the sky. The need to sacrifice large numbers of cattle leads to cattle-raiding because it is better to kill other people's cattle than to starve later for lack of milk or cheese. The need to raid for cattle makes women dedicate themselves to Ahlat. The dedicated brides improve the chances of successful cattle raiding, and so, villages perform the sacrifices to Ahlat more often. The large numbers of dead cattle force other villages to raid to get enough cattle to live on, and the cycle continues perpetually, without escape.

What is obvious to the monk, however, is either not obvious to the average citizen of Harborhead or not something she is willing to acknowledge. Though the worship of Ahlat contributes to a grave degree of instability in the country, it enlivens and invigorates the lives of many, and it provides a proving ground for the young. Many a tribal chieftain began life as a cattle-raider or a bride of Ahlat, and they won their status and dignity on the battlefield. This culture is also one that takes great pride in its martial bearing and its right to carry weaponry, likely also at the connivance of Ahlat.

THE FANE

While each tribe has its own priest and, often, its own altar for the performance of the hecatomb sacrifice, and there are numerous temples to Ahlat in cities and market towns, one temple in particular is regarded as the national shrine to the War God: the Fane of the Upswept Horns, in Kirighast. Situated on the slopes of the Bull's Mountain in the Old City, the building is a Manse of great power (see pp. 96-97). Here, in a series of ceremonies that the average denizen of the Realm would find a hateful mockery of the traditions of the Immaculate Philosophy, Ahlat is worshiped in sacrifice after sacrifice, first revering him as the God of War, then as the Lord of Battles, then as the Bringer of Milk, then as the Bringer of New Calves, then as the God Who Makes Women Heavy with Pregnancy and more. The perpetual prayers rise to Ahlat as the giver of war and death and life and peace, totally corrupting his place in the Celestial order.

THE HIGH PRIEST AND THE HIERARCHS

Like the Empress, Blood on the Horn, the first Leopard of Harborhead liked to center all her realm's power in herself. As a result, she left the hierarchy of the priesthood of Ahlat somewhat fluid and prevented the Fane from developing any clear lines of institutional authority with the priests of individual Peoples and tribes. Even so, she used her own personal authority to regularize the worship of the Lord

of Cattle and standardize the forms by which he was worshiped. The existence of a standard pattern of worship throughout Harborhead was a huge leap forward for the cult.

At present, Excellent Ibis, High Priest of the Fane of the Upswept Horns, is merely regarded as the first among equals within priestly circles. As the principal celebrant at Ahlat's largest and most important temple, he has the largest venue to promote the Cult of Ahlat and the largest and most important audience to exhort, including the Leopard and his court. At the same time, Excellent Ibis' voice must be somewhat muted, given the presence of a monk of the Immaculate Order at most of his ceremonies. The monk is not there to give approval, but to prevent any radical or dangerous claims from being made.

In an effort to circumvent this close observation, Excellent Ibis created a college of priests around himself, collectively called the Hierarchy. These hierarchs act as messengers and teachers of the Cult of Ahlat and travel around Harborhead helping to regularize the practices of the cult. Accompanied by elaborate retinues of assistant priests, acolytes, guards and drummers, the hierarchs perform the hecatomb and the tauroboleum for the tribes they visit in a particularly lavish and unrestrained manner. These expensive and elaborate rites help to secure the prestige of the Fane and the High Priest, and gradually, a number of regional centers for Ahlat-worship are assuming a formally subservient relationship to the Fane, creating a hierarchical network over the whole of Harborhead. The Guild is only too happy to assist the cult in creating new forms of worship (for a fee), since the Cult of Ahlat is such an embarrassment to the Realm.

EXCELLENT IBIS, HIGH PRIEST OF AHLAT

A Shayanti of lean face and hard eyes, Excellent Ibis is the High Priest of the Fane of the Upswept Horns. In his early 70s, his hair has gone white, and his eyebrows are the color of ash. His ceremonial coat, made of cloth of gold, is usually stained with blood from a recent sacrifice, and he reeks of smoke and blood all the time. His mouth is usually a grim line.

Excellent Ibis replaced an outcaste Dragon-Blooded named Furious Buffalo as the high priest 18 years ago. While the Immaculate Order grudgingly tolerates many things in the Cult of Ahlat, the presence of an outcaste priest in such a highly heretical post was deeply offensive. As a result, Furious Buffalo was murdered. Excellent Ibis regards this casual murder of his patron and colleague a grievous affront, but being mortal himself, he has yet to find a way to avenge himself or his office on the Immaculate Order. For now, he keeps his opinions to himself.

As the leading religious authority in Harborhead, Excellent Ibis has worked to increase the prestige of the Fane and the high priesthood. He has spent temple funds to found schools, pilgrim hostels and hospitals and appointed their administrators based not on competence but



on personal loyalty. The result has been the creation of a creaking but functioning hierarchy loyal to the Fane rather than to local priests and shamans. The High Priest intends to die in office and to leave his successor a powerful and strong organization that can help muster the forces needed to throw off the imperial yoke.

Excellent Ibis rarely thinks about the ethnic tensions that threaten to pull Harborhead apart. He tends to regard the worship of Ahlat as the great unifier rather than a potential impetus to civil war. However, his very blindness to ethnic conflict also keeps him from making informed choices about the future. All of his six potential successors, some of whom he has been grooming for over 20 years, are Shayanti. Many of them, unknown to him, are ethnically motivated and are encouraging strife between the Five Peoples already.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Despite cultural differences, a visitor from one part of Harborhead can participate in the rites of Ahlat clear on the other side of the country and still derive some benefits from being present. Where before the rites of Ahlat were confined to the members of a single tribe, now the benefits of those rites could be extended to all in attendance. Alliances between tribes and Peoples could be cemented with ritual offerings to Ahlat. The God of Battle could reward his followers, and indeed would reward his followers, for attending his sacrifices even when they were far from home.

Then, Blood on the Horn was killed, and the Realm began attempting to stamp out the worship of Ahlat. The people of Harborhead rebelled at this. Having just discovered a force for national unity, they were reluctant to give it up, no matter how assiduously the Immaculate Order pursued and punished the priests of Ahlat. Indeed, the Empress herself noted the effect martyrdom was having on the populace — encouraging rather than discouraging revolt — and asked the Immaculate Order to back off a little when handling the Cult of the Bull God.

Seething internally with fury, the monks of the Order did let up on the cult in the last 30 years, while vigorously suppressing all of the other Hundred Gods heretical groups they could find in Harborhead. As a result, while the Cult of Ahlat lies under the cloud of official disfavor from the imperial advisors to Harborhead, the Immaculate Order has, in fact, done a marvelous job of eliminating all of the cult's principal rivals. In a vast number of circumstances in which mortals might appeal to a god for aid, those prayers ascend to Ahlat, along with the attendant sacrifice. On the other hand, with the Scarlet Empress gone, the Immaculate Order feels as though it has the opportunity to change its policies toward the cult. There have been a number of occasions recently in which monks of the Order have destroyed shrines or rounded up Ahlat's priests with little obvious long-term consequence. The abbot of the local Immaculate temple is considering launching a major offensive against the Cult of Ahlat in the next two years or so.

THE ISHADHI

The Immaculate Order's principal source of frustration and anxiety these days is the rumored existence of the Ishadhi, a messianic figure who dwells in the deep Southern reaches of Harborhead. The Ishadhi supposedly has the power to call up fire out of the earth, to send streaks of flame from his fingers and to call down meteors from the heavens. The Totikari and others in Harborhead believe him to be the Chosen Son of Ahlat, the destined replacement to Blood on the Horn. The Order has been unable to confirm his existence, much less determine whether he is an outcaste Dragon-Blooded, a God-Blooded child of Ahlat or a Solar Exalt. Attempts to hunt down the Ishadhi have all ended in failure and frustration. Sorcery and conversations with little gods have proved fruitless as well, at least so far.

What is clear is that a number of tribes from all the Peoples have sworn personal obedience to the Ishadhi and that there is a substantial personal army available to this cult leader, should he desire to assemble and use it. The Immaculate Order has made the capture of the Ishadhi and the disbanding of this army a top priority.



TRIBAL LIFE

While the population of Kirighast continues to grow, there is still a very large portion of Harborhead's population that refuses to be boxed in by the urban life of the capital. Countless more have no hope of reaching that kind of life, much less dream of refusing it. Harborhead contains many hundreds of thousands of people who continue to live entirely off of the land, whether on the veldt and the desert, in the hills, on the coastlines or in the jungle. These who still live what is called the tribal life believe themselves to be the true natives of Harborhead. Just as many of the inhabitants of Kirighast look at foreigners as rapists of their land, so do the tribespeople of Harborhead look at those who have moved into Kirighast. Needless to say, tensions run high between them.

Whether it is in the jungle or on the shifting sands of the deserts, most of the folk who live in Harborhead have adopted a similar social structure. While there are some distinct regional differences, the basic backbone is the same.

THE TRIBE

Though outsiders who notice differences between the Peoples make much of the tensions between them, in reality, the Peoples are merely general categories for defining the tribes. An individual is more likely to think of himself as a member of the Ogun tribe than as a Shayanti. The Oguns know that they are Shayanti and know which of their neighboring tribes are Shayanti and which are not. Yet, it is not the overriding identity of their lives. Their identity as Oguns dominates all other considerations. Tribal relationship, rather than identification with a People, is the overwhelming factor.

This figures into daily life in a number of ways. From a political standpoint, first of all, it is not possible to appeal to any body of Shayanti elders. One cannot issue a call for the Brakhani tribes to assemble at a mustering point and so create an army. The Totikari tribes seldom gather at a single watering hole where all of them can be persuaded to some course of action at once. Each tribe has its own body of elders, its own procedures for forming its militia and its own interests that must be met if it is to be persuaded. Dozens of tribes cannot be won over all at once. Their allegiance can only be won one at a time. The reasons for this diplomatic slowness are simple. The words "neighbor" and "enemy" in Harborhead mean much the same thing — someone likely to raid one's village, steal sisters, daughters, sons and wives to be slaves and make off with the cattle. The tribe's allies often live at some distance, rather than right next door. After all, it is hard to make cattle move fast, so the people raiding to steal them probably live close by.

IDENTITY AND GEOGRAPHY

A tribe begins as a branch of a People. Some tribes think of themselves as wholly being of one People, while others think of themselves as being the result of a fusion between two or more Peoples. It is often the case that individuals in a tribe will be culturally of one People, while being discernibly and physically of a different People. This may be due to intertribal marriages, births among slaves or any number of other causes.

A tribe is usually centered on a landmark of some local significance. This might be a place of human habitation, such as a set of terraced fields or a village, or a geographical feature, such as a particular hill or cliff, a stand of trees, a bend in a river or a harbor or waterhole. The Salty Hill Shahanzi, for example, are an Izhalti tribe who settled near a hill with a natural salt deposit. The salt provides the tribe with a considerable portion of its income, as well as over-flavoring most of its food.

A tribe usually consists of between a dozen and several hundred immediate and extended families. The families are joined to one another by kinship of marriage and blood, and the degrees of interrelation are usually quite complex. Everyone in a given tribe usually knows their ancestors back to five and sometimes six generations. Questions of whether a given marriage is a good idea can often be settled by asking the local witnesses.

Each tribe usually has one principal "village" that it regards as its own. This village may only be a dozen houses, or it may be a full-scale market town with several thousand residents. This village is home to the chief and a shrine or ceremonial space for the tribe. This may be a dancing ground with a firepit in the middle, a sweatlodge each for the men and the women, a mud-brick temple with a statue of wood or stone inside, an open-air marketplace, a hidden cave or some combination of all of these.

Once a village becomes a city (at about 10,000 free inhabitants), it usually loses its specific tribal character as it becomes an important center for other tribes. The original tribe may remain influential, but it is just as possible that an upstart tribe or a group of foreign merchants will supplant the original tribe or that an army officer will take control and establish a governor from Kirighast over the town. Part of the reason why the tribes hate urbanization so much is that it often robs them of vital political, social and religious centers, which diminishes the tribe's importance.

THE CHIEFTAINCIES

The chief, who can be a man or woman, belongs to one of the more important families in the tribe. She acts as a sponsor for a local magistracy for the inhabitants to bring legal cases to for adjudication, for a lawmaking body and

ADVENTURE SEED

Target Character Type: Dragon-Blooded, God-Blooded, Heroic Mortal, Solar

The Kuishain tribe has ruled over the village of Thorn Tree Falls for as long as their history runs, almost 400 years. Being nearly illiterate, their claims to the territory are all in the form of oral histories of their ancestors and heroes. Unfortunately, the Realm has built a road through their town, connecting Bent Creek with Kirighast, and designated Thorn Tree Falls and its bridge important enough to need a governor appointed by the Leopard Seat in Kirighast. The Kuishain are frantic to keep control of the place and are contemplating armed rebellion. The imperial advisor in the region will not brook the slightest signs of resistance. Can the Realm, the Kuishain and the government in Kirighast find a peaceful solution?

for a “big man” to lead the local militia in defense against raids. In many places, the chief has a priest, shaman or thaumaturge on her staff and often an unofficial raiding-party leader.

It is important that the chief act as the sponsor for these political and social functions, however, rather than carry out these roles herself. While she may participate in these functions, and even lead them to some degree, the chief acts as the legitimating authority. She maintains some distance from acting as a lawmaker or a warleader, so that bad or impractical policy may be repudiated. Tribes function on a practical basis — what works must take precedence over what the rules are. Life in the South is harsh, and a chief directs her whole attention, ideally, on what is good for the tribe as a whole. As a result, most chiefs practice a combination of enlightened self-interest and traditional congeniality. They never reject new ideas, but neither do they embrace them wholeheartedly. A common saying among many tribes, and phrased many ways, is “The old ways are best, except when the new way is better.”

Most tribes elect their chiefs from prominent families within the tribe. They must usually be married and often must have the means to support more than one wife. Usually they are skilled warriors but retired from active battle. Rarely are they sorcerers or men of power. The tribes do not like putting too many kinds of power into one set of hands. Sorcerers and great warriors can be members of the chief’s retinue, but they rarely rise higher.

CITY-DWELLERS

Almost since the refounding of Kirighast, the capital has felt the touch of the Realm to one degree or another. And whether it was the need in the aftermath of the first Leopard’s death to embrace something or simply the desire to continue the evolutionary process she had started, those people of Harborhead who decided to leave behind their herding ways and give up the life of a nomad for *something* else, regardless of what the else was, stayed within the limits of the city and changed. Perhaps the only difference between them and their bush brethren is in their own eyes. Certainly, the tribes that retain the old ways and practices don’t see any fundamental distinction between themselves and the city folk other than the urban-dwellers have put on airs and seem more pretentious, eager to compete and outshine the foreign element of the capitol whenever possible, though most fail. Those who live within the walls of Kirighast would and do disagree with that opinion.

Most of the indigenous natives to Harborhead who live in Kirighast do not live within the walled Imperial Garrison, a city within a city, for the simple reason that they cannot afford to. Instead, they live in houses and multi-home buildings sometimes filthier than the mud-and-dung huts of the veldt tribes. And many of these homes are in terrible need of repair, although there is little, if any, money available. Like so many, most of the city folk are living on promises of payment either for services rendered or goods sold to the Realm, and they are becoming less understanding of the excuses why that payment is still overdue.

The only inhabitants who have any ready cash are those who have direct dealings with Realm’s citizens. These people serve as organizers or bearers on expeditions into the “uncivilized” regions of Harborhead for foreigners searching for trophies, treasures or resources. Many work as household servants in the establishments of merchants and visitors, in posts where slaves cannot be trusted, but Realm citizens find too demeaning. Many maintain and care for the more exotic pets of the rich, their native expertise enlisted to keep the delicate animals alive.

While the foreigners refer to them as “guides,” those who earn their living leading groups through the jungles, deserts and veldts of Harborhead hold a tenuous position amongst their own people. Though their families and extended families are grateful for the relatively steady income, they are received in decidedly different fashions by the rest of the population. Their warrior lineage is scorned, and curses and abuse are heaped on them in the marketplace.



FOREIGN INFLUENCES

Harborhead's culture and identity is divided and subdivided in so many ways that it is difficult to track which group hates or likes another on any given day or which culture uses masks in their rites and which tribe despises anything that hides the face and eyes. Yet, for 300 years, Harborhead's Peoples have lived in contact with the Realm, their Varangian neighbors, the nomads of the deep Southern desert and foreigners from across the Summer Mountains. These contacts have both expanded and changed the points of view of many denizens of Harborhead. No one can remain free of foreign influences unless the borders are shut tightly, and the satrapy has had porous and vague frontiers for most of its history. Notions from distant lands have found their way to Harborhead from all sorts of places, and ideas have consequences that are sometimes difficult to foresee.

THE REALM

The principal source of strange ideas in Harborhead is the Realm. Being in the closest contact with Harborhead for the longest time, the Realm has brought bureaucratic wrangling to nearly everywhere in the country. Even little gods make jokes about forms filled out in triplicate or a lack of requisite seals.

The downside of this joking is that bribery and corruption are rife in the satrapy's society. From a minor inspector of an unpaved road in an unnamed village all the way up to an official standing within sight of the Leopard Seat, Harborhead officials will accept bribes. The honor of the whole country is seriously compromised in this way, in a dark mockery of the allegedly honest government of the Scarlet Empress.

VARANGIA

While the Summer Mountains and the dense jungle in its hot, humid valleys prevent much cultural invasion from the East, the western border of Harborhead is considerably more open. The city-states of Varangia, while divided and fractious, are all too aware of the vast military machine poised on their frontiers. Consequently, a great number of traders and travelers come east to Harborhead, simultaneously serving as spies for their home cities and as cultural and economic ambassadors.

The Varangians recognize that the greatest threat to their survival will come when Harborhead asks the Realm to leave and the Realm leaves voluntarily. Accordingly, the city-states have adopted a number of confusing and contradictory positions. Some city-states have resolved to foment a civil war in Harborhead, reasoning that a divided nation is unlikely to invade its



neighbors. Others have worked to fire up a rebellion, in the hopes that the Realm will crush it mercilessly. Still other city-states choose to sell all manner of commercially and personally valuable goods to the people of Harborhead, in the hopes that a wide variety of luxury goods will soften the Peoples and make them more inclined to trade rather than to invade.

All of these methods work with varying degrees of success from the point of view of the Varangians. However, each of these foreign policies has direct and ultimately measurable effects upon the Peoples of Harborhead. First, ethnic tensions are on the rise in some areas and falling in others. In other areas, armed resistance to the Realm has already begun, though it has not yet reached the awesome proportions of previous rebellions. In still other regions, a combination of urbanization and new luxury has caused many citizens to put away their old weapons and put on garments of silk or fine linen instead.

MERCHANTS

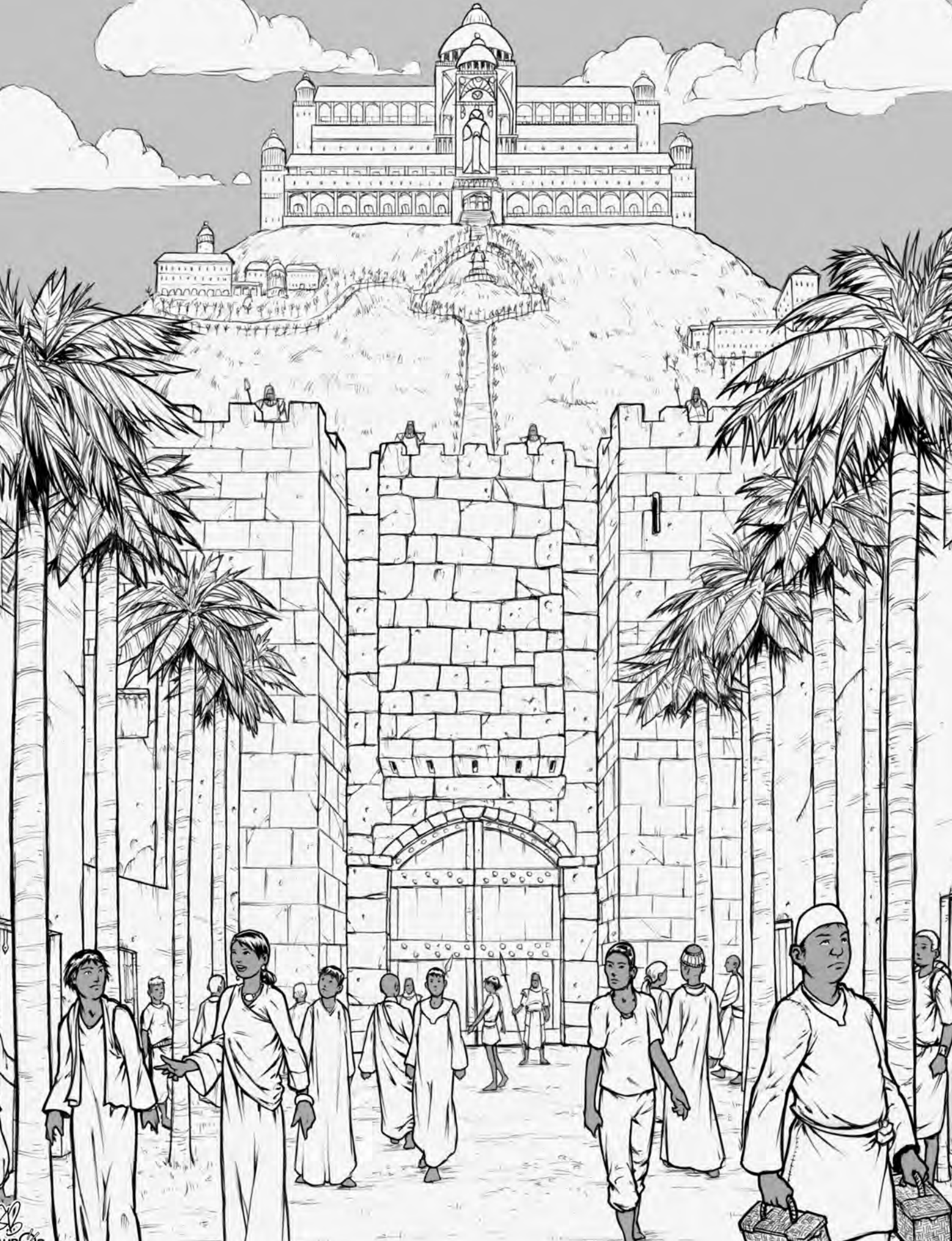
Another faction of the foreign interests living in Harborhead are merchants from the North, East or West. Initially drawn here by the lure of money from the extremely lucrative slave market, those who managed to make a life in the warlike nation were rewarded when the jade beds were discovered in Bent Creek some 40 years ago. The merchants managed to get themselves a hefty


chunk of that money, and most do not foresee ever leaving the nation. Not only do they maintain extravagant homes in Kirighast, but many have established secondary sources of income and pleasure by building and maintaining cattle ranches. The merchants believe that, by understanding and even raising the symbol of Harborhead, it will put them in touch with the people and show that they are fixtures.

Most affluent members of foreign society take part in trophy hunts and dabble in cattle. Most convince themselves that this helps to integrate them into Harborhead society and lends them insight into the culture of the place they call home. Only the most astute recognize that the activities they participate in are ones that the people of Harborhead neither have the time or the means to do. The more they attempt to fit in amongst the citizens, the more they brand themselves as interlopers.

With the lack of income an increasing problem, more and more of the indigenous people of Harborhead have started to take a closer, harder look at the paler-skinned visitors. Envy and something harder and more deadly have started to creep their way in. The natives see their foreign visitors more and more as a villainous burden, a parasite to be removed. Most foreigners have dismissed the growing dissatisfaction as a temporary setback that will be rectified as soon as the Empress returns.







CHAPTER TWO THE IMPERIAL GARRISON



For 350 years, the Realm has maintained a base of operations in Kirighast, Harborhead's capital city. Once a minor, unimportant backwater where trouble was just waiting to happen, Harborhead's importance to the Realm increased dramatically with the discovery of an incredibly rich jade supply. Since then, the Realm — and particularly the Dragon-Blooded — has taken a much greater interest in this Southern nation, falling over itself to gain some form of control.

When the Empress made Harborhead a Realm tributary in RY 418, one of the conditions was that the Realm be granted a large section of the capital city to govern as it saw fit. For the next 310 years, Harborhead was treated as little more than a backwater country, a place where officials of the Thousand Scales were sent and forgotten about. The Satrap's job was often a troublesome one, as the Harborhead natives were notorious for not paying their tribute in full and on time. Often, troops from the 47th Legion were ordered to extract the tribute from the natives by force and to repress any resulting uprisings.

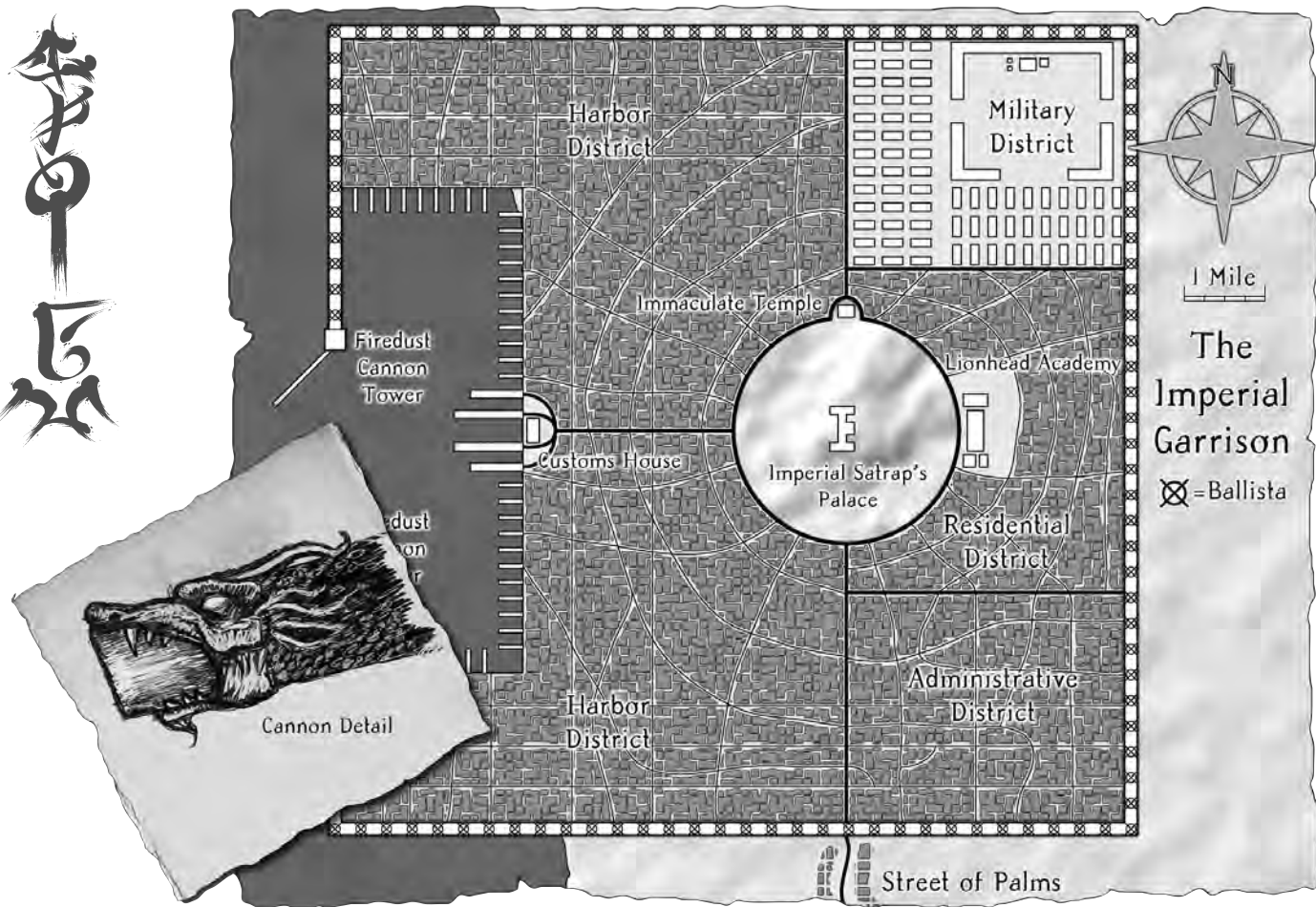
The discovery of the Bent Creek jade beds in RY 728 changed Harborhead completely. With the mass of jade flowing into the Imperial Treasury, the Empress granted Harborhead a lowered tribute level, as well as certain other concessions. Among these were more freedom to raise a standing army for self protection, as well as greater degree of freedom in self-governing.

Some of the Dragon-Blooded and senior Dynasts opposed the Empress' decision and have since watched the situation developing with great concern. They distrust the people of Harborhead, knowing the natives would prefer to throw off imperial influence and become a power in the South in their own right. The Empress overruled their objections, instead ordering them to take proper precautions to ensure that the natives stayed in their place as prescribed by the Immaculate Philosophy.

Since then, the natives have grown in military strength, and their direct worship of the gods — outside of their place in the greater order of things — has increased dramatically. Many of the Dragon-Blooded in Kirighast have become increasingly nervous with recent developments, particularly since the Empress' disappearance five years ago. They watch the situation outside the Garrison and are taking precautions to ensure its protection, and the safe evacuation of its population, if it is attacked or overrun. Some of the Dragon-Blooded, particularly those either in the 47th Legion or with ties to the military, refuse to even entertain the idea that natives could overrun the Garrison and castigate those who are planning for that eventuality as cowards.

THE GARRISON'S LAYOUT

A huge walled city within a city, the Imperial Garrison is home to over 5,000 people. Stretching over 10 square miles on the northern side of Kirighast Harbor, it covers



some of the most expensive and desirable real estate in the capital. However, the Garrison is built to be as independent of the rest of Kirighast and Harborhead as possible.

Designed by some of the best architects in the Realm at the time, the Imperial Garrison is encompassed by a huge, 30-foot-high stone wall. Spaced along the wall at 150-foot intervals are guard towers, each one fitted with a huge ballista that can fire down on any forces that might attack. The tops of the walls between the towers are all fitted with battlements, allowing archers to rain arrows down onto the enemy. The battlements extend right around the entire Garrison, allowing troops to move easily from one section to another.

The Garrison itself is divided into different districts, grouped mainly for their primary function, although there is some overlap between the regions. Dominating the center of the Garrison is Inkosintaba, the hill the Imperial Satrap's Palace sits on. Around the lower parts of the hill and stretching between the base of Inkosintaba and the Garrison's eastern wall is the Residential District. The Immaculate Order's temple is also situated at the base of Inkosintaba, directly north of the Satrap's Palace. In the northeastern corner of the Garrison are the barracks and the training and parade grounds of the 47th

Legion. South of the Military District, in the Garrison's south, is the Administrative District. Finally, on the western boundary, clustered around the harbor itself is the Harbor District.

INKOSINTABA — THE IMPERIAL SATRAP'S PALACE

The Imperial Garrison's most prominent feature is the Imperial Satrap's Palace. Ever since the Empress turned Harborhead into an imperial tributary, a satrap has lived in the palace on top of Inkosintaba, the King's Mountain. Visible from anywhere inside the Garrison, and most places throughout the rest of Kirighast itself, the Satrap's Palace stands as a stark reminder that the Realm remains in control of the country's destiny.

The Satrap's Palace is a sprawling building, made of polished white limestone carved from the quarries to the city's north. Two stories high, the upper floor has a balcony going all the way around the building, providing exquisite views of the city and the countryside for miles in every direction. Specially constructed brass telescopes are installed at strategic points around the balcony to allow visitors to get an even better view.

Mnemon Imane — one of the Realm's best Manse designers at the time — designed the palace. Its very shape and size were carefully calculated to inspire respect and desire in those who viewed it. Imane carefully studied the landscape around the Garrison and created a building that would accentuate the area's natural features but still draw onlookers' attention up toward the palace. However, because of a miscalculation on the architect's part, the Manse lies a couple of degrees off of its optimal layout. Nevertheless, the structure remains a visually striking example of early Dynastic architecture. It took the Harborhead's most skilled artisans 50 years to complete the Satrap's Palace, and it was officially opened by the Scarlet Empress herself.

The Palace is divided into two wings. The main wing is dedicated to the running of the tributary. It houses the Satrap's office, meeting rooms, the main audience chamber and a host of smaller, multipurpose chambers that allow visitors to the palace a chance to talk in private. The main wing is always bustling with people: heads of the administrative bureaus, Dragon-Bloods coming to see the Satrap, the Satrap's personal staff going about their business, couriers arriving or leaving with messages and slaves moving about maintaining the palace's appearance.

The main audience chamber takes up about half the wing's floor space and rises to the full height of the building. A balcony runs around the chamber on the upper story, with a huge marble staircase sweeping down to allow for impressive entrances. The chamber is used several times a year for the Satrap's gala dances, where the Garrison's entire Dragon-Blooded population, many of the more prominent Dynasts and some of the more influential Harborhead natives gather together for extravagant costume balls.

The second, smaller wing contains the Satrap's living quarters. Like the main wing, the residential wing is lavishly decorated. Portraits of the past heads of House Cathak and of Harborhead satraps line the walls, particularly in the hallways. A huge number of trophy heads also fill the rooms. Some are animals that the satraps have personally killed, although many — particularly those of the Harborhead's most dangerous creatures — were given to past satraps as a way of currying favor.

The current Satrap, Cathak Voper, is extremely fond of the native artwork from Harborhead and has collected many exquisite pieces, which decorate much of the palace's residential wing. Although he deplores the idolatry involved and actually feels somewhat guilty for indulging his passion for it, he nevertheless appreciates the craftsmanship involved.

The palace grounds cover 50 acres, which slaves keep immaculately groomed at all times. Huge beds of flowers and shrubs provide a breathtaking display of natural color. Trees carefully sculpted into the symbols of the Five Elemental Dragons line the paths that wind their way

through the gardens. A huge water feature also attracts birds to the garden, to the delight of the Satrap's wife, who often spends hours in the gardens studying and painting the creatures.

A high, double stone wall surrounds the estate, making it nearly impossible to enter without coming through the main gate. Each of the walls is 12 feet high and topped with sharpened iron spearheads. The walls are 15 feet apart, with a 10-foot-deep ditch dug between them. The main gate is constantly guarded by one of the 47th Legion's talons. The soldiers identify all guests arriving to visit the Satrap before the visitors are allowed to proceed up to the palace itself. While this tends to fray the Dragon-Blooded's tempers, the Satrap nevertheless insists on proper security procedures, especially now, with the increased tensions with the natives.

CATHAK VOPER, THE SATRAP OF HARBORHEAD

Description: Appointed to his post by Cathak Cainan seven years ago, Cathak Voper has exemplified himself as satrap during his term. A shrewd financial manager and a staunch believer in the Immaculate Philosophy, Voper has managed to keep things in Harborhead under control — but only just.

Cathak Voper is a tall, strong man in his late 50s. His dark hair is turning a deep shade of blue as he ages, as is his meticulously trimmed beard. His most dramatic feature is his intense dark blue eyes, with which he transfixes people when he is talking to them. He has a deep voice but normally remains soft spoken, which can sometimes lull people into a more relaxed state than they'd intended. However, when he shouts in anger, the force in his voice shocks most people who hear it.

Voper is an Air-pected Dragon-Blooded from one of the strongest families in House Cathak. All through his



primary schooling at the Chestnut School in Juche, Voper showed all the signs of his Dragon-Blooded heritage: He was strong, fast and highly intelligent. When he Exalted during a mathematics exam, it only strengthened the belief of many of his teachers that he was destined for great things.

With the chance to rise to the top of the Realm's society, Voper was determined to make himself the best citizen he could be. His parents enrolled him at the Golden Band Institute, where he studied economics and politics. Voper pushed himself to the limits of his endurance and was rewarded with exceptionally good marks. He graduated second in his class, forever earning the hatred of several other Dragon-Blooded students.

Cathak Voper joined the Thousand Scales directly after school and made an immediate impact. He possessed an extraordinary talent for economics, using his highly trained intuition to predict which way the market was heading. In fact, he was so successful that many of his enemies suggested he must have been getting outside — or even supernatural — assistance. Although nothing was ever proven, his Dragon-Blooded enemies still perpetuate these rumors to discredit him.

After succeeding in a string of increasingly difficult and more prominent appointments, he was eventually appointed Harborhead satrap. Cathak Cainan made quite certain that Voper knew what was expected of him. The tributary was showing increasing signs of defiance to the Realm, and Voper was instructed to get the natives under control again.

The assignment has been the hardest of Voper's career. With the entrenched corruption in the local administration often requiring the natives to pay more than twice the proper tribute, he is not surprised they are outraged about it. Voper finds himself getting frustrated more often than he would like, and he finds himself taking his frustration out on the serving staff and slaves, something very unlike him.

Voper is a staunch believer in the Immaculate Philosophy. His faith in the divine nature of the Dragon-Blooded is unshakable, and everything he does in his duty as satrap comes from that faith. He spends at least an hour every morning in meditation and attends a service at the temple every week. He meets daily with Cathak Katuf, the oldest of the Exalts in Kirighast, who advises the Satrap on policy directions and how to handle some of the more belligerent bureau heads. Voper regularly takes counsel from the senior Immaculate monks and often delays making important decisions until after he has had a chance to confer with the Abbot on matters related to the Immaculate Philosophy.

Cathak Voper meets with Leopard Oshom Kurgaz at least once a week. The two sit in the Satrap's office and talk over tea and a game of Gateway. Voper has a deep love for Harborhead, finding the harsh natural beauty of the coun-

try strangely alluring. This has given him some common ground with the Leopard, and the pair have formed a strong friendship, despite the political difficulties between their two cultures. They discuss the Immaculate Philosophy at length and look for ways to bring the two cultures closer together.

However, Cathak Voper is under no illusions about the rightful place of Harborhead in the greater scheme of things. It is still a tributary to the Realm, and he continues to treat it as such. One of the few strained issues between Voper and the Leopard is the matter of tribute payments. Voper insists that his accountants' calculations are completely correct and that if they tell him that the natives have not paid the correct tribute, he believes them. The Leopard, on the other hand, maintains that the Realm is squeezing his people too hard and that they are starting to resent it.

Voper's wife — Tepet Berel Halase, an Air-pected Dragon-Blooded — shares Voper's unshakable belief in the Immaculate Philosophy. Halase occupies much of her time doing missionary work among the natives, trying to get them to understand the proper scheme of things. She often spends her mornings meditating on the Philosophy with her husband and *always* attends the services at the temple with him. Like her husband, Halase has a deep love of the country and, in particular, the native bird life. She regularly takes trips out of Kirighast — accompanied by a large protective force — to indulge in her passion for bird watching.

Aspect: Air

Nature: Architect

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 2, Temperance 4, Valor 2

Abilities: Archery 2, Awareness 4, *Bureaucracy 5, Dodge 4, Endurance 2, *Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Firetongue, Forest-Tongue, Low Realm, Riverspeak) 4, *Lore 3, Martial Arts 2, Melee 4, Performance 3, *Presence 4, Resistance 2, Ride 3, *Socialize 3, *Thrown 3
* Aspect or Favored Ability

Backgrounds: Artifact 4, Breeding 3, Connections 5, Influence 5, Manse 4, Resources 4, Reputation 4

Charms: Benevolent Master's Blessing, Confluence of Savant Thought, Elemental Concentration Trance, Geese-Flying-South Administration, Glowing Coal Radiance, Language-Learning Ritual, Loquacious Courtier Technique, Loyal Weapon, Ox-Body Technique, Persistent Hornet Attack, Poisoned Tongue Technique, Seeking Throw Technique, Stoking Bonfire Style, Thousand Tongues Meditation, Threshold Warding Stance, Unbearable Taunt Technique, Voice of Mastery

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 6 Damage 3B Defense 6
 Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 5 Damage 5B Defense 5
 Jade Daiklave (Vengeful Thunder): Speed 13 Accuracy 10
 Damage 8L Defense 10
 Chakram: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 4L (Rate 3, Range 20)
Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 13L/17B (Jade articulated
 plate, 12L/14B, -2 mobility penalty)
Willpower: 6 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-
 4/Incap
Essence: 4
Personal Essence: 13 **Peripheral Essence:** 22 (33)
Committed Essence: 11
Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT**Attack:**

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 3B Defense 8 Rate 5
 Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 7 Damage 6B Defense 3 Rate 3
 Jade Daiklave (Vengeful Thunder): Speed 17 Accuracy 11
 Damage 9L Defense 10 Rate 5

THE RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

With the Imperial Garrison the home for more than 5,000 people, space for housing is always a problem. Like many of the other cities in the empire, there is a great discrepancy between the lifestyles of the rich and the poor. While many Dragon-Blooded have huge estates within

the city, most of the city's peasants live in cramped, dilapidated conditions.

The Garrison's Residential District occupies the eastern side of the city. The magnificent walled compounds of the Dragon-Blooded, the Garrison's most expensive real estate, are clustered around the lower slopes of Inkosintaba. Most of the city's patricians live in relative comfort in modest suburbs that occupy the majority of the Residential District. In the northeastern corner, built up against — and in some cases into — the Garrison's outer walls are the lower class and slave hovels.

THE DRAGON-BLOODED ESTATES

With the possible exception of the Imperial Satrap's Palace and the Immaculate temple, the Dragon-Blooded estates are perhaps the most impressive buildings in Kirighast. Huge edifices of carved sandstone or limestone, the estates are as individual and eccentric as their owners.

All the estates have several things in common. All of them — like the Satrap's Palace — are walled, multi-acre properties, with elaborate, well-maintained gardens. The mansions built there are huge, ostentatious buildings designed to flaunt the owner's wealth as much as they are a home. They are also all maintained by a slave workforce. As Harborhead is one of the best slaving markets in the South, slave labor is cheap.

Most of the 54 Dragon-Blooded living in Harborhead own estates in the Garrison. Twelve are part of the 47th



Legion and live at the barracks, and another 10 are Immaculate monks living at the temple. The remaining 32 have different-sized estates, each one mirroring its owner's eccentricities.

The largest belongs to Cathak Katuf. Katuf has acted as the senior advisor to the various satraps since the Empress made Harborhead a tributary. Katuf is over 500 years old now and is looking forward to retiring. Katuf had his 30-acre estate heavily forested with pine trees to match his Wood Aspect, preferring his artificially created wilderness to the starkness of the city. His mansion, however, is among the most impressive in the city, with vines and flowering plants growing all over it, transforming it into a huge hanging garden.

House Cynis' chief slave trader in Kirighast, Cynis Rubib, maintains a modestly sized estate close to the edge of the Harbor District. Rubib, like Vecos and many others in House Cynis, enjoys the hedonistic lifestyle and makes up for his lack of land with an overabundance of opulence. His mansion is luxuriously appointed, and Rubib keeps more house slaves than any of the other Dragon-Blooded in Kirighast. Rubib delights in using slaves for his own enjoyment. In fact, he maintains a gladiatorial arena in one corner of his estate and hosts weekly fights there mostly for his own enjoyment, although he is happy to invite many of his friends to also enjoy the combats. Rubib also maintains a harem of attractive slaves of both sexes, and he usually takes two or more to bed with him every night.

Like Rubib, Cynis Vecos also has a hedonistic lifestyle, but her tastes are far more cultured than her relative's. Vecos, the owner of the Elegant Lotus brothel in the Harbor District, is one of Kirighast's largest patrons of the fine arts. Vecos' estate reflects her tastes, with great attention paid to detail in the landscaping and garden design, which beautifully complements her mansion. The main feature of the estate is the amphitheater, where her personal orchestra performs at least twice a month during the warmer part of the year. Vecos also sponsors performances of the latest plays (she is especially fond of tragedies) and recitals of ancient poetry.

Cathak Jocas' estate matches his flamboyant and ostentatious personality. The deputy head of the Humble and Upright Collectors of Taxes and Tribute has spent a small fortune in jade on "improving" his estate. His mansion is crowded with art and trophies — many of which he has purchased rather than earned — as another way of trying to show how important he is. Jocas likes to flaunt his wealth and regularly throws galas for most of the important people in Kirighast. Despite this, most of the other Dragon-Blooded think he's a fool and would rather see the back of him.

The small estate of Cathak Qenita reflects her time as part of the Northern legions. Now the head of the Humble and Upright Collectors of Taxes and Tribute,

she has set up her estate grounds to allow her to train in the martial arts in privacy. Qenita has little time for extravagance, preferring to fill her estate with deadly traps and obstacles to allow her to push her skill to the limit. Her house is sparsely decorated, apart from one room that she uses to keep all her souvenirs from the Northern campaigns. The room also serves as a shrine to the memory of her comrades in the Northern Legion who fell in battle with the barbarians.

Peleps Nostro also maintains a small estate, although he rarely spends time there. Preferring to maintain the lifestyle he had while serving in the imperial navy for over 150 years, his house's interior looks more like the inside of a ship than it does a mansion. Nostro expects his household to run the same way as his old command: with clockwork precision. His servants keep the house in immaculate condition, with the timber oiled and the brass fittings polished. Nostro occasionally holds dinners at his estate, but he is not known for his hospitality.

Like Cathak Jocas, Cynis Tazakes — the corrupt head of the Honorable and Precise Division of Auditing and Accountability — invested some of his ill-gotten gains in an ornate estate. Although only about 20 acres in size, it has been packed with all sorts of captured animals, both from Harborhead and from other places in the Threshold. Tazakes takes great delight in torturing and mutilating the animals for sport, enjoying the ability to hunt them in the confines of his own land without the need for the protective details required for the annual great hunts. He is also fond of letting some of the predators loose on the grounds and releasing slaves for them to catch while he watches from the balcony of his mansion.

One of the few members of the 47th Legion to maintain his own estate, Sesus Chefos — the head of the guard detachment protecting the Imperial Treasury Store in the Harbor District — prefers his private estate to the more Spartan accommodations of the legion's barracks. Chefos often hosts expensive dinners for his fellow legion officers and maintains one of the largest wine cellars in the country (second only to the cellars of V'neef Jegan's vineyard estate 30 miles outside of Kirighast).

The smallest of the Garrison estates belongs to Peleps V'odap. V'odap is an admiral in the imperial navy and is out to sea with his fleet most of the time. However, he docks in Harborhead often enough that he maintains a modest estate in the Garrison where he and the other senior officers stay when they dock. The estate is only five acres in size, with a large brick mansion built at the center. If V'odap is in town, then the house is a hive of activity, as the Admiral hosts dinners and small galas. The remainder of the time, his staff maintains the house in pristine order, as though the Admiral could return at any minute.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHERS?

Only a small number of the Dragon-Blooded estates have been mentioned. Not all of the Dragon-Blooded in Kirighast own estates inside the Garrison. Some live on larger properties out in the country, using their land for grazing thousands of head of cattle or for extensive vineyards. A few — such as Cathak Sevan, the head of the Infallible Couriers' cryptography cell — keep only a modest apartment in the Residential District and devote all their time to their work.

Not all the Dragon-Blooded in Kirighast are permanent residents. Some are simply adventuring and spending their time on extended stays in the country, enjoying their relations' hospitality, going on hunts and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

This allows the Storyteller to create characters with estates to match their stories. It also gives the players' characters a chance to have their own estates in the Garrison and to be part of the active social calendar. Purchasing an estate in the Garrison requires Resources ••••, and maintaining it in top condition requires a constant investment of at least Resources ••• every month.

THE SUBURBS

The bulk of the Garrison's citizens are unExalted Dynasts or patricians who work in one of the eight bureaus of the Thousand Scales in Harborhead, or they help to run the many small businesses in the capital. The bulk of the Residential District is made up of their townhouses and apartment complexes, and the streets are usually filled with people moving to and from their workplaces.

Many of the townhouses in the district date back to the time that the Empress made Harborhead one of the Realm's tributaries. Once House Cathak won control of Harborhead, it quickly moved several thousand people into the country to help administer the tribute's collection. The houses in the district were built quickly using local labor and materials. Consequently, the houses have a distinctly native feel about them. Many have thatched roofs and walls made from timber planking that has been rendered with a mud and cement mix.

Most of the houses are two or three stories each and terraced together, with neighbors sharing a common wall between their two dwellings. Each house typically consists of a living area, a kitchen and an eating area downstairs, with bedrooms upstairs.

Life in the suburbs is usually quite comfortable. Food — particularly beef and wheat — is plentiful in Harborhead,

and there are many shops spread throughout the suburbs to allow the population to buy food easily, without having to travel for miles to the markets outside the Garrison. Scores of teahouses and inns are also scattered throughout the suburbs, with no one usually needing to walk more than four blocks to find a teahouse. These teahouses form the hub of the patrician's social world, with most of the adults gathering in their local one every evening for several hours of drinking and gossip.

Friendly rivalries have sprung up between the suburbs over the years. While these rivalries rarely descend into physical violence, members of neighboring suburbs often taunt each other on the streets and sometimes even play practical jokes on one another (such as blocking main roads with loads of yeddim manure in the middle of the night). Sporting events, such as games of football, are common between the suburbs and usually draw large crowds of vocal spectators cheering on their side and taunting their opponents.

Not a great deal of planning went into the district's layout, which has resulted in a tangled mess of streets. There are many narrow alleys and dead ends that resulted from houses being built either too close to one another or being built over the end of some streets when there was a shortage of real estate. This is particularly evident close to the Garrison's main wall, near to the slave hovels. These dark places often become home to drifters and escaped slaves who manage to eke out an existence on the scraps and leftovers of others. The local Black Helm detachment periodically tries to clean out the homeless, without much success.

ADVENTURE SEED

Target Character Type: Dragon-Blooded, Heroic Mortal

A wave of murders has struck in some of the poorer suburbs over the past few months. Mutilated corpses of both sexes have been discovered in some of the back alleys. No one has seen anything, but dozens of rumors are circulating blaming the killings on everything from the Anathema to disgruntled spirits to an escaped slave or a rogue native to even some of the Dragon-Blooded who are looking for something new to distract them from their indulgent lifestyles.

The residents are living in fear and have taken to traveling in groups after dark and making sure that at least one of them is armed at all times. Despite the Black Helms investigating, no leads have arisen, and those investigating are having trouble coming up with a motive for the killings.



THE SLAVE HOVELS

When the Residential District was laid out, little thought was given to where the slaves were going to live. When the Garrison was first established, the slaves were forced to live outside the walls, returning before dawn every morning to commence their duties. However, many people found that the slaves grew lazy and, as they needed to travel several miles before starting work, were normally late every day as a result.

To correct this problem, some of the slaves started building hovels along the inside of the Garrison's wall on the extremities of the Residential District. These huts were made from whatever materials the slaves could salvage, often just mud and woven grass brought in from the fields outside the city. Over time, other slaves started building on top of the construction of others, and the hovels grew up the wall, as well as spreading out along it.

Life for the slaves is hard. Each hovel usually consists of only a single room, without any sort of furnishings. Sanitation is functional, albeit very basic, and some enterprising slaves have begun collecting night waste from their general areas and carting it away for a small fee. Fresh water and food needs to be carted in by hand, and both are in fairly short supply.

THE LIONHEAD ACADEMY

One of the best primary schools outside of the Blessed Isle, the Lionhead Academy still suffers from its location. Despite having incredibly high academic standards and producing students with excellent training in many areas, the academy is still looked upon as a second-rate institution by the Dynasty.

Situated on a 30-acre estate close to the base of Inkosintaba, the academy's grounds are surrounded by a huge granite wall. This wall prevents the students from seeing the rest of the city apart from the Satrap's palace at the top of the mountain, supposedly to remove any distractions the city might pose for the students.

The school consists of two main buildings: the school itself and the accommodation block. Each building has five two-story wings arranged as a star expanding out from a central hub, with the teaching block being marginally larger than the accommodation block. The red brick and sandstone building is meticulously maintained at all times. While the school does have a permanent maintenance staff, the students are expected to help maintain the school facilities as part of their chores.

Modeled after the Chestnut School, the Lionhead Academy is designed to train its pupils for a life as part of the Thousand Scales. Although there are classes on martial arts, the arts and philosophy, the emphasis is firmly placed on the classes in the sciences — particularly mathematics, politics, government and administration. All of the teachers spent years practicing in their fields before joining the academy staff.

Students are expected to maintain an extremely high standard of academic excellence, far higher than many of the schools on the Blessed Isle. This stems from the school's desire to be seen as among the best of the schools in the Realm, rather than just a second-rate institution. Still, the Satrap and all the Dragon-Blooded continue to send their offspring to more prestigious schools back on the Blessed Isle, despite constant petitioning from the school's administrators.

ADVENTURE SEED

Target Character Type: Abyssal, Dragon-Blooded, Heroic Dead, Heroic Mortal, Lunar, Sidereal, Solar

A recent field trip for senior class members to study the Harborhead wildlife has gone horribly wrong. Their protector, Sesus Treshus, was mortally wounded by a desert basilisc. Although he killed the creature before it could kill the children, he died shortly thereafter. Since then, the children have been wandering the veldt and are completely lost. Leopards have taken three of them, and the rest have holed up in a small cave.

For Dragon-Blooded and Realm-aligned heroic mortals, the children need to be found and brought back alive. It's also possible that one of the children may Exalt while protecting the others.

For the other Exalted types, this situation provides an opportunity to get some leverage over the Dragon-Blooded.

THE 47TH LEGION AND THE MILITARY DISTRICT

The northeastern corner of the Imperial Garrison is the home of the Imperial 47th Legion, which House Cathak has funded and controlled since the Empress' disappearance five years ago. Unlike many of the other legions when they were taken over by the Great Houses, the 47th has actually *improved* under House Cathak's control. This is mainly due to the extra discipline instilled by General Cathak Lazera, whom Cathak Cainan put in charge of the legion. Lazera is a veteran of dozens of wars and quickly set about whipping the legion into fighting form.

THE 47TH LEGION

The 47th Legion has a long tradition in Harborhead. It was originally deployed to Kirighast when the Scarlet Empress made Harborhead a tributary of the Realm. Its mission was then as it is today — to protect the Realm's interests in the country, to protect the Satrap and to ensure that the natives pay the correct and proper amount of tribute.

Prior to the Cathak takeover, the 47th Legion had earned a reputation for lax discipline and corruption. Things deteriorated even more after jade was discovered at Bent Creek, with many of the legion's officers taking bribes, often claiming some of the tribute they were supposed to be collecting. When House Cathak assumed responsibility of the legion at the Celebration of the Seven Shattered Helms, one of the first things Cathak Cainan did was to put Lazera in charge, replacing General Tepet Tilis Rajin, who had personally claimed much of the missing jade.

Rajin and dozens of other senior officers were court-martialed in accordance with *The Thousand Correct Actions of the Upright Soldier* and found guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer. All of them were executed in front of the whole legion, with Cathak Lazera personally beheading Tepet Tilis Rajin. Lazera then explained to the assembled troops that the 47th Legion was to regain its position as one of the premier legions of the Realm, ready to defend the Empress' wishes, under the instructions given through House Cathak.

Since then, Lazera has continuously drilled the legion to improve both its discipline and its fighting skills. Lazera regularly sends detachments out on maneuvers throughout the entirety of Harborhead. These exercises not only give the troops a chance to practice their skills, but they also allow the officers to get firsthand experience of the land itself, as well as impressing on the natives that the legion is the strongest military power in the country and that any uprising will be met with the harshest possible force.

Lazera has little time for the natives. He is disgusted with their heresies and would prefer that the legion remain vigilant for any sign of them preparing to attack the Garrison. He knows of their increasing militancy and both he and his senior officers are working with the Benevolent and Knowledgeable Office of Native Affairs to gather intelligence on the natives' motives. This information is used to determine the different rotations of the legion's men out into the field, ensuring that the most likely trouble spots have troops deployed to them as quickly as possible.

The 47th Legion is not at its full strength. Cost cutbacks have reduced the infantry troop numbers to around 3,500. Rather than jeopardize the strength of each unit, House Cathak simply mothballed one dragon of heavy infantry and two dragons of medium infantry. The numbers of light infantry and missile troops have also been cut to three dragons, with a larger reduction in the number of support staff. The troops are now expected to do more with less money, and most of them have been forced to assume the duties of the auxiliary staff without a reduction in the active duties they are supposed to perform. This state of affairs has affected the troops' morale, but they continue with their duties, as complainers are severely punished as an example to others.



47th Legion

THE BARRACKS

The Military District is spread out over nearly one-eighth of the total area of the Imperial Garrison. The barracks house only about a quarter of the legion at any one time, with the rest out on exercise or deployed to other garrisons throughout the country.

With so many troops in close confinement, the barracks is quite cramped. Scattered around the compound are dozens of rendered brick accommodation blocks, each one, two or three stories high with a thatched roof. The troops are quartered 10 to a room, with only a bed and a footlocker for furniture. The unExalted officers have slightly more luxurious quarters, with each only two to a room. Dragon-Blooded officers are given their own apartments and usually employ several servants to clean and maintain their weapons and armor.

In the center of the compound is the grassed parade ground. It is here that, once a week, Cathak Lazera holds a parade and personally inspects all the troops that are currently stationed in the barracks. The troops spend hours in preparation for these parades, cleaning and polishing their weapons and armor. As a means of encouraging higher performance, Lazera grades each of the scales on their dress and drill performance, with the lower-scoring scales being assigned additional duties and reduced leave during the coming week.

Around the rest of the compound are training arenas and obstacle courses. These are constantly in use during the day, as the troops continue to train to ensure they are at peak efficiency when out in the field. The compound is consequently quite noisy, as the troops call cadence as they double time from one training area to the next.

At the cardinal corners of the compound and in its very center are shrines dedicated to the Five Elemental Dragons. As part of their training, all troops are expected to spend at least a portion of their time in prayer and meditation. Normally, whole fangs, and sometimes scales, will pray together, making it into a formal part of their daily routine.

THE LEGION'S DUTIES

The 47th Legion is responsible for the Imperial Garrison's defense and the maintenance of law and order. Each of the wings stationed in the legion's barracks is rostered onto guard duties at different times during the week. The troops patrol the Garrison's battlements day and night, ensuring that the citizens can feel safe in their homes.

Those troops not stationed in Kirighast are expected to patrol certain sections of the countryside, conducting drills and exercises as they do so. One of their secondary functions is to feed intelligence on the natives' military forces (including their numbers, positions and general state of readiness) back to the General Staff in the capital.

The legion's other main duty is to help to collect the natives' tribute. The troops work in conjunction with forces

from the Humble and Upright Collectors of Taxes and Tribute, using as much force as necessary to collect the tribute. At times, this has come to turning everyone from their homes and putting the village to the torch for failing to pay the correct amount of tribute. At times, the legion's troops have had to fight against armed resistance units, who have tried to protect the villages. When this has happened in the past — and it is beginning to happen with increasing frequency — the troops have captured as many of the resistance fighters as they could and executed them in front of the rest of the village as an example. However, with the increased military prowess shown by many native units, the legion is beginning to suffer casualties in these skirmishes.

DRAGON-BLOODED OFFICERS

At present, there are 10 Exalted officers serving with the 47th Legion. Most of these are Dragon-Bloods from the Great Houses, particularly House Cathak. With the exception of Cathak Lioun, who only graduated from the House of Bells four years ago, all of them have only been serving with the 47th Legion since House Cathak assumed control of it five years ago. However, they have all been serving with different legions for well over a century, with more than a millennium of active military duty between them. All of them are experts on both strategy and small-unit tactics and could all ably lead the legion's forces if Cathak Lazera should ever fall in combat.

There are also three outcaste Dragon-Blooded officers serving with the Legion. All three were "lost egg" outcastes, natives of Harborhead who Exalted without warning. All three have only junior officer ranks, and despite being among the most successful in combat and the most popular officers with the troops, they are distrusted by the other Exalted officers. None of them expects to rise above the rank of captain within the legion, a fact that angers all three.

ADVENTURE SEED

Target Character Type: Dragon-Blooded, Heroic Mortal

Two of the "lost egg" Dragon-Blooded officers in the 47th Legion have recently discovered the location of the Beast of Resplendent Liquids that the Guild keeps in the Harborhead region (see *Manacle and Coin*, p. 50). They know a war with the Harborhead natives is brewing and believe this is a perfect opportunity to raid and capture the beast. When the war begins, the two plan on deserting and making their way to the beast's location. They are concerned they don't have enough firepower and are quietly looking for a few more trustworthy conspirators who are interested in sharing in a cut of the profits should the beast be captured.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT

The Imperial Garrison exists primarily to support the operations of the Thousand Scales in Harborhead. Half of the Garrison's population works for the Scales, enforcing the Realm's policies and keeping track of the administrative minutiae required to keep the city functioning.

The administration in Harborhead technically reports to the Wise and Knowledgeable Advisors of Foreign Tributaries on the Blessed Isle. However, almost since the Imperial Garrison was established, the Harborhead administrators have fought to retain their autonomy from the parent organization. Directions from the main office in the Imperial City are routinely ignored or simply shunted around from bureaucrat to bureaucrat, rather than read and acted upon.

The Thousand Scales' administrative operations are broken down into eight separate bureaus. In keeping with the tradition of the Thousand Scales, the bureaus have a considerable degree of overlap, leading to all manners of inefficiencies. In addition to the bureaus, the All-Seeing Eye maintains a strong presence in Harborhead, ensuring that the Realm's citizens do not fall victim to the god worshipping heresies so rife in the area.

THE HUMBLE AND UPRIGHT COLLECTORS OF TAXES AND TRIBUTE

The job of collecting the tribute from the Harborhead natives falls to the Humble and Upright Collectors of Taxes and Tribute. Its members travel throughout the country, collecting the jade from the natives and bringing it back to the Imperial Garrison in Kirighast for counting.

The Upright Collectors have recently had a change in leadership. One of the brides of Ahlat assassinated the old leader, Ledaal Bekat, when he personally stepped in to assist one of his collectors who was having trouble with a particular village. Because of the increasing level of violence against the collectors, Cathak Qenita — a Fire-aspected Dragon-Blood and a survivor of the fight against the Northern barbarians — was sworn in to ensure that the level of tribute being demanded is actually collected. Qenita, a brave and dangerous warrior in her own right, has created a martial training routine for her collectors that mimics the training that she used to put her troops through in the Northern legions.

Since the Empress' disappearance, House Cathak has gradually increased the amount of tribute it expects the natives to pay. The Harborheadites are increasingly angry about this and often simply refuse to pay. This results in the collectors resorting to more extreme measures in order to raise the necessary amount of jade: they capture people and put them into slavery, confiscate livestock and crops and raze villages to set examples. This behavior sometimes backfires on the collectors, who find other villages are

even *less* willing to hand over their tribute when they hear that their neighboring village was destroyed. Rather than see that happen to their own village, the native warriors are more inclined to fight than ever.

The 47th Legion often operates in support of the Upright Collectors. Even though the Upright Collectors have become a paramilitary force in their own right under Cathak Qenita's leadership, they often need military support when dealing with the more obstinate of villages. With the legion's troops at their disposal for protection and legal enforcement, huge numbers of villages are forced into submission. This has really only increased the native's resentment, bringing the situation close to boiling over.

Once the tribute is collected, it is brought back to the Upright Collectors' office in the Garrison for counting and auditing. In recent years, House Cathak has been siphoning off a much greater percentage of the tribute for its own uses, greatly reducing the amount being paid to the Imperial Treasury. The accounting section fiddles the numbers to make it appear as though the natives are not paying the full amount of tribute, necessitating the collectors to force the natives to pay even more. Most of the accountants also skim some for their own personal use.

The bureau's policy explicitly places its staff above reproach. The employees are all hand picked by the senior management for their "honesty, loyalty and integrity." When a tribute shortfall is detected, the investigating officers simply assume that the error lies outside the bureau and that any receipts produced to prove otherwise are all forgeries. The investigators — for their part in covering up the embezzlement — are paid a cut of the stolen tribute.


The entrenched corruption reaches nearly to the very top of the bureau. The middle managers claim a sizeable percentage of the stolen jade from the account clerks as protection money, to ensure that the racket is kept quiet. The senior managers right up through the hierarchy — including the Upright Collectors' deputy head, Cathak Jocas — claim the same from their immediate subordinates, in a giant pyramid scheme.

Cathak Jocas, despite being the deputy head of one of the most important bureaus in Harborhead, is an incredibly lazy man, with little self-discipline. Jocas spends much of his days wasting his ill-earned gains at the Elegant Lotus (see "Bars and Teahouses," p. 61). Jocas believes he is in love with the Lotus' owner, Cynis Vecos, and tries on a weekly basis to woo her. His obsession is costing him a fortune in jade, but he considers it money well spent, particularly if it will net him a bride as attractive as Vecos.

THE BLESSED OFFICE OF GARRISON OVERSIGHT

The Blessed Office of Garrison Oversight runs the Imperial Garrison itself. This duty includes the maintenance of all roads, public buildings and gardens within the Garrison's walls. To much of the population, including





most of those who work in the Administrative District, the Office is the least of the administrative bureaus in Harborhead. The staff does take a great deal of pride in their work, however, and knows that its service is vital.

Much of the Office staff are actually tradesmen who tend to the Garrison's physical necessities.

The Office is currently run by Cathak Luvek, a former student of the Gournay Academy who later washed out of the Spiral Academy. Luvek's family treated the unExalted Dynast as a failure and sent him to Kirighast to get rid of him. Because of his artistic skill, he landed a job at the Blessed Office of Garrison Oversight, and over the past 10 years, he has shown an amazing degree of talent and political ability to rise to the top of the bureau.

Luvek's view is that the Garrison itself is a work of art, and through careful maintenance and planning — when combined with a humble attitude of servitude — it can continue to be so, improving the lives of everyone who lives or visits there. Luvek is a skilled motivator and is able to get his staff to buy into his vision and accept his methods. By always being somewhat self-deprecating and almost vague, Luvek is able to get people to trust him without a lot of effort. Because of his position with the Office, he has a reputation for being willing to help with any sort of catering or maintenance task that needs doing, including many that would normally circumvent building regulations or would breach import restrictions. Luvek keeps careful records of everything that he does for people, however, and is not above calling in a favor when it suits him.

The Blessed Office of Garrison Oversight has recently been charged with coming up with a suitable and effective plan to evacuate the Garrison in the event of war with the Harborhead natives. The task was Luvek's idea, following a conversation with the Satrap. Cathak Voper mentioned in passing his concern about the nation's rising militancy and how he was worried about what would happen to the Garrison if a native uprising broke out. Luvek took it upon himself to create a contingency plan for the Garrison's evacuation.

Many of the Dragon-Blooded, as well as anyone with links to the 47th Legion, believe that evacuation is impossible and unnecessary. Most ridicule Luvek publicly, calling him a coward and accusing him of wasting public money on fantasies. They believe that the Harborhead natives would be insane to attack the Realm, even if they had a numerical superiority. Luvek ignores these barbs, knowing that a properly conceived and executed plan will save thousands of lives and earn him much in the way of political favors. So far, he and his team have formulated plans to safely evacuate most of the woman and children and are working on ways to fortify the Garrison further in the event of siege to allow for ships to return to pick up the remaining population. Luvek himself has spent a great deal of time with Peleps Nostro, the Garrison's chief pilot, studying shipping records and making careful note of the

threats to shipping in event of war. Luvek is grateful for the old sailor's assistance, and the two have become reasonably good friends.

THE RELENTLESS AND PUNCTUAL PURVEYORS OF TRANSPORTATION

With a country as large as Harborhead, there is often a problem moving both people and goods around quickly and efficiently. The office of the Punctual Purveyors was established to oversee transportation within Harborhead, ensuring that regularly scheduled transportation was available to help facilitate commerce and tax collection and providing personal transports for the Dragon-Blooded who either live permanently in Harborhead or simply have reason to visit occasionally.

The bulk of the Punctual Purveyors' work revolves around the trade caravans that run between the various outposts and towns throughout Harborhead. They own hundreds of yeddim, as well as other pack animals such as donkeys and camels. The Purveyors run caravans between the Realm interests in Harborhead — and even some of the neighboring countries — in an attempt to undercut the Guild's operations wherever possible.

When necessary, the Purveyors' wagon trains are seconded to support the actions of the 47th Legion. Troops and supplies need to move throughout the land quickly and efficiently, something that the Purveyors do moderately well. When the legion's talons are in the field, the wagon trains shuttle food, water and other necessary supplies back and forth to ensure the fighting force remains at peak efficiency.

The Punctual Purveyors detest the Guild's presence in Harborhead. They run caravans in the same way, which often puts the two's interests at loggerheads. On more than one occasion, the antagonism between the two groups has led directly to brawls at rest stops. The Purveyors have deliberately copied the Guild's methods, particularly when it comes to shipping goods, as they are tested and effective.

However, the Purveyors have suffered a bout of budget cutbacks in recent times. The income from the trading missions has been falling steadily in recent years, particularly in areas where the natives have rearmed and are beginning to look on the Realm as invaders. In some regions, the Purveyors are now no longer able to field as many caravans as they once did and are being forced to rent space on Guild caravans in those areas. The Guild is charging exorbitant rates in retaliation, while deliberately flooding the market in those regions with similar goods at much cheaper rates.

Within the Garrison itself, the Purveyors are responsible for providing transport for both people and goods. People either ride in horse-drawn carriages or in slave-carried litters. Each of the Dragon-Blooded is assigned several transports, which are permanently stationed with the household so as to be ready whenever the Exalt is ready

to travel. Transportation is also made available to the more important Dynastic unExalted, although, in many cases, the assignment of transportation is not permanent, but can be summoned at any time of the day or night.

THE BENEVOLENT AND KNOWLEDGEABLE OFFICE OF NATIVE AFFAIRS

The Office of Native Affairs has become one of the busiest bureaus in Harborhead over the past 35 years. The Empress originally created the bureau to help the natives with self-government in the wake of the discovery of jade at Bent Creek. However, in recent years, its role has become more to do with monitoring native activities and recommending appropriate courses of action.

The main headquarters of the Office of Native Affairs is in a huge sandstone building close to the 47th Legion's barracks. Here, reports from field agents throughout the country are collated and analyzed. Experts in the native culture and politics pore over the information and write detailed briefings and policy papers to allow the Garrison's leaders to make informed decisions.

The current leader of the Office of Native Affairs is Ledaal Enapu, an unExalted Dynast who was originally appointed to the bureau as a graduate fresh from the Spiral Academy. Since then, she has worked her way up through the ranks, thanks to her innate intuitive skills, astute observations, detailed analyses and deft political maneuvering.

Enapu is alarmed at the increasing militancy shown by the Harborheadites, a view shared by her senior advisors. The growing desire to go to war with the Varang City-States appears to Enapu to be only the prelude to a much larger campaign of conquest. She and her advisors all fear that a victory in the Varangian campaign would only inflame an already volatile situation.

Consequently, Enapu has been conferring with the Satrap and the General of the 47th Legion, strongly recommending that they take action early to prevent an armed uprising against the Realm's interest in Harborhead.

So far, the Satrap has been unwilling to take direct action, but the legion has taken to exercising in some of the areas most likely to erupt into war. The intent is twofold: The first is to show the natives the strength of the legion, which will hopefully convince some of them to not go to war against the Realm. The second reason is to give the legion's commanders and troops first hand knowledge of the likely battlegrounds should a war with the natives become a reality.

While much of the Office of Native Affairs' attention is now focused on what the natives are doing, a small portion continues with the bureau's original mission, which is to help the Harborhead natives. The efforts of this section — headed by Sesus Qoxun — go largely unnoticed and unappreciated by the bureau's senior managers.

WHERE IS THE NEWS COMING FROM?

The Office of Native Affairs relies heavily on the intelligence gathered by its agents in the field. Many of these agents are either members of the Punctual Purveyors who travel as part of a caravan through the country or natives still sympathetic to the Realm.

However, some of the information is coming from the Sidereal Bronze Faction. The Sidereals are feeding information to the Office of Native Affairs in such a way as to make the Dynasts think the natives are spoiling for a war. The Bronze Faction believes that by inciting a war between the Realm and Harborhead, it may help to delay the civil war that's brewing in the Realm.



THE INFALLIBLE COURIERS OF COMMUNICATIVES AND MISSIVES

The Infallible Couriers of Communicatives and Missives are a division of the Infallible Conveyors of Official Messages and Heartfelt Expressions. With Harborhead being as large as it is, quick and effective communications are essential.

The backbone of the communications system is the network of heliograph stations spread throughout the country. Messages are relayed from one station to another, eventually reaching the main hub in Kirighast. Dispatch riders and runners, who carry less important messages between the outposts, back up the heliograph network. The Harborhead natives, with their incredible stamina, are often recruited into the Infallible Couriers and tasked with carrying messages on foot between some of the more remote outposts in the country.

Due to the messages' sensitive nature, most of them are encrypted using codes and ciphers developed specially for the task by a small cell of savants. They create special codebooks, and their artisans construct elaborate enciphering machines, which are sent out under legion protection to heliograph stations around the country.

The cryptography cell, based at the Infallible Couriers' building in Kirighast, is headed by Cathak Sevan, a Water-aspected Dragon-Blooded who has been living in Kirighast for the past 300 years. Once a legion officer, she became intrigued — and later obsessed — with ways of enciphering messages shortly after she was posted to Kirighast. Since then, her prowess with codes and ciphers has only grown, to the point where she thinks of little else. It has been decades since she attended any of the social events in Kirighast.

HOW HARD ARE THE CIPHERS TO BREAK?

Cathak Sevan and the other cryptographers have devised some incredibly complicated ciphers that are almost impossible to break without knowing the correct encryption keys.

Deciphering a message encrypted by unExalted savants requires a Nearly Impossible (difficulty 4) Intelligence + Linguistics check.

Cathak Sevan herself has the Cipher Missive Charm (see **Aspect Book: Air**, p. 67). The Storyteller should roll Sevan's Intelligence + Linguistics (nine dice) to determine the number of successes required at difficulty 5 to decrypt one of her fiendishly complicated ciphers.

When a message is received for a specific person — either at the Infallible Couriers' communication station in Kirighast or at the nearest heliograph relay station — it is deciphered, if necessary, and then, runners are dispatched to deliver the message to the recipient. These runners are normally small units of men in full armor, providing a degree of protection for the communications. In the case of extremely sensitive messages, a cipher specialist carries the encrypted message personally, protected by a talon or more of armed troops (sometimes from the 47th Legion, sometimes from the Infallible Couriers' own protective force). Once the recipient is located, the specialist then decrypts the message and delivers the plain text to him.

As the Infallible Couriers are part of the Imperial Post network, they carry out the same functions as their counterparts on the Blessed Isle do. Trimarans carrying mail dock in Kirighast Harbor at least twice a week, bringing news from the Realm and instructions and demands for the Satrap. The Infallible Couriers ensure that the messages are dispatched quickly and efficiently, and they also send a copy of any general news out to each of the Exalted households to ensure that the Exalts are kept abreast of developments — both political and social — back in the Realm proper.

THE HONORABLE AND PRECISE DIVISION OF AUDITING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

With much of the Realm's interests in Harborhead revolving around commerce in some form or another, the Empress felt it necessary to ensure the other bureaus remained honest. The Honorable and Precise Division of Auditing and Accountability — a subdivision of the Imperial Treasury and the smallest of all the Harborhead bureaus, with only 100 staff members — was given the charter to audit the financial records of the other bureaus and to ensure that every yen was accounted for.

Given such a mandate, the Precise Auditors should be the most honorable and upright bureau in Kirighast. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The Precise Auditors are perhaps the most corrupt bureau of all. Although they are supposed to uncover corruption within the Realm's officers and ensure that integrity and honesty are rewarded, they instead do everything in their power to ensure that the graft and the corruption is as widespread as possible.

The Precise Auditors are all incredibly skilled at following money trails and learning how the more unscrupulous of the Realm's public servants siphon off funds. However, in order for them to keep their mouths closed, they simply demand a percentage of the graft. They also play a large part in the political games of many of the other bureaus, as the Precise Auditors can be bribed to investigate other Dynasts in particular roles to ensure that they are acting in according with their mandate.

The person being investigated can then bribe the Precise Auditors as well to ensure that the report is buried, allowing the Precise Auditors to pocket money from both sides of the dispute. However, if the audit's subject fails to offer an auditor a suitable bribe, the auditor will pin any minor discrepancies in accounting on him and ensure that he is removed from his office.

The current Chief Auditor is Cynis Tazakes, an Earth-aspected Dragon-Blood. Tazakes was appointed head of the Honorable and Precise Division of Auditing and Accountability 220 years ago, and he found the lack of respect for his new post distressing. In his first five years in the role, he struck fear into the hearts of many corrupt administrators by combing through their records and prosecuting even the smallest transgressions. Fearful of getting caught, most of Tazakes' targets offered him substantial bribes to ignore their corruption and let them continue. This fearful respect suited Tazakes, and he began the current tradition. It has suited him and his fellow auditors well since then, and they continue with the tough public stance on corruption that Tazakes started when he arrived.

THE ALL-SEEING EYE

Despite the budgetary cutbacks that have savaged the All-Seeing Eye in recent times, it is still an active force in the Realm's dealings in Harborhead. The discovery of the Bent Creek jade beds and the Empress' subsequent relaxation of some of the laws that had been placed on the Southern kingdom meant that the natives started to revert to their old militaristic ways. This has the Eye's senior representatives in the nation extremely concerned, and they continue to work tirelessly to monitor developments.

At the head of the All-Seeing Eye's Harborhead organization is Nellens Bellor, a veteran player of the Realm's political machinations. The Empress personally sent Bellor to Harborhead 35 years ago to take over the reins of the All-Seeing Eye as she began relaxing some of

the long-standing laws. She wanted to ensure that even though they were being given more freedom, the natives understood that Harborhead was still one of the Realm's tributaries and was expected to behave like one. Bellor completely understood his assignment and has been spreading his tendrils throughout the nation ever since.

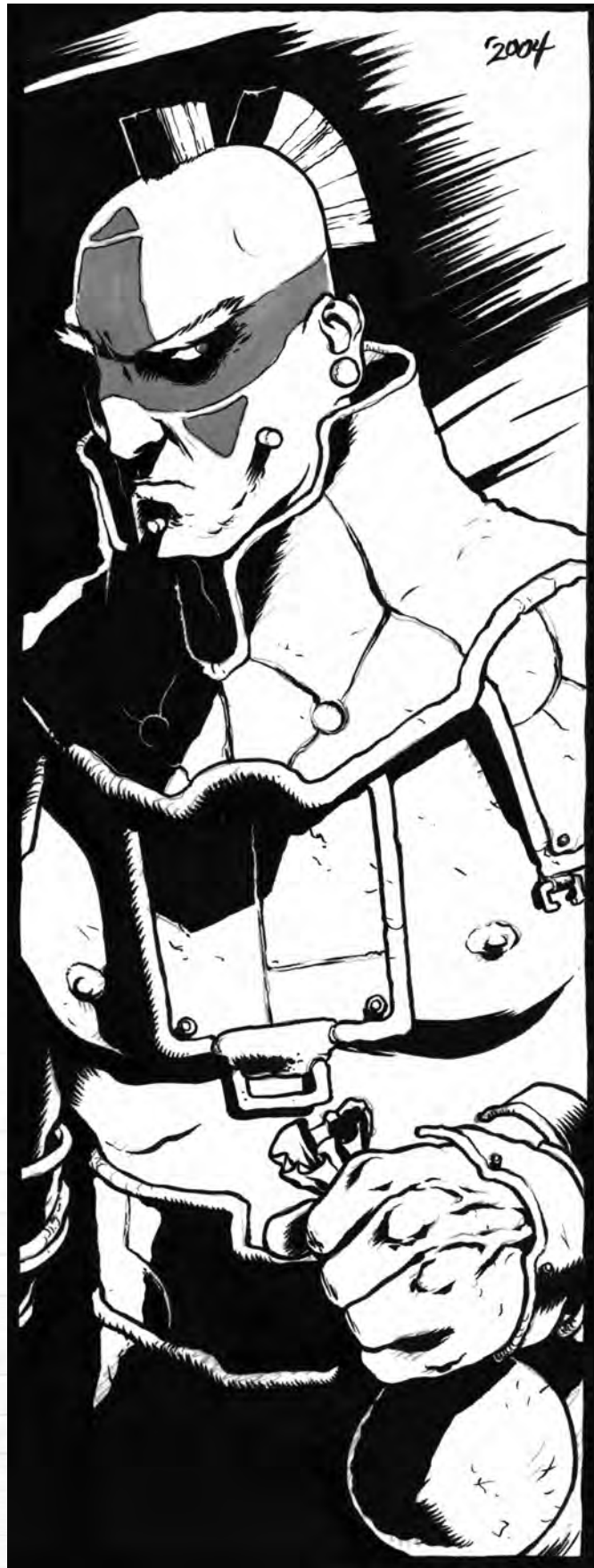
Bellor simply does not trust the natives of Harborhead. He sees them as heathens who would much rather fall back into their heresies instead of following the guidelines laid out by the Immaculate Philosophy. Consequently, much of Bellor's attention is focused on ensuring that any native appointed to a position of authority within Harborhead is completely loyal to the Realm and its beliefs. This is even more true of the Realm's citizens living in Kirighast. Bellor is convinced that many of the weaker-willed patriicians who live in the Imperial Garrison are vulnerable to falling to Ahlat and his followers.

Under Bellor's guidance, the Eye has created a massive network of spies and informants. The Eye regularly investigates important citizens in Kirighast and, less frequently, in the more remote towns and settlements throughout Harborhead. The Eye's agents follow anyone suspected of being disloyal, checking on who they see and talk to. Well-trained spies often break into suspects' homes and businesses and check paperwork and correspondence to ensure that nothing untoward is happening. Citizens are encouraged to inform on anyone — particularly imperial citizens who have regular dealings with Harborhead natives — that they even suspect is not upholding the Immaculate Philosophy.

Bellor's agents also keep tabs on the natives, keeping careful records of any large gatherings that take place and who seems to be holding the power outside of the Realm's influence. Bellor reports on this information to the Satrap at least twice a week. He in turn — often at Bellor's insistence — brings it to the Leopard's attention. If this fails to get a response, the Eye's assassins are often tasked with removing any problem individuals in such a way that they appear to have been struck down because they refused to follow the Immaculate Philosophy. Occasionally, Bellor arranges for missionaries of the Immaculate Philosophy to move into an area to spread the word and then simply orders the assassination of a number of random individuals who are not responding, as evidence of the Philosophy's "truthfulness."

THE TEMPLE

The Immaculate Order's Kirighast Temple lies at the base of Inkosintaba. Built at the same time as the Satrap's Palace, the temple plays an essential part in the lives of those living in the Imperial Garrison. Beautifully crafted from white marble and limestone



2004

polished to an almost mirror finish, it stands as a testament to the simple beauty of the Immaculate Philosophy.

The temple is vital to the Immaculate Order's Harborhead operations. With the country so steeped in heresy, the Order's monks are regularly sent out into the field to walk circuits, preaching the word of the Immaculate Philosophy to the natives, in an attempt to bring them around to the correct way of thinking. Exalted monks are also charged with dealing with the little gods and fixing any problems that the natives' worship causes.

But the temple is also the focal point for the practice of the Immaculate faith in the Imperial Garrison. Daily meditation and prayer sessions are open to any citizen wishing to attend. The Satrap, Cathak Voper, and his wife are both regular attendees. Voper strongly encourages all of the Garrison citizens, from the Dragon-Blooded right down to the slaves, to attend the temple and to meditate daily on the teachings of the Order.

The temple maintains an extensive collection of the Immaculate Texts and has several scholars well versed in the ancient literature. With Harborhead so steeped in spirit worship, the scholars place a large emphasis on how to deal with spirits who step outside of their proper place in the Immaculate Order. They also study the Texts looking for information on the best way to defeat the heresies that the natives regularly commit.

The growing problem of native militancy and heresy is deeply troubling to the Abbot. Although he had hoped that the teachings of the itinerant monks would be enough to convince the natives of the correct and proper beliefs, he has recently realized the futility of that way of thinking. He has regular meetings with the Leopard, Oshom Kurgaz, who attends the temple at least once a week with Cathak Voper. The Abbot has warned the Leopard that, unless the natives step away from their heresies, the monks will be forced to act in accordance with the directions prescribed in the Immaculate Texts. He has already ordered the monks to make and paste up posters outside the Imperial Garrison, explaining to the natives the error of their ways. He is reluctant to take further action, knowing that it could spell the beginning of a war with Harborhead, but he can see no alternative.

The Kirighast temple's monks spend hours every day practicing their martial arts. The Abbot is well aware of the growing native militancy problem and has ordered all of the monks undergo extra training. Although he considers it a last resort, the Abbot is prepared to order the Blossoming of Sorrowful Violence against the natives in Kirighast — and particularly against the Brides of Ahlat — if they do not turn away from their heresies.

THE WYLD HUNT

Harborhead has seen the emergence of several Solar Anathema in recent years, and the current signs point to more appearing in the near future. Consequently, the

Immaculate temple maintains a list of Dragon-Blooded who are willing to assist with destroying the Anathema when they Exalt.

The most active Wyld Hunt members are all Immaculate monks based in Kirighast. Mnemon Remah, who is one of the most outstanding martial artists in recent years, has undertaken more hunts than any other in the country. He is a Fire Aspect who has mastered all five levels of both the Fire and Air Dragon Styles and has recently attained the first level in the Wood Dragon Style. Remah has personally killed three Solars with the help of the Wyld Hunt and has dealt with unruly little gods more times than he can count.

Regularly standing with Remah are Ledaal Ganem, an Earth Aspect who has mastered Earth Dragon Style, and Ragara Tevak, a Wood Aspect who chose to master Water Dragon Style. Both are as dedicated to killing the Anathema as Remah is, and the trio has trained together for over 150 years. They have become so good at working together that they can anticipate each other's moves and be in a position to back one another up.

Several of the other prominent Dragon-Blooded living in Kirighast volunteer their services for the Wyld Hunt when necessary. General Cathak Lazera and most of the 47th Legion's Dragon-Blooded officers have all participated in hunts, as has the Satrap, Cathak Voper, who views the Wyld Hunt as a vitally important part of his faith in the Immaculate Order.

Remah confers daily with the Abbot about the worsening situation in Harborhead. The Wyld Hunt has already been called on several times to quietly make examples of prominent heretics, and its members expect to be used far more often in this new role than they are with chasing Anathema.

THE HARBOR DISTRICT

Since the sacking of Thorns by the Mask of Winters and his army, Kirighast Harbor has become the most important seaport in the Southeast. The harbor is vitally important to the Realm's interest in Harborhead, as it allows for unhindered access for the loading and unloading of imperial ships, while being under the protection of the 47th Legion.

About half of the harbor foreshore falls inside the Imperial Garrison. The great wall surrounding the Imperial Garrison actually extends out into the harbor itself, creating a breakwater and a choke point for ships trying to enter the Garrison area.

At the harbor's mouth stand two huge stone gatehouses, each one equipped with a series of massive winches. In times of war, two huge iron gates can be winched shut, preventing ships from entering or leaving the Garrison's harbor area. In the First Age, the gates were opened and closed using sorcerous engines, but since the Contagion, the winches have been operated using slave

labor. In recent times, the gates have been left open, as it simply costs too much to keep slaves in the gatehouse to open and close them whenever a ship needs to enter or leave the harbor. On the roof of each gatehouse is a huge firedust cannon, manned by the brides of Ahlat. Troops of the 47th Legion are drawing up plans to take control of the gatehouses should war break out with the natives as the cannons are positioned such that it is impossible to approach the harbor entrance without coming under fire.

The wharves themselves run along the entire waterfront inside the harbor. Most are made from timber — with the pylons being whole tree trunks shipped in from the East. Some, including the Imperial Wharf, are made from cut granite blocks, expertly chiseled with decorations. The Imperial Wharf is used for the personal transports of the most important Dragon-Blooded and was where the Empress' personal vessel used to dock during her infrequent visits to Kirighast.

THE IMPERIAL PILOTS

Ships entering or leaving the harbor are required by law to be guided by one of the Garrison's pilots. These experienced sailors meet ships outside the harbor and then sail them carefully through the gates to their berths. When a ship is due to leave, a pilot ensures that the ship safely leaves the harbor before turning control over to its captain.

The imperial pilots spend their on-duty hours at the Pilot House, a single-story sandstone building near the southern gatehouse. Technically, the pilots are employed by the Relentless and Punctual Purveyors of Transportation, although they have little to do with — and, in fact, little time for — the public servants in the main office. Instead, they tend to treat the main-office staff as their personal servants, sending through all the documentation about ship arrivals and departures and leaving it up to clerks to collate and file that information in the appropriate fashion.

The Chief Pilot is Peleps Nostro, a former imperial navy captain who lost a leg in a battle with pirates from the Coral Archipelago. Unfit for active service, but unwilling to give up his ties with the sea, Nostro took over command of the Harborhead pilots 15 years ago. A Water-aspected Dragon-Blooded, he runs an extremely tight unit, and both he and his men are intimately familiar with the hazardous underwater landscape around the mouth of the Imperial Garrison's harbor entrance.

The other harbor pilots are all unExalted, born to families outside the Great Houses. Pemaso Jerol, Nostro's second in command, is young and ambitious. He works long hours and constantly revises his knowledge of the shoals around the harbor entrance to ensure he will not guide a ship into danger. Meter Wosel is nowhere near as conscientious. Although not lazy, he does not tend to put in any more effort than the minimum amount necessary. He'd much rather spend his spare time in one of the harborside teahouses

drinking cheap brandy. Gades Uhus, the oldest of the Harborhead pilots, is looking forward to retirement. His eyesight isn't as strong as it used to be, but his reflexes are still sharp as ever, and he has the uncanny ability to predict even minute wind shifts and to move the ship to correct for them. Because of this, he is the only pilot other than Nostro who can berth a ship without the need to have a slave gang help to maneuver it alongside the dock.

Nostro has been conferring with Cathak Luvek, the head of the Blessed Office of Garrison Oversight, as they keep watch on developments outside the Garrison. Nostro is helping formulate a possible evacuation plan, using the commercial fleet of House V'neef and House Peleps' imperial navy. Despite his best efforts, he simply cannot figure out a way to get enough ships into the harbor to get the entire population — or even a sizeable percentage of it — evacuated to safety if things turn nasty. Factoring in the inevitable desire for the Exalted and the Dynasts to bring many of their possessions with them makes the task impossible. Nostro has several of the other pilots, particularly Pemaso Jerol, working on a contingency plan in case the natives try to blockade the Garrison's harbor entrance by sinking ships in front of the gate to prevent the deep water ships from getting out.


CUSTOMS HOUSE

Any cargoes entering the Imperial Garrison are required by law to be inspected by Imperial Customs agents who determine the import taxes to be paid on the goods. Customs House is a huge sandstone building right on the waterfront, with a large double door opening directly onto the wharves themselves. Goods are moved from the ships into Customs House for inspection, under the oversight of armed Imperial Customs officials, who ensure that the shipments are not tampered with.

The goods are brought into the Long Room for inspection. Here, boxes and smaller containers are put onto huge granite tables, where Imperial Customs inspectors open each one in turn and spread the contents out on the tables. The value of the goods is estimated, and the inspector determines an appropriate levy that must be paid by the importer before the goods may be released. The inspectors determine the correct levy by consulting a huge book, *The Right and Correct Tables of Weights and Values*, which lists the levy rate for each of the items normally encountered in the port. If an inspector comes across an item not listed in the *Correct Tables*, there are a number of rules that allow him to calculate an appropriate value. This value is then recorded by the Chief Inspector, who later issues it as an update to the *Correct Tables*.

The Long Room opens at dawn, and Imperial Customs inspections are carried out until sundown. Should a ship berth after sundown, armed guards are posted on the dock to ensure that the cargo it carries is inspected and the appropriate levy paid before the cargo can be dispersed.





The current Chief Inspector of Customs in Kirighast is Nellens Fisoc, an unExalted Dynast from one of the House Nellens' minor families. Fisoc, a small, intense, beady eyed man who speaks with a slight lisp, is *religiously* ethical. He refuses to even *consider* taking a bribe from an importer, and any attempt to have the appropriate import levy reduced by bribery results in seizure of the whole cargo in the name of the Scarlet Empress and the arrest of the importer.

Fisoc is fastidious in his calculations and will double- or even triple-check his calculations to ensure that the correct levy is collected, not a jade bit more or less. Once the Long Room closes in the evening, Fisoc collects the notes from all his inspectors and spends the evening tallying up the levies and ensuring that the amount of jade collected exactly matches the amount required by the *Correct Tables*. If any new cargoes were encountered during the day, he personally writes out the updates for each copy of the *Correct Tables*, so that his inspectors have the complete information for the following day.

Nellens Fisoc is not, however, without his critics in the Imperial Customs service. Many of the inspectors chafe under his rigid rule and are plotting to have him poisoned. The chief conspirator is Sesus Lirok, who does not share Fisoc's love for the precise running of the system. Lirok regularly accepts bribes and records a much lower quantity of goods as coming across his inspection table. In this way, he can lower the levy for the importer, while still keeping Fisoc in the dark. Still, Fisoc has been keeping a closer eye on Lirok of late, and the younger inspector is finding it hard to be as "flexible" as he would like.

Lirok is not alone in his frustration. V'neef Alis, Ragara Gatan and Tepet Nudab, all unExalted Dynasts, are fellow Imperial Customs inspectors who are in the conspiracy with Lirok. Alis and Gatan both desperately want to get rid of Fisoc, but they are unsure about who is a good candidate to take his place. Nudab wants Lirok to assume the mantle, but the other two worry that Lirok's ambition will attract the attention of the All-Seeing Eye and bring them all to ruin.

THE WAREHOUSES

Right along the wharf line run a series of warehouses and livestock yards that are used for storing cargoes coming into or leaving Kirighast. Most of them are huge, leaky timber constructions, as much filled with rats as anything else. Shipments are often not left here for long, a few weeks at most.

The Great Houses own most of the warehouses and lease them out to anyone willing to pay for short-term storage space. The majority belong to House Nellens, which enjoys profiting from the need of others to move goods from one port to another. Keeping an eye on what is stored in their warehouses also helps give Nellens a good idea about what people are interested in buying, which can often give them leads in their diversified business interests.

Only a few of the warehouses have armed guards posted on them around the clock. The 47th Legion sends patrols through the harborside docks several times an hour, on semiregular schedules. The Great Houses often assign their own troops to patrol the areas, particularly if they have expensive cargoes in storage. However, by talking with the right people in some of the harborside teahouses, it's possible to learn the movement schedules for all the troops in the area.

The exception to the rule is the Imperial Treasury Store. A 12-foot-high stone wall topped with barbed iron spikes surrounds this giant sandstone warehouse. Jade shipments from the Bent Creek jade mines are stored here until they are shipped to the Imperial Treasury on the Blessed Isle. Because of the vast wealth the warehouse contains most of the time, a detachment of the 47th Legion guards it heavily at all times. The detachment commander is Sesus Chefos, a Fire-aspected Dragon-Blood with a *fierce* temper and a stickler for *The Thousand Correct Actions of the Upright Soldier*. The troops in the Imperial Treasury building do their utmost to maintain discipline and correct protocol according to the book, as Chefos has been known to execute soldiers who flout regulations. Chefos has a darker side, however. He is happy to take bribes from the Great Houses — especially his own — to turn a blind eye to the amount of jade being moved into and out of the Imperial Treasury Store. His entire officer corps is as happy to accept bribes, partly because Chefos views *not* taking the bribes as insubordination, which he punishes mercilessly. However, Chefos goes to great lengths to keep this enterprise a secret, as General Cathak Lazera — the Commanding Officer of the 47th Legion — will happily execute any legion officer caught accepting bribes of any sort.

The Garrison's slave pens are also situated down at the docks. The pens are a series of large stone barns, arranged radially around a large exercise yard. The buildings have little in the way of ventilation, possessing only narrow iron-barred windows. The slaves sleep inside the barns on rough timber bunks, with only the barest facilities. Food is brought in once a day, and it normally consists of a thin gruel, made from oats or wheat. Once a week, the slaves are treated to a thin meat stew and a ration of bread to help prevent malnutrition. The slaves are allowed out into the exercise yard in small groups for one hour of exercise a day to ensure that they remain in good physical condition.

At any one time, 100 or more slaves sit chained up in these cramped yards awaiting shipment to the Blessed Isle. Armed guards keep an eye on the slaves and ruthlessly punish even the slightest sign of insurrection. The Kirighast slavers prefer not to whip or beat the slaves because this reduces their value at auction. Instead, they prefer brutal tortures that do not leave lasting marks on the slaves, such as staking a slave out in the sun with water dripping slowly between his eyes.

Cynis Rubib, House Cynis' head slave trader in Kirighast, spends several hours a day at the pens, checking over his merchandise. An obese, balding, lecherous old man, Rubib often enjoys watching the slaves work out in the exercise yard, getting them to perform ridiculous and degrading tasks for his own enjoyment. On one night a week, he opens the doors to the slave pens to anyone willing to pay cash for a couple of hours of physical pleasure with the slaves. These weekly orgies are often popular with sailors who happen to be in port, as well as with some of the more influential Exalts in the Imperial Garrison, including Cathak Katuf, Nellens Jotul and Cynis Tazakes.

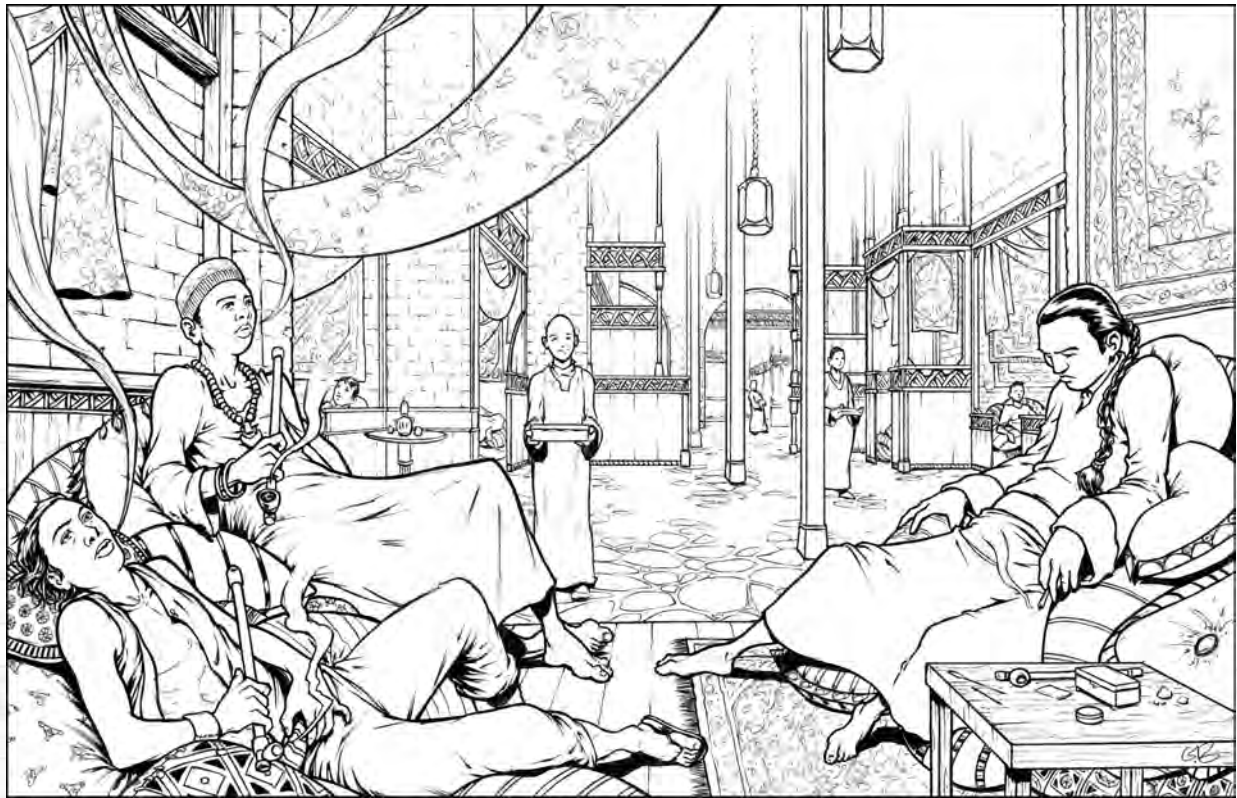
The Guild owns several of the warehouses. Guild investment in Harborhead has increased dramatically since Thorns fell to the Mask of Winters' undead army. With Kirighast now being the largest seaport in the Southeast, the Guild has been forced to ship many of its cargoes here and then ship them via roundabout caravan routes to its markets. The expanding Guild presence in Kirighast disturbs several of the Great Houses, especially House Cynis. The Guild is driving slave prices up, which is dramatically cutting into Cynis' profit margins. Cynis Rubib in particular continues to actively petition the Satrap on a weekly basis to intercede by reducing the Guild's involvement in the region as much as he can. At the same time, Rubib undermines the Satrap's authority whenever he can, casting aspersions against Cathak Voper's manliness, because the Satrap refuses to attend House Cynis' orgies.


BARS AND TEAHOUSES

As Kirighast is a port city, dozens of bars, teahouses and brothels are scattered throughout the Harbor District to cater to the needs of the sailors visiting the port. Without exception, these are rough, dangerous places, where fights regularly end with fatalities. Still, all of them are extremely popular, even with some of the wealthier citizens in the Garrison who like to come down to the wharves to "slum" it for a while.

By far the most popular of the teahouses is the Jade Empress. The owner is V'neef Onemi, an UnExalted Dynast with a penchant for all manner of sexual depravities, from one of House V'neef's adopted families. The Empress, as it is known around the wharves, is perhaps the roughest teahouse in the city, with bar fights normally occurring at least once a night. Onemi himself is a skilled brawler, and has killed several men with his bare hands for insulting him. Onemi stocks whatever alcohol and drugs he can find — he is famous for some appallingly bad brandy normally referred to as Kirighast Smoke — and he rents out the tiny bedrooms on the upper floor of the building to the prostitutes who bring their clients up from the bar area below. The Empress is also famous for its live entertainment, with nude dancers, both male and female, constantly gyrating in cages and some form of musical entertainment on most nights.

For those patrons more interested in sampling some drugs, the Respondent Fernery is perhaps the most notorious opium den in Kirighast. Located in the basement of a stone warehouse, the Fernery is constantly filled with





heavy opium smoke. The space is divided up into a maze of small alcoves, where addicts can lie and smoke — or even inject — themselves into a stupor. Opium is by far the most common drug available, although marijuana, cocaine and heroin are all easily purchased. Strangely enough, no one knows exactly who runs the Fernery or whether it just muddles along by itself, although some rumors suggest that it's owned by the Guild, which uses the place to peddle its own merchandise. Other stories insist that it's run by the All-Seeing Eye in Kirighast, who have their operatives listening into the drug-induced ravings of the addicts to learn whatever secrets they may know. Still, regardless of the time, there are people here, and most forms of drugs are available from the dozen or so dealers who seem to almost live at the Fernery.

The Elegant Lotus is the city's most elaborate brothel. Owned by Cynis Vecos, a Air-aspected Dragon-Blood with a taste for anything pleasurable, and run by her younger unExalted sister, Cynis Alanta, the Lotus is always immaculately appointed. To some, it appears out of place in the Harbor District. The building is a large, single-story daubed mud brick and thatch building, built in much the same way as the Harborhead native buildings. It is, however, much larger and built around a large garden courtyard, complete with a waterfall and a huge pond. The pond is stocked with native fish and frogs and is home to a small family of long-legged spoonbills, who feed on the pond's water insects. Vecos, who is a beautiful young woman in her own right, prides herself on the brothel's presentation and only purchases the most attractive slaves from the slave market to service her clients. The Elegant Lotus attracts some of the most influential figures in Kirighast, both from inside the Imperial Garrison as well as out, and Vecos always ensures that the service is as discreet as it is enjoyable.

Cathak Jocas, the deputy head of the Upright Collectors, is currently courting Vecos. Jocas continues to propose to her at least once a week, and she continues to string him along, refusing to commit to a permanent relationship. She has no real interest in Jocas, finding him boorish and an Exalt of low merit, but she recognizes a cash cow when she sees one and is prepared to milk the situation for as much as she can.

THE GREAT HOUSES

With Harborhead being such a rich land both in terms of natural resources and relative wealth, the Great Houses are all interested in claiming a piece of the action for themselves. But like most things that the Dragon-Blooded have their hands in — each wants it all for himself and is willing to do just about anything to undermine the other houses in order to get it.

HOUSE CATHAK

As Harborhead is currently a Cathak tributary, it is the Great House with the largest presence in Harborhead. Nearly half of the unExalted Dynasts working in Kirighast

are Cathaks. With the discovery of jade at Bent Creek 40 years ago, the tributary has become even more important to the House's fortunes.

Cathak house members fill many of the senior positions within the eight local bureaus of the Thousand Scales, providing the house with a huge amount of insider information about the state of the tributary. Many of the house members also spy on those who come from other houses, trying to learn of any ongoing plots to undermine Cathak's authority in Harborhead. Any reports that lead to the uncovering of genuine plots to wrest the tributary away from Cathak control — and there are at least one or two a year — are generously rewarded.

The current political situation in Harborhead is worrying the house elders, who are concerned that if a full-scale war breaks out, they stand to lose one of their most profitable tributaries. Because of this, they are willing to do whatever it takes to keep Harborhead under their thumbs for as long as possible.

HOUSE CYNIS

House Cynis has a strong presence in Harborhead, as the country is one of the richest sources of slaves in the South. It has built an extensive network of contacts with slave traders, particularly those who do not sell to the Guild. With the Guild driving slave prices up across the Threshold, House Cynis is working hard to keep the Harborhead slave prices down.

Cynis Rubib is actually looking forward to a war between Harborhead and the Realm. Wars are good business for slave traders, with prisoners of war often finding their way to the slave auctions. With a big war looming on the horizon, Rubib is delighted with the prospects of slave prices in Kirighast falling because of a fresh supply. He is already in communication with the Cynis matriarchs, who have instructed him to do everything in his power to help start the war.

HOUSE LEDAAL

House Ledaal has little direct interest in Harborhead. Its influence has recently suffered a setback with the death of Ledaal Bekat at the hands of the brides of Ahlat. Bekat had been siphoning some of the collected tribute money to his house, and his death has caused those funds to dry up. While the amount of jade Bekat supplied was minimal, Ledaal is still annoyed at its loss.

At present, two of House Ledaal's Dragon-Blooded — Ledaal Guwos and Ledaal Ichajuk — are both traveling around Harborhead with their entourages looking for lost First Age texts. While they are not traveling together, they remain in contact as much as possible and are both converging on the ruins of a First Age Manse in the deep south of the country. Both had independently found clues about the Manse and decided to join forces to explore it.

HOUSE MNEMON

House Mnemon has almost no interest in the political machinations of Harborhead. Although it does have tributaries in the South, the house has practically no influence in Kirighast. It is keeping an eye on developments there, however, in case war breaks out and spills over into the neighboring countries.

Mnemon herself has been approached by Cathak Cainan, who seeks support should the war break out and reinforcements be needed. Although Mnemon remains uncommitted at this stage, the temptation of the country's jade remains in her mind, and she is considering offering Cainan the assistance of several of her houses' sorcerers to help support the 47th Legion in the field.

HOUSE NELLENS

House Nellens has created itself a niche market in Harborhead, using its members to gather a great deal of market information and using that knowledge to be in the right place at the right time to be as helpful as possible. Nellens has two of its members in key positions in Harborhead: Nellens Jotul, who works in the cryptography cell in the Infallible Couriers of Communicatives and Missives, and Nellens Bellor, who heads the All-Seeing Eye's division in Kirighast. Their privileged positions allow them access to a great deal of sensitive information, which they pass onto their house, giving Nellens an inside view on what needs the Imperial Garrison is going to have in the near future. By moving business assets into position before that need materializes, Nellens can capitalize on the business developments of the other houses.

HOUSE PELEPS

With Kirighast being one of the major shipping ports in the South, especially since the fall of Thorns to the Mask of Winters, House Peleps has started building a resupply facility for its naval vessels in the Imperial Garrison. With the Blessed Office of Garrison Oversight negotiating for the use of imperial naval ships if an evacuation of the Garrison's citizens becomes necessary, Peleps is milking the arrangement by gaining lower berthing costs for its ships and discount rates on supplies.

But for House Peleps, perhaps the biggest problem in Harborhead comes from one of its own. Peleps Howdarn put himself before his house when he gave the whole of the Bent Creek jade beds to the Empress, instead of letting the house claim a portion first. With the Empress now gone, the house's elders are planning to assassinate Howdarn and assume control of the mine. They recognize that holding the mine after a takeover is going to be nigh impossible, so they are currently determining how to covertly move troops into the area first, so they can seize the mine after Howdarn is killed.

HOUSE RAGARA

As in most places in the Realm, House Ragara supplies loans to many in Harborhead. Harborhead is rich in mineral deposits, not only in jade, but also gold, diamonds, copper and other precious and useful materials. There is no shortage of entrepreneurs, both Dragon-Blooded and unExalted, who are looking for backers to finance their expeditions. By loaning money for these ventures, House Ragara gains some leverage over the debtors, but also gains information about other valuable assets that it often claims when its debtors cannot pay back the money they owe.

With Harborhead being such a rich tributary, Ragara Banoba is particularly interested in increasing his control over it, despite its increasing political problems. However, most of his machinations actually take place behind the scenes on the Blessed Isle, where he works through the Deliberative to undermine House Cathak's authority over Harborhead.

HOUSE SESUS

House Sesus has been quietly looking for ways to increase its influence in Harborhead for several years. It invested heavily in prospecting when the initial discovery of jade was made at Bent Creek and is still smarting after losing the whole claim when Peleps Howdarn discovered the jade's source and donated it to the Empress.

Sesus Kejak Raves is watching the retraining of the 47th Legion with some interest and is impressed with General Cathak Lazera's efforts at improving the legion's effectiveness. He has written to House Cathak seeking permission to send some of his own forces to Harborhead to train with the 47th Legion, in the hope of being able to replicate Lazera's success in other obstinate tributaries.


HOUSE TEPET

Some of the powerbrokers within House Tepet look on Harborhead's jade mines as a means of helping the house get out of the dire straits it currently finds itself in. With the exception of the Satrap's wife, House Tepet finds itself having little influence in Kirighast. House Tepet can read the signs about a war in Harborhead and is hoping to sneak enough troops into the country to seize the Bent Creek jade mines when war breaks out.

HOUSE V'NEEF

While not particularly active in the Imperial Garrison, House V'neef does have a substantial operation in Harborhead. In the hinterland about 30 miles from Kirighast, V'neef has planted hundreds of acres of vineyards on several estates. Local conditions are excellent for winemaking, and the house established its vineyards in the hills over 90 years ago. The estates produce excellent red and white wines, as well as some particularly fine ports and sherries.





The V'neef operations are overseen by V'neef Jegan, an Earth-aspected Dragon-Blood with over 300 years of winemaking expertise. Jegan planted most of the original vines in his estates when he first arrived and has clung to traditional winemaking techniques, preferring to spend his time refining his methods and making the best possible wine, rather than trying to create new varieties.

Alongside the actual winemaking facilities, House V'neef has established related businesses to support the vineyards. Huge plantations of oak trees provide timber for barrel making, and cork plantations provide bark for sealing wine bottles. There is also a growing glass blowing business that makes wine bottles. The local glass is so good that many of the bottles produced are actually shipped empty to the Blessed Isle for use by the vineyards there.

THE BENT CREEK JADE BEDS

Forty years ago, Harborhead's fortunes took a dramatic turn for the better. Jade was discovered at a remote spot in the veldt, sparking a jade rush that continues to this day. Initially, a few lucky prospectors got extremely rich quickly, but once word got out, the Realm rapidly muscled in on the action. Today, much of the Bent Creek jade goes directly to the coffers of the Imperial Treasury, although some does find its way into the hands of the Leopard and some of the other Harborhead natives.

At the time of its discovery, Bent Creek was an isolated region some 400 miles east-southeast of Kirighast. In RY 728, torrential rains in the mountains caused massive floods that swept across much of central Harborhead. The deluge caused huge landslides in the Bent Creek area, with whole villages being swept away.

The initial jade strikes were in the alluvial silt washed down from the mountains. After a small jade rush, the Realm's forces arrived and claimed the minefields in the name of the Scarlet Empress. After a brief insurrection was brutally quashed, the Great Houses quickly recovered nearly all of the jade in the landslide's wreckage.

Peleps Howdarn was a latecomer to the Bent Creek minefields. Somewhat of a loner, he was there of his own volition, rather than at the request of his house's leadership. Howdarn, a Fire-aspected Dragon-Blood and a geology and mining expert, was ambitious and realized quickly that the jade being mined from the flood waters did not originate where it was found, but had, in fact, washed down from somewhere else with the flood. So, rather than try to stake a claim, he quietly headed upstream into the wilderness looking for the source.

Twenty miles away, he discovered it. The Bent Creek beds were in the shadow of an extinct volcano. The mountain, which the locals called Umfulashisayo, turned out to be largely made from jade. The ground was treacherous, and the jade fields — near the top of the mountain in a very difficult and hard to reach location —

were *unbelievably* rich. Boulders of jade taller than a man and weighing thousands of pounds were everywhere, cemented into the side of the mountain but exposed by the recent landslides.

Howdarn knew that if the word got out to the Great Houses about the find, he would personally not see any of the jade that he had just found. To counter this, he surreptitiously sent word directly to the Empress, explaining the size and magnitude of the find. His message explained that he would be delighted to claim the whole find in her name if she would only appoint him as the official overseer of jade mining in the area and allow him to take a half a percent as commission. To Howdarn's great delight, the Empress agreed and sent an official proclamation to that effect.

This created a furor among the Dragon-Blooded present. None of them wanted to be subservient to an upstart like Howdarn. Most of the Great Houses — including House Peleps — had hoped to corner the jade production for themselves. Now, in a single stroke, Howdarn had undermined everyone, including his own house. Installing himself as Imperial Overseer, Howdarn set to work to mine the jade for his Empress.

Over 300 acres of mountaintop are currently being mined for jade. Much of this is being done as open-cut mining, using slave labor assisted by Exalted helpers. Some of the houses prefer to use the more traditional deep-pit mining, believing that the erosion caused by open-cut mining is more likely to ruin or perhaps even destroy the jade seams. The mine tailings are carted to carefully designed sieves, where it is processed to ensure that it does not contain any jade fragments. The remaining dregs are loaded onto yeddim carts and hauled away to huge scree piles at the base of the mountain. Some of the local natives spend their time picking through the tailings, looking for jade dregs that managed to somehow slip through the sieves. Few are successful, but some have found enough jade dust to live comfortably for a number of years.

Once the jade boulders are removed from the mountain, they are usually taken to specially built processing factories, where they are carved into talents or smaller denominations (see **Manacle and Coin**, p. 104) and stored ready for shipping. These buildings are heavily guarded, day and night, with at least one Dragon-Blooded warrior always on duty. Occasionally, particularly fine jade boulders are left intact so they can be shipped back to the Blessed Isle for carving into enormous statues or other significant artwork.

Slaves do all the actual mining. They normally work in the mines for 12 or more hours a day, with only a brief rest break every hour for a short drink of water. The mining is backbreaking work, made even more difficult by the constant high temperature of the region. Much of the digging is done with picks and shovels, with the aim being to remove the jade boulders as intact as possible. Teams of

yeddim are often brought in to help drag the largest of these boulders out of the mines.

At the end of the day, the slaves are herded back to the slave enclosures. The slaves live in mud-daubed grass huts with thatched roofs, with at least 10 people to a hut. The huts are not particularly well maintained and often leak badly when it rains. Food is cooked in a separate hut and usually consists of a thin beef stew with a few meager vegetables thrown in. Surrounding the enclosure is a 12-foot-high wall of woven thorn bushes. These walls are usually two or more feet thick and are impossible to climb without suffering serious injuries.

By contrast, Peleps Howdarn lives in a palatial manor, made from quarried sandstone blocks. It has the best furnishings and decoration money can buy, and the kitchens are well stocked with food and wines. The estate grounds are always immaculately groomed and feature tame birds and animals wandering about freely. Howdarn conducts all of his official business from his residence but makes daily trips to the mine itself to ensure its efficient running.

The patrician guards and other supervisors all live in brick barracks near the mines themselves. Life for these workers is rough but not altogether unrewarding. A small township has grown around them, providing bars and brothels. Guild caravans occasionally stop buy, bringing extra mining supplies, as well as luxury items in demand by those living near the mines, particularly drugs and alcohol. Most spend their off-duty hours drinking or smoking away their aches and pains.

Hundreds of tons of jade have been quarried from the mountain. The Empress wanted the jade to go to her own supplies so that she alone could control the availability of the Magical Material. She also allotted a small percentage of the output to the Leopard of Harborhead, as a token of her goodwill and respect for the satrapy. Since the Empress' disappearance, the payment of jade to the Leopard has ceased, and the Great Houses have started skimming a much larger percentage of the jade they are responsible for shipping back to the Blessed Isle, rather than sending it to the Imperial Treasury.

PELEPS HOWDARN

Description: One of the myriad children of Peleps house leaders Peleps Febaris and Peleps Taxin, Howdarn was a constant source of disappointment to his parents. In primary school, his grades were only marginal, he invariably made an error in his every recital and he was prone to fighting with his classmates, even after his Exaltation. Despite the tremendous effort on his parents' part to get him accepted to the House of Bells, Howdarn dropped out after only four years, running off to the South chasing a pipe dream.

Imagine his parents' surprise when Peleps Howdarn made use of the specialized skills he'd picked up in his military engineering classes to discover the Bent Creek

ADVENTURE SEED

Target Character Type: Dragon-Blooded, Heroic Mortal

Some of the Dragon-Blooded overseeing the jade mining operations are beginning to chafe under Peleps Howdarn's strict oversight and are conspiring to murder him. With the Empress now missing, his justification for holding onto the top job is looking increasingly tenuous.

At the same time, the conspirators are jockeying among themselves to grab as many mining plots as they can in the chaos to come. It is a foregone conclusion that there will be casualties. Deals are being made, and the mountain is being hypothetically carved up among those most likely to survive.

ADVENTURE SEED

Target Character Type: Abyssal, Dragon-Blooded, Heroic Dead, Heroic Mortal, Lunar, Sidereal, Solar

Every week, tons of mined jade is shipped from the Bent Creek mines to Kirighast, where it is loaded onto ships and sent to the Blessed Isle. This has more than raised the ire of a large section of Harborhead's native population, who believe they are more entitled to the jade than the Realm is. It is, after all, coming out of their soil.

More than 100 heavily armed troops and at least five Dragon-Blooded warriors normally escort these shipments. Despite several attempts, no one has yet succeeded in hijacking a jade convoy. However, with the right amount of greed and careful planning, anything is possible.

jade beds. Imagine their glee at the thought of getting their hands on such a significant jade strike. And then imagine their shock when he turned his back on his family and cut a deal with the Scarlet Empress that benefited him alone.

Peleps Howdarn is that rarest of animals in the Dynasty, the loner. He's spent his whole life going his own way and suffering scorn for it at every turn. Never able to repress his independent nature to the satisfaction of his family, Howdarn was made miserable by his family, his peers and his instructors. Finally, fed up with both his family and his future prospects, Howdarn chucked it all and headed to Harborhead in the first days of the jade rush. Unlike many of the other opportunists there, however, Howdarn possessed the skills necessary to backtrack the jade to his source. Also, unlike the other Dragon-Bloods present, Howdarn felt he owed his house nothing, and went out of his way to leave it out of the deal he brokered.





He's never regretted that decision, but with his patron the Scarlet Empress missing, he may soon come to. His house has neither forgotten nor forgiven him, and Howdam may soon pay the ultimate price for his independence.

Aspect: Fire

Nature: Rebel

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 2, Valor 2

Abilities: Archery 1, *Athletics 1, *Awareness 4, Brawl 4, *Bureaucracy 4, *Dodge 3, Investigation 1, Lore 2, *Melee 4, *Performance 5, *Presence 4, Ride 1, *Socialize 4

* Aspect or Favored Ability

Backgrounds: Artifact 3, Backing 3, Breeding 1, Reputation 2, Resources 4

Charms: All-Encompassing Earth Sense, Aura of Invulnerability, Become the Hammer, Blade Deflecting Palm, Dragon-Graced Weapon, Enchanting Performance, Glowing Coal Radiance, Memorable Performance Technique, Precision Observation Method, Protective Performance, Stoking Bonfire Style, Threshold Warding Stance, Unbearable Taunt Technique

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Punch: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 2B Defense 7

Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 6 Damage 4B Defense 6

Jade Daiklave (Volcano's Kiss): Speed 11 Accuracy 9 Damage 7L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 11L/12B (Jade reinforced breastplate, 10L/9B, -1 mobility penalty)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/
Incap

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 11 **Peripheral Essence:** 18 (27)

Committed Essence: 9

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 2B Defense 9 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 8 Damage 5B Defense 4 Rate 3

Jade Daiklave (Volcano's Kiss): Speed 15 Accuracy 10 Damage 8L Defense 9 Rate 5

SORCERERS IN HARBORHEAD

Dragon-Blooded sorcerers are relatively rare in Harborhead. There are currently only three sorcerers living permanently in the country. With their knowledge of the spirit courts, they often find their services in relatively high demand, helping to deal with the problems caused by the natives' spirit worshiping habits. However, because of the discrimination against them, the three public sorcerers demand a high price for their services.

Mnemon Wexen is perhaps the best known of the Harborhead sorcerers. Great-granddaughter of Mnemon herself, Wexen is a strikingly beautiful woman with vivid green eyes and raven black hair. She has lived in Harborhead for the past 300 years and has spent her time studying and negotiating with the county's spirit courts. She lives on a large, isolated estate about 50 miles south of Kirighast, although she rarely spends much time there. Instead, she spends most of the year on the road, traveling to some of the more remote parts of the country, to learn the ways of the spirits and to search for remote Manse ruins to study. Wexen has a high success rate when dealing with spirit courts, and her services are much in demand, particularly by the Humble and Upright Collectors of Taxes and Tribute, who often have trouble with some of the little gods when they are collecting tribute. Still, she does return to Kirighast at least twice a year to attend some of the larger gala events, although she rarely stays for long.

Ledaal Dabok also spends most of his time in the remoter parts of Harborhead. Unlike Mnemon Wexen, however, Dabok is only interested in furthering his own knowledge. Dabok is a daring adventurer, often willing to risk his own life in order to find some elusive fact that could bring him more power. In his rare visits to the Imperial Garrison, he normally prefers to stay in inns in one of the patricians' suburbs and spend his evenings telling stories about what he has seen and learned, like some traveling minstrel. He has little time for the Realm and its endless political machinations, and consequently, he is often the subject of rumor and innuendo about where his true loyalties lie. He has even started carefully collaborating with several of the Lunar Anathema in order to recover lost knowledge, which has started a few whispers back in Kirighast. Still, he is often called on to help with problems with small gods who are causing problems for the administration.

The last resident sorcerer is Ledaal Dehiv, one of the black sheep of House Ledaal. Dehiv never sets foot in the Imperial Garrison, and few people even know he lives in the country. As far as House Ledaal is concerned, this is a good thing. Dehiv took a demon as a lover over 200 years ago and subsequently developed a taste for human flesh. His depraved habits forced him away from the Blessed Isle and into Harborhead, where he eventually settled in a small valley in the southeastern corner of the country. Dehiv has completely forgotten about the Realm. In fact, he is completely deranged and often goes off into the wilds with his demon lover in search of hapless natives to torture, kill and eat. While some in the Realm still maintain a price on his head, he lives in so remote a location that few even remember he is still alive. Those that do care find the costs involved in bringing him to justice are too high — and the chance of failure too great — to warrant raising an expedition.

LEDAAL DEHIV

Description: A sensitive young Dragon-Blood, Ledaal Dehiv was probably never suited to a life as a sorcerer, much less to stressful conditions at the Realm's premier school of sorcery, the Heptagram. Insecure and, for the most part, friendless, Dehiv craved love and acceptance, and he eventually found it in the arms of a demon lover named Deiknymena. Originally summoned on a dare by a fellow Heptagram student, Deiknymena's sensual charisma and nonthreatening androgyny left the neophyte sorcerer smitten. Dehiv summoned the demon secretly many times thereafter and the two became lovers in short order.

A neomah, Deiknymena used her growing influence over the young Terrestrial Exalt to slowly corrupt the shy, pensive sorcerer. Soon after, Deiknymena had the boy



doing things for her that would have been incomprehensible just months earlier. Dehiv's behavior might have gone undiscovered for years had he not killed his school roommate in a fit of jealousy over Deiknymena's attention and been forced to flee the Isle of Voices into the night.

Ledaal Dehiv's flight eventually led him to settle in a valley deep in Harborhead's interior. There, from his lover's tower, he watches over a village inhabited by the two's Demon-Blooded offspring and is worshiped by nearby villages as a dark god. Here he's dwelled for the past 200 years, his mastery of magic improving under his lover's tutelage as his sanity and morality have steadily declined.

Aspect: Water

Nature: Survivor

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 3

Abilities: *Archery 5, *Brawl 5, *Dodge 4, *Investigation 1, *Larceny 3, Lore 2, Melee 5, *Occult 5, Performance 1, Presence 2, Ride 1, Socialize 2

* Aspect or Favored Ability

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Artifact 4, Breeding 3, Resources 3

Charms: Drowning Embrace, Harmonious Wind-Luring Song, Observer Awareness Method, Pounding Surf Style, Riptide Method, Spirit-Detecting Mirror Technique, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery

Spells: Conjuring the Azure Chariot, Death of Obsidian Butterflies, Demon of the First Circle, Disguise of the New Face, Flight of Separation, Invulnerable Skin of Bronze, Manifestations of Vigorous Design, Unstoppable Fountain of the Depths

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Punch: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 4B Defense 8

Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 7 Damage 6B Defense 7

Chopping Sword: Speed 5 Accuracy 9 Damage 8L Defense 8

Jade Short Powerbow: Speed 5 Accuracy 10 Damage 8L (Rate 3, Range 300)

Dodge Pool: 7 **Soak:** 11L/12B (Jade reinforced breastplate, 10L/9B, -1 mobility penalty)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5

Personal Essence: 16 **Peripheral Essence:** 31 (39)

Committed Essence: 8

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 5 Accuracy 9 Damage 4B Defense 10 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 9 Damage 7B Defense 5 Rate 3

Chopping Sword: Speed 8 Accuracy 10 Damage 8L Defense 7 Rate 3





LIFE IN THE IMPERIAL GARRISON

For the most part, life in the Imperial Garrison revolves around the work of the Thousand Scales. With the Harborhead natives becoming increasingly hostile toward the Realm, the administrators' workloads have increased exponentially over recent years. For most of the unExalted in the Garrison, this leaves little free time to enjoy the sights that Harborhead offers.

But the Dragon-Blooded who live in Kirighast but don't have jobs with the administration have enough spare time on their hands to explore the country and enjoy some of its rich heritage and wildlife. The Exalts regularly travel outside of Kirighast, traveling to the different Legion outposts in search of excitement — or at least to remove the boredom of city life.

TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE GARRISON

Travel outside the Imperial Garrison has become increasingly dangerous in recent years. With the increasing native militancy, they are losing their fear of the Dynasts, particularly the unExalted. Several such Dynasts have been attacked and robbed while traveling outside the Imperial Garrison, particularly on the roads between the major settlements. Despite the Satrap protesting such things to the Harborhead Leopard, the bandits continue to strike against unwary travelers.

Consequently, those needing to travel outside the Imperial Garrison — even if only for as little as an hour — ensure that they have heavily armed escorts. Even the Dragon-Blooded do not travel with any less than 50 or 60 armed escorts, and they themselves remain ready for combat at any time. If the unExalted need to travel outside the Garrison, they tend to pass word around about their basic itinerary, inviting other interested parties to join them. Over the past four years, such combined groups have become increasingly common. It is not unusual to see four or five dignitaries traveling together with an armed escort of more than 100 soldiers.

The 47th Legion will often assign a scale or more of troops to escort particularly high-ranking travelers — either the Dragon-Blooded or important Dynasts from one of the local bureaus. Cathak Lazera is happy to provide the protection because not only does it help him earn favors from grateful travelers who save money on hiring bodyguards, it also allows his troops extra combat experience should they run into bandits.

THE SOCIAL CALENDAR

Dinner parties are, by far, the most common form of social gathering, with hosts putting on dinners for up to 30 or more guests at any one time. More than

simple meals, these parties are often used to get feedback on proposals, to forge allegiances and to help build networks of contacts. A huge amount of prestige is given to those who can organize an excellent dinner party where the food and wine is uniformly excellent and the conversation, both during and after dinner, is lively and engaging. The Satrap, the Dragon-Blooded and the heads of the different bureaus are all sought after dinner guests, although they are only able to attend a fraction of the dinners they are invited to because of other engagements.

The Imperial Garrison sports an impressive opera house not far from the Immaculate temple. Shows, particularly operas and classical plays, are all well attended, as attending such events indicates good breeding and social standing. The intermissions at the shows often go for an hour or more to allow the guests to mingle and to discuss important issues.

Cynis Vecos' private amphitheater is also an important part of the Kirighast social scene. Not only are the performances there uniformly excellent, but Vecos is renowned for her Cynis hospitality. Such events often turn into lavish parties that stretch on into the small hours of the morning — and, sometimes, even longer. Vecos is, however, extremely selective with her invitations to such events, and receiving one often provides an immediate boost to one's social standing in the Garrison.

IMPERIAL GALAS

The highlights of the Harborhead social calendar are the six galas held throughout the year. These are formal affairs, held at the Imperial Satrap's Palace. The invitation list has nearly 1,000 people, from all the Dragon-Blooded in Harborhead — excepting Ledaal Dehiv — and many from the Blessed Isle, the Harborhead nobility and their entourages and the upper crust of unExalted society in the Imperial Garrison.

Each one is normally a fancy dress ball, with those attending spending small fortunes on costumes. Keeping one's costume a secret is as much part of the experience as actually revealing it on the night. Some take it to extremes, bribing costumers and hiring spies to find out what rivals are going to be wearing on the night so they can upstage them.

The largest of the galas is the Calibration Remembrance masked ball, where attendees are encouraged to come as caricatures of other figures in the Imperial Garrison. The intent is to have some harmless fun at someone else's expense — particularly those that have wronged or annoyed the person wearing the costume — but those attending often take things to extremes. Huge vendettas have been started because someone has offended another with her costume.

House Cynis helps to organize the preparations for each of the galas, ensuring that the nights turn into debauched affairs. But because of this, the galas are among the most anticipated occasions in Harborhead.

TROPHY HUNTING

Hunting is a huge part of the imperial social calendar in Harborhead. With the Southern country being home to some of the most spectacular and dangerous creatures in the Threshold, being able to claim that one has killed at least one trophy animal of each major species is an impressive social feat. The hunting obsession is mostly limited to the Dragon-Blooded, as the creatures being hunted are often far too dangerous for mortals to kill.

At certain times of the year, when each creature is at its most aggressive, huge parties head out into the wilderness on hunting expeditions. These groups often consist of only two or three Dragon-Blooded hunters, with a huge group of spectators and a gaggle of servants and slaves who are there to ensure that the expedition is as comfortable as possible. Like the great hunts for furnace rhinos in Gem, the Harborhead hunts are a huge part of the social calendar, with Dragon-Blooded visitors coming from the Blessed Isle and neighboring tributaries for the occasion. In the process, deals are made, marriages are arranged and allegiances are formed — or, sometimes, broken.

The Harborhead hunts start with scouts heading out before dawn to locate a suitable prey animal for the hunter. Once the prey is located, a huge troupe of peasant beaters drives it toward a prearranged location where the Dragon-Blooded hunter awaits. A crowd of spectators watches from a viewing platform that is specially built nearby to provide the best view of the kill.


In particular, the Dragon-Blooded hunters are after at least one of each of the species that make up the Five Trophies of the South: the abacasteri (see **Creatures of the Wyld**, p. 52-53), the desert basilisc (see **Creatures of the Wyld**, p. 55), the furnace rhino (see **Creatures of the Wyld**, p. 62-63), the simhata (see **Exalted: The Lunars**, p. 43) and the lion fae (see pp. 90-93). Killing these creatures is always dangerous, but in order to preserve them as trophies, special considerations are sometimes needed. This is particularly the case for the abacasteri, which needs to be carefully bled to death if its corpse is to be prevented from collapsing into dust on its death.

Because there is a large contingent of spectators nearby, a hunter's demeanor, courage and panache are as much on display as the creature itself. Hunters who provide skillful shows are feted as heroes for several months afterward, something that is particularly important if the hunter is trying to impress future in-laws. Conversely, a hunter who breaks and runs or who fails to cleanly kill the prey is vilified for years afterward. Failing to stop the creature that then kills or wounds some of the spectators is particularly damning.

For unExalted Dynasts, hunting is also an important pastime, but they tend to limit themselves to less dangerous prey, such as lions, leopards, elephants, rhinos and buffalo.







CHAPTER THREE

GODS, MONSTERS AND MANSES



AHLAT

In the long millennia since the Primordials walked in Creation and played the Games of Divinity, Ahlat, the Southern God of War and Cattle, has come far. He has acquired wealth, prestige, power and influence, both in Creation and in Heaven, and taken a turn at the boards of the Games of Divinity.

Yet, no one comes as far as Ahlat has, in Heaven or in Creation, without taking a few risks or making a few compromises. The god has enemies — other small gods the fiery Lord of Battles stepped on as he rose to the top, and higher gods who suspect Ahlat may be after their position. Other deities, too, feel they have a chance to supplant him as war god or as cow god — or perhaps as both. However glittering Ahlat's court may appear, the War God's sphere of influence is riddled with compromised personalities.

THE HISTORY OF A GOD

Ahlat began his career as a god in the Far North, as the small god in charge of the mating contests of the male black walrus, a massively muscled beast that rarely moved except to eat and fight other black walruses whenever a walrus cow was nearby. In a lonesome sanctum at the edge of the ice, he did his duty: writing up reports on how many walrus matings there had been each day, each week, each month, each season. These reports Ahlat sent on to his

superiors in the Bureau of Nature, in the Heavenly City of Yu-Shan. Occasionally, the reports would come back to him with recommended changes or simply stamped “well done” with the standard seal of an official not substantially more important than Ahlat himself.

It was a dismal, dreary existence, and the god longed to escape from the edges of creation to someplace closer to the bright center of Creation — perhaps even to the heights of Heaven itself. Yet, the Celestial Order kept him at his post for time beyond human memory. Other gods thought him cursed to be so dissatisfied with his post, when there was no possibility of change or the reordering of Creation. They shunned his company, so he dwelt alone at the edges of Creation, recording the virility of his wards.

So it became clear in the fullness of time that the numbers of the black walruses were declining. Food was scarce, and the walruses responded by competing for food more frequently. More of them died in these battles, and more were wounded. In the harsh environment of the North, even these hardy creatures were faced with extinction. Not content simply to observe, Ahlat dashed off an emergency report to his superiors in the Bureau of Nature and forwarded it through both the officials responsible for the walrus's Type and Function. Laboring over his calligraphy for weeks, Ahlat made sure that every single character flowed perfectly from one thought to the next, that every brush stroke conveyed the urgency of the situation.

The *Emergency Report on the State of the Black Walrus* came back marked “very good” in the vermilion ink of his superiors’ seals, without a single blemish on the later sheets of silk in the report. Ahlat’s words had come back unread.

Ahlat made appeal to the local spirit court. He presented his evidence: centuries of reports marked with the same jade stamp, over and over again. Decades of letters and official communiqués, memos and attachments stamped simply “very good” or “correct your calligraphy.” Rarely did these marks reach into the second page of any letter or report. And now, a vitally urgent report — on yellow silk, no less — had been sent back marked with the same stamp. Were the officials in the Bureau of Nature even reading the reports that came to them?

The spirit court judged the matter seriously and considered all of the Walrus God’s evidence. It was inconceivable, they decided, for a minor god to lay such a serious charge upon a high official of the Bureau of Nature. How could such an important personage not read his reports? No doubt, they concluded, it was all part of the plan of Heaven, ordered and woven into the Loom of Fate. The walruses would soon recover their numbers. Maybe it would take a century or two, but sometimes these things take time. The spirit court recommended that Ahlat lay the matter aside and leave off worrying his superiors about it. Ahlat ignored their advice and continued to send petitions and frantic memos to Yu-Shan, hoping that someone would believe him.

One of the first assaults on Creation by the fae took place that year, during the miserably pathetic walrus mating season. Ahlat, already on the scene, fought the attack on Creation personally and collected whiskers from his companion walruses who had fought with him in the battle. The walls of Creation held that time, and the fae were kept out.

REWARDED

Suddenly, Ahlat was a hero. His long ignored reports became proof of a perceptive mind. His ability to recognize changes in Creation as signs of an impending attack from the Wyld was brilliant. And his personal courage could not be faulted, since he had faced off against the terrible forces of the Wyld almost alone until reinforcements arrived. Ahlat was invited to Yu-Shan as a guest of Gaia herself, in the days when she still spoke and dealt with the gods. The great goddess insisted that he be offered a promotion.

Of course, Ahlat’s willingness to act when all around him had done nothing made his superiors in the spirit courts and in the Regional Authority at the Bureau of Nature look bad. A promotion would be offered, they said, when a position was available. In a century. Or so. Or never.

Undaunted, Gaia had Ahlat moved from the Harmonious Conciliation of Northern Animals to the Serene Assembly of Southern Beasts. Gukhan, the Southern God of Cattle, was being promoted to an office in the Bureau of



Nature as the God of All Ungulates, and his old regional job in the South was open.

Ahlat accepted the transfer from the North to the South. He found he could afford a larger sanctum and began dating a goddess of steam vents that lived nearby, Wafting Sweetness.

Ahlat discovered that his new duties were not terribly stressful. Better yet, he had jurisdiction over several minor gods associated with various aspects of cow life: the Goddess of Calving and of Milk, and the God of Thoughtful Cud-Chewing. They could do his paperwork for him, Ahlat reasoned. Then he could read their reports and add a cover letter and, thereby, avoid a substantial amount of work that no one read anyway.

Better still was the pay. Bands of local hunters, humans, would sacrifice trinkets and burn sweet-smelling grass on altars they built to him, in exchange for him letting them kill one or two of his cows. These hunters usually took down minor members of the herd, the older animals who were less able to care for themselves. The offerings the mortals made were largely useless things, and yet, when their gifts entered the economy of the spirit world, they became Ambrosia, the wealth of Heaven.

Traditionally, the Bureau of Nature and the Bureau of Humanity had little to say to one another, especially in those days. Yet, Ahlat saw a way to make both realms prosper, the world of the cattle and their gods and the human culture of the hunters. He approached the principal hunting god in the area, one Bright Spearpoint by name, and offered him a deal.

When the human hunters returned from the hunt a few years later, they came with two pregnant cows and several young calves. In exchange for this permanent herd, Bright Spearpoint taught his hunting humans to worship Ahlat, the Cattle God, more effectively. The regular sacrifice of meat and milk made Bright Spearpoint stronger, too. Both gods prospered in the wake of their arrangement.

In the next audit, the arrangement came to the notice of Lòu Yòu, then the Celestial Censor of the South with the Bureau of Heaven. Bright Spearpoint and Ahlat were called to account for their wrangling. The mixture of the business of the Bureau of Nature with that of the Bureau of Humanity seemed unwarranted, Lòu Yòu told the pair.

Bright Spearpoint prepared to back off from the arrangement, but Ahlat argued vigorously for the connection between cattle and humans. Humans who had cows were better fed and offered better worship to the gods. The cows benefited from having protectors to guard them from predators and who could help nurse them through illness. In short, the joining of cow and mortal created synergies in the divine economy that were simply too powerful to pass up. Lòu Yòu let the matter stand, but promised to review the issue in future audits.

In this way, Ahlat secured his post in the Celestial Bureaucracy. However, discontent still flourished in him. He had begun as a war god, no matter that the wars were fought only between bull walruses on rocky beaches in the frozen North. Cattle were relatively docile creatures, and aside from an occasional feisty bull, Ahlat never experienced the thrill of battle any more.

THE PRIMORDIAL WAR

Then, Ahlat was summoned into the presence of the Unconquered Sun. The great Celestial Incarna was looking for champions, heroes whom he could raise up for coming battles — with whom, the god did not say. Ahlat knew, however. The rumors circulated widely in Creation that the Incarna thought ceaselessly of the Games of Divinity. The Unconquered Sun explained that he had already spoken to Bright Spearpoint, but that the Hunter God seemed a fool. Would Ahlat support the new order in Creation?


Ahlat would. Now, there were many bands of herders on the plains of the South. Each band had its herd of cattle, from which it harvested milk and blood and meat and leather — always offering a share of its goods to the Anklok. The Southern Dragon Kings took what was offered, of course, and sometimes more. From what remained of their goods, men made offerings to Ahlat as their god of cattle — always small offerings, but enough to keep Ahlat happy and well fed on prayers.

Ahlat materialized and made his presence known to his shamans and priests in the herding bands. He commanded them to offer a new sacrifice: the hecatomb, the whole offering of 100 cattle. None of the bands Ahlat chose were large enough to offer 100 cattle and survive on the remainder. Some turned away from Ahlat's directive and paid for it. Whenever the Cattle God needed to appear a second or third time, he used his powers to lay waste to the tribes' herds with terrible sicknesses or bargained with local water gods to dry up their sources for a time. Other tribes of herders instantly understood what the god commanded and recognized that Ahlat did not intend for them to die by killing all *their* cattle.

They went to war, instead.

All over the South, tribe marched on tribe to steal cattle for the hecatomb sacrifices, slaying other herders and driving off their cows. The more cunning tribes built walls of mud-brick and founded villages within them, to better protect their animals. Others innovated, developing short bows and swords of metal and obsidian to fight off invaders or to attack their neighbors. The number of gods proliferated in order to watch over the new technologies and new centers of human settlement. Some peoples planted seeds in the ground to secure for themselves and their cattle a reliable food source so they did not have to herd their cattle through dangerous country from one waterhole to another.





And heroes arose. The cattle raids turned into outright battles, the battles turned into brush wars, and the brush wars turned into raging conflicts lasting for generations. The warriors in every tribe, people, clan, city-state and country turned to their bravest, most courageous, most patriotic and most cunning to defend house and home and cattle against raiders — and to take the cattle and land of their enemies.

PROMOTION

The Unconquered Sun promoted Ahlat to be the War God of the South. Ahlat accepted only on the condition that he continued as the Cattle God as well. Upon his acceptance, Ahlat's outward appearance began to shift, changing from the gentle, cow-faced being he had been recently. Retaining his bull horns and hooves, he now became terrifying and stern-faced, dangerous and cunning.

Of course, all this warfare had been engendered for reasons having nothing to do with the plans of the Bureaus of Fate or Humanity. Surreptitiously, Ahlat watched all the battles to identify the heroes. Then, he reported the names of the best to the Unconquered Sun. His efforts did not go unnoticed: Fully a third of the recruited Solar Exalts trained on the battlefields of the South. Nor did Ahlat's assistance to the Incarnae end there, for he shaped battlefields in the South to the needs and demands of the heroes he himself had trained. The War God aided those who had learned war at his knee on the battlefield. Thereby, Ahlat kept his oath not to overthrow the Primordials, while at the same time sticking by his divine duty to look out for the interests of his portfolio in Creation.

THE FIRST AGE OF MAN

The First Age of Man saw many changes. E-Naluna, the Goddess of War and Ahlat's supervisor, arranged for the Department of War to jump from the Bureau of Humanity to the Bureau of Heaven. Now responsible to different auditors and investigators, Ahlat spent centuries figuring out who to bribe and how to keep them bribed to stay out of his business. During this period, he suffered a humiliating audit, and warfare was restrained in the South for a period of almost 100 years as a result. It might have lasted longer, but Hu Dai Liang, the Shogun of the Crimson Banner, pulled him back on active duty for a minor rebellion. She felt that only the Cattle God had the right feel for the type of conflict she wanted. Pleased to be of service, Ahlat carried out the work with distinction and recovered his former honor. A few decades later, Ahlat struggled to keep cattle alive and lowing during the Great Contagion, when both man and beast seemed doomed to die. He personally raised armies to fight back the Fair Folk when they breached the Walls of Creation. He screamed defiance at their backs when they fled before the energies unleashed by the Scarlet Empress. And Ahlat howled with frustration when she sent her legions into his territory to enforce peace.

CURRENT SITUATION

For most of the last seven hundred plus years, Ahlat has been playing a waiting game. On the one hand, he knew that the Realm could not be the dominant power in the world forever. He had watched too many kingdoms rise and fall in the course of his efforts to find heroes for the Unconquered Sun to Exalt. On the other, the Cattle God was aware of how much Creation depended upon the continued existence and command of the Empress.

At the same time as he has weighed his choices between accepting the Realm's imposed peace in Creation and fulfilling his divine mandate to promote war in the South, Ahlat has also weighed his choices between Bronze and Gold Factions in Heaven. The Celestial supporters of the Realm and the Wyld Hunt have a point — Ahlat knows that the last major invasion from beyond Creation nearly destroyed his precious cattle, and he remembers the corruption of the Solar Deliberative all too well. At the same time, he chafes under the restrictions imposed on his income and lifestyle by the Immaculate Philosophy. He also trained many of the heroes who became Exalted at the time of the Primordials War, and he feels somewhat paternal toward them. By and large, he has chosen to preside over relatively minor conflicts, to keep his hand in the game and build his power base.

In the almost 800 years of idleness that he has suffered, Ahlat has played at being the wanton courtier. He has built an elaborate palace for himself in Yu-Shan and stocked it with all manner of delights. He has planted vineyards for making celestial wine and has orchards of the peaches of immortality. He accumulated almost as many wives in Creation as he took lovers in Heaven. Throwing lavish parties and providing entertainments worthy of a god of battles has consumed whole years of planning at a time. The War God has even been working on a breeding program to introduce greater variety into the types and numbers of cattle in Creation. Much of his time is given over to entertainments and apparently trivial pursuits. He has watched the Games of Divinity often and bided his time.

One of the ways the Lord of Southern Battles has built up his power in Heaven is through the promotion of the theology of Ahlat's brides. The women of the Royal Guard of Harborhead have become an important source of Essence and Ambrosia in his life, since their connection to him allows power to flow into him, and their regular sacrifices to their husband build up his treasury. Moreover, these brides have borne him not a few God-Blooded children. Ahlat even broke off his tempestuous relationship with Wafting Sweetness for the sake of a string of casual relationships with his brides to generate more such sons and daughters.

AHLAT AND THE BRONZE FACTION

While the Bronze Faction regards Ahlat as a particularly egregious example of a Hundred Gods Heresy cult, there is little that it can do to overthrow the Southern War God. A powerful warrior in his own right, Ahlat commands a highly loyal and capable military force both in Creation and in Yu-Shan. He is also a god of high station in the Celestial Bureaucracy and has the good will and support of the Unconquered Sun. In the face of such significant allies, it is difficult to suggest a reduction in his role or his duties — especially since he takes them so seriously.

For his own part, Ahlat maintains a degree of genial aloofness with the leadership of the Bronze Faction. He invites the Sidereals to all his parties and public events and takes the time to greet each of them personally and by name if they should happen to show up. He makes a point of knowing their current assignments and is not above trading favors for favors — a victory for the legions here in *this* engagement, in exchange for a defeat *here* or a couple of draws over *there*. He always remarks on the questionable legality of such maneuvering, however, and submits all such matters to the ultimate review of the Crimson Panoply of War and the Loom of Fate. As a senior god, Ahlat can pretend to be above the squabbles of the Realm and individual kingdoms — and any divine squabbling relating to those earthly conflicts, as well.

In fact, Ahlat cares passionately about the Bronze Faction — he would like to see them lose the upper hand. The presence of the Realm in the South has brought a measure of peace and stability that threatens his worship and his income. Moreover, while the Solar Exalted were off the board, it was quite difficult for the War God to maintain the good will of the Unconquered Sun, a critical component in his livelihood.

CURRENT ATTITUDES

Like many gods, Ahlat tends to take a long view of matters. His present sojourn away from battle has been a mere sabbatical, an extended leave of absence or a long vacation. The Empress could not rule forever. Despite her long lifespan, she was still only mortal. The Immaculate Philosophy might survive, but without the Empress to sustain and support it, the cults of the gods would eventually prosper again, so long as there was a need for a bureaucracy in Heaven.

Ahlat is not one of those deities who gave in completely to the corruption and sloth that infects Yu-Shan and the whole Celestial Order. He remembers his hardscrabble beginnings, and there is a golden statuette of a walrus on his desk to remind himself of where he came from. He knows how far he has risen, but he knows that there are ranks and ranks of bureaucracy above his own, and it is his aim to reach higher. Though he watches the Games of Divinity, he suspects that he will never play more than a few moves and that real power lies in rising high in the Celestial Order and helping to control and command Creation. He planned to try to become the head of the Division of War within the Bureau of Heaven, replacing the current Goddess of War, E-Naluna. However, he found all of this game-playing to be quite boring. What he really longed for was battle and strife.

To this end, Ahlat began a series of long-term projects. He bribed the Jade Goddesses to place several large reserves of that Magical Material under his kingdom of Harborhead. If men would not fight over cattle, he reasoned, they would fight over jade. He also suborned several spirits associated with individual clans and tribes, convincing them to propound philosophies of personal honor and the virtues of combat among their devotees. He paid a substantial sum in Ambrosia to an accounting divinity in the Office of Means, and this divinity of accounts cut funding to Swan Dragon in the days before the Great Contagion. Thanks to an ongoing bribe, Ahlat continues to keep Swan Dragon's successor as Celestial Censor of the South, Wong Bongerok, permanently understaffed and on a tight budget.

Then, the Empress disappeared.

Suddenly, life in the South began to get interesting again. Ahlat had been gearing up for a major rebellion in the South. However, he had expected it to go badly for the rebels, with senseless waste of life and property as the Realm butchered the populace and put them down again, to remain subservient tributaries to the Blessed Isle. Now, in the absence of the Empress, Ahlat sees new possibilities for widespread war across the whole South, as the Realm fights a losing battle to keep its subject states in line.

Ahlat knows he walks a dangerous line. Wong Bongerok continues to keep an eye on Ahlat, as he has for centuries. Bright Spearpoint, eclipsed by his own pact with the Cattle God, has been looking for a chance at revenge for longer than there have been cities of men.

But the opportunities are simply too grand to be refused. For now, Ahlat is content to remain the best of the regional war gods. Displacing E-Naluna can wait.

AHLAT, THE SOUTHERN GOD OF WAR AND CATTLE

Description: Ahlat has dominion over warfare and cattle in the South and Southeast. He is worshiped in much of the South, especially in Chiaroscuro and Gem.





However, the center of his worship is the Kingdom of Harborhead, where the elite female warriors of the Royal Guard are all pledged to him as his virgin brides.

Ahlat is the patron of warriors. All male warriors who follow him are considered to be his sons, while female warriors can proclaim themselves either his daughters or his brides. His sons and daughters can pray to him, as mortals pray to any god — on occasion, their prayers are even answered. However, Ahlat grants greater favor to his virgin brides. Any of his brides who have never slept with a man can ask his favor in her next battle. In return for the bride sacrificing a prize bull to him, add one die to all her player's Melee or Archery rolls for the next battle, as well as reduce the difficulty of all Valor and Willpower rolls to resist fear by 2 (to a minimum of 1). However, if the bride does not fight bravely, if she surrenders or flees the battle, Ahlat strikes her down. She will fall unconscious for a full day, and when she awakes, her permanent Willpower is forever reduced by one point. Those who ask his favor and then betray their comrades or disobey direct orders instead bleed to death the next time they are wounded — no known magic or medicine can stop this bleeding.

After particularly impressive battles, Ahlat sometimes sends out his war aurochs to consume the bodies of exceptionally brave fallen warriors. In the act of devouring them, these aurochs consume the warriors' memories. When these bulls return to the celestial kraal, Ahlat's servants gather these memories by harvesting hair from these bulls' long manes. Each set of memories is woven into another tassel to adorn Ahlat's fearsome red-and-black cape.

Mortals and Exalts sometimes pray to Ahlat, asking for the tassel of a particular fallen warrior. On rare occasions, the Lord of Battles will grant these requests, but only if the petitioner is willing to undertake a deed of exceptional bravery. This task often involves stealing cattle from a heavily armed opponent and sacrificing all of the cattle to Ahlat. In all such cases, Ahlat sends the petitioner a dream that tells her what she needs to do to obtain the tassel. If the petitioner succeeds, the tassel will be in her hand one morning when she awakens. By holding it, the petitioner can gain access to all of the memories of that particular dead warrior. However, if the petitioner fails in her task, Ahlat takes the warrior's highest combat Ability (which can include Dodge or Athletics), reducing it to 0 (though it can be raised again normally).

Ahlat always appears as a tall, extremely muscular man with dark skin and the head of a black bull. He wears nothing but a short kilt and a long black and red cloak adorned with fearsome patterns and thousands of tiny tassels. He carries a spear made of blood-red metal and jet-black wood and a bow made from gold and lion bone.

Sanctum: Ahlat dwells in the Celestial City of Yu-Shan. He lives in the vast Palace of the Golden Sahel, with its huge feast-hall for his followers and war aurochs, decorated with the memorabilia of the countless battles he's won.

Nature: Paragon

Attributes: Strength 12, Dexterity 7, Stamina 10, Charisma 7, Manipulation 5, Appearance 6, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Abilities: Archery 7, Athletics 5, Awareness 6, Brawl 7, Dodge 7, Endurance 5, Linguistics 5 (Native: Old Realm; Firetongue, High Realm, Low Realm, Riverspeak, Southern Barbarian Tongue), Lore 4, Melee 7, Occult 4, Performance 7, Presence 5, Resistance 5, Survival 5

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (War Aurochs), Cult 5, Followers 5 (Various Servants and Warriors), Influence 3

Charms: All listed Charms

Cost To Materialize: 60

Base Initiative: 12

Attack:

Spear (Bloodspike): Speed 26 Accuracy 20 Damage 27L Defense 20

Lion-Bone Bow (Glad-of-War): Speed 12 Accuracy 20 Damage 18L* (Rate 2, Range 1 mile)

*Ahlat typically uses broadhead arrows but carries and will use arrows of all types.

Dodge Pool: 14 **Soak:** 35L/35B (Tasseled cloak, 30L/25B)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 7**Essence Pool:** 118

Other Notes: Anyone wounded by Ahlat's spear Bloodspike (including all Exalted) bleeds heavily. Victims lose one lethal health level every other turn to bleeding, until their wounds are bandaged.

Ahlat's bow has a range *increment* of one mile (roughly 1,800 yards), meaning he can shoot it out to three miles at -4 dice. His tasseled cloak acts as potent armor. Also, the courage of the thousands of warriors whose memories are in its tassels requires the players of any characters who attempt to attack Ahlat to make a Valor roll at difficulty 1 for attacks with spells or missile weapons and at difficulty 2 for attempts at hand-to-hand combat.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Spear (Bloodspike): Speed 33 Accuracy 20 Damage 28L Defense 22 Rate 2

AHLAT AND THE GOLD FACTION

While Ahlat finds the Bronze Faction tedious, he does not side with the Gold Faction, at least not openly. He continues to make reports on the Solar Exalted to the Unconquered Sun, as he has for centuries — but he rarely shares this information with the Sidereals. He considers it strictly need-to-know information, and the average Sidereal doesn't need to know. Of course, for a substantial concession or favor, the War God might make a copy of one of his reports available for an afternoon or a day.

Ahlat is careful to invite all the Sidereals to his parties, but he spends less time talking to the Gold Faction than to the Bronze Faction. So far, this practice has had the calculated effect of letting the Gold Faction think Ahlat favors it, but can't support it openly because of political pressures. The Bronze Faction, meanwhile, simply thinks Ahlat is showing off his Southern hospitality by inviting everyone and then snubbing the less-important guests.

In general, while Ahlat likes the presence of the Solar Exalts in the South — especially since they tend to stir up battle and strife — he has little use for the Gold Faction itself. He regards them as being antiestablishment without having their own plan for the world. Ahlat helped to choose the first Solars because he agreed with the Unconquered Sun's plan — they weren't rebels, they were revolutionaries. A real, honest-to-goodness focus, as opposed to brainless nattering about how bad the Bronze Faction is, would do much to sway Ahlat's opinion — provided there was something in the plan for him to do, once the fight was over. Until then, Ahlat is willing to remain polite but unhelpful.

THE GOD'S DAILY BUSINESS

The business of being a god of war is exceptionally complicated, and just because Ahlat has larger plans and ambitions does not mean he can afford to neglect his day-to-day responsibilities. War is such an integral part of human activity that Ahlat's day begins early, with a visit to the offices of the Division of Battles, where he meets personally with the other four regional war gods and Hu Dai Liang and their associated officials, functionaries and secretaries.

WAR GODS MEETING

While mortals below ascribe deep personal animosity to the relationships among the five war gods and their shogun, in point of fact, they largely have “good working relationships” with one another in Yu-Shan, as they coordinate the overall business of battle and military conflict in all Creation. Of course, each war god wants a chance to improve her particular battle-host in the field, and so, rivalries are manufactured between West and South and between North and Center for the purposes of exercising the troops. The East has had sufficient military actions recently that it has been left out of the divine play for the last thousand years or so. These arrangements have persisted for generations, and no one can say if the gods chose these patterns randomly. In any case, Siakal rarely gives Ahlat more than a curt nod, and the two exchange only the briefest notes about where and when their forces will engage each other.

In this daily meeting, major battles are discussed and planned, particularly when such battles occur along the fault lines between regions. Often, such battles are planned months, years or even decades ahead of schedule. The Shogun of the Crimson Banner feels that a little bit of preparation over a long time makes up for a rush at the end. There is always a rush at the end, however, largely due to the fog that war casts over all plans and preparations. Records from these daily planning sessions are stored in the Archive of Impending Conflict in the Crimson Panoply of Victory.

THE OFFICE OF SOUTHERN WARFARE

Once the daily planning meeting of the whole Division of Battles is complete, Ahlat returns to his palace to lay down plans for the next several days, weeks and months for the South. His staff at the Office of the Southern Armies and Navies Engaged in Brutal Conflict (known more commonly as the Office of Southern Warfare) is carefully organized and runs smoothly. Ahlat, like any general in Creation, runs a tight ship.

Alone among the war gods, he does his best not to dictate the pattern of warfare in his region. Rather, his forecasting department keeps abreast of the latest economic, political and social trends below. That data,





summarized and digested in a daily report, helps Ahlat make decisions about the shape of warfare in the South.

During his daily staff meeting, Ahlat checks in with each individual Desk in the Office: Planning, Logistics and Supply, Tactics, Sieges, Essence Users, and Horrors. Each supervisory spirit brings to his attention one or two matters within their purview that they cannot decide for themselves, and conflicts between Desks are resolved in similar fashion: Ahlat makes a decision and expects it to be followed. He tries to follow up with a note to the relevant advisors later in the day, but Bloody Brush, his secretary, keeps a running record of Ahlat's meetings every day. Once the staff meeting is complete, Ahlat goes out on what he calls his "field business."

THE AMBUSH OF THE DAY

Ahlat tries to make it down from Yu-Shan to Creation every day, to observe the Ambush of the Day firsthand. This tactic is one he learned back in the days when he was first stirring up battles in the South, because, sometimes, even the most elite soldiers won't start a fight without an accident — a broken branch, a smell on the wind — spurring them to action. Ahlat usually observes the first four minutes of a battle personally before moving on. His staff used to choose the one with the most violence, but Ahlat redirected their efforts, asking them to find the one

with the most uncertain outcome. He likes to make snap decisions in the field about which side will win, though, often enough, he simply stands on the sidelines and watches. Victors are recorded, and the names of the cowardly dead are forwarded to Odiferous Talon, the Goddess of Southern Carrion. Occasionally, Ahlat will direct one of his war aurochs to eat one of the slain instead of handing the names on. Sometimes, Ahlat will also pay visits to local spirits and get their impressions of the battle.

THE SKIRMISH OF THE WEEK

At some point during the day, Ahlat will visit the proposed battlefield of the Skirmish of the Week. Sometimes, he is there to view the actual conflict and to ensure the outcome that was agreed upon in planning meetings. Other times, he goes simply to survey the ground and make sure that one side or the other has not substantially altered the conditions at contact. He will again consult with local spirits about the reasons for the battle.

THE BATTLE OF THE MONTH

In like fashion, Ahlat pays a visit to any battlefield that will be important in the coming month. Usually, major battles can be predicted with surprising accuracy in Heaven, and Ahlat makes a point of knowing the lay of the land before the battle starts. That way, when he supervises the

conflict later on, he can move quickly and easily between the battle's different parts. Ahlat also consults with the spirits in the region and arranges with Odiferous Talon for sufficient carrion eaters to arrive after the engagement.

RITUAL BUSINESS

For the last several thousand years, Ahlat has encouraged mortal combatants to celebrate success in battle by creating monuments to their victories. Victors might pile up the skulls of the butchered losers or set up the losers' daiklaves, shields and armor in a trophy pile. Ahlat visits any such recently erected trophies in order to meet the recently born trophy sprites that watch over these monuments. Many such trophy sprites are unstable and vanish when their trophies succumb to the forces of time and the elements. However, a temporary trophy is sometimes replaced with a more enduring monument, and Ahlat finds such monuments' trophy sprites to be useful servants, acting as his couriers and messengers in Creation. He makes a point of introducing himself early on and rewarding them with a little Essence, so that they come to regard him as a patron.

Ahlat also makes a point of attending any ceremony in which he is wed to one of his brides. Once a century or so, he materializes and attends the wedding as a visible groom — just to keep his adherents in line. More often than not, however, he attends as an invisible presence, whispering the groom's lines into his intended's ear and rewarding her with an insubstantial kiss.

Ahlat tries to attend one military parade a week and, every so often, surveys some "new recruits" on a whim. He continues to make reports to the Unconquered Sun on likely candidates for Exaltation, though he now sends copies to the other Celestial Incarnae and to Lytek, the Daimyo of Exaltation, knowing that you never know whom you need on your side. Sword of Fire, a war aurochs in charge of the Essence Users Desk, also takes Ahlat around once a week to peek in on one or more of the active Exalts in the region.

THE REGIONAL COURT OF WAR

While Ahlat does not convene the Southern Court of War every day, he usually allows time for a session every week. The Court of War hears pleas from local divinities, who often ask that a battlefield bypass a particular orchard or village or that a particular warrior survive or die in the course of a specific conflict. The War God tries to satisfy as many petitioners as he can. Still, battle is a difficult business, even for gods, and thousands of compromises can make a major engagement into an indecisive skirmish. It is clear that Ahlat takes a personal interest in the welfare of little gods in the path of his armies, and his personal care and attention to detail has won him much praise among the lower divinities and elementals. As a result, his court tends to run much more smoothly than the wars it super-

vises, and outbursts are rare. Ahlat's personal ferocity in dealing with those who transgress against the procedures of his courtroom are legendary. He has been known to chase offenders across Creation.

The Court of War also settles disputes among spirits in the region, as well as adjudicating spiritual matters in mortal wars. When other courts are unable to come to a determination, their logjammed cases come to Ahlat's Southern Court of War, where trial by combat often resolves the matter. Ahlat supervises such combats and personally adjudicates and executes judgments upon the losers. Since spirits cannot really fight to the death, the combatants fight to dissolution, though, sometimes, well-connected spirits will muster spirit armies under Ahlat's supervision. All Court of War trials by combat take place under the direct supervision of Ahlat and the aurochs, who watch for signs of foul play or battlefield cowardice.

VISITING THE COWS


Once Ahlat completes his military duties, he goes and checks in on his cows — or at least some of them. In communities all over the South, there are herds of cattle specifically dedicated to Ahlat, either to be future sacrifices to him or to be kept as tokens of esteem and honor. There is no actual Office of Cows any more, and Ahlat has only Horn of Ink as a staff member in this department, who does all the paperwork associated with cows. Still, Ahlat takes a continued interest in this area, and he is constantly suggesting new breeds and new byproducts from his beloved animals to the Bureau of Nature. He also reads a daily digest from the Convention on Disease on the incidence of mange and other illnesses in the herds.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PLAY

Ahlat's pleasure calendar is every bit as packed as his official calendar. The realm of the gods is full of socialites hosting salons and upwardly mobile deities who throw lavish dinner parties. Ahlat attends some of these out of a desire to stay connected. He finds many of them boring, except those where some new mortal entertainer has been recruited to perform. He finds it amazing how many of them believe their work to be original, and he takes great delight in engaging them in conversation about their more illustrious and well-remembered predecessors when he can.

Ahlat also finds it necessary to convene his court from time to time in a purely social context. For example, the War God invites Long Tusk, his successor in the North as presider over walrus mating fights, to a state dinner once a decade and sees to it that proper honor is paid to the station where he once labored. This is considered the proper duty of an advanced god by many in Yu-Shan, for it is a way of bringing hardworking lesser gods to the attention of their superiors. The Southern War God also holds similar state dinners every four years for hundreds of





gods on behalf of each of the war gods except Siaka. He also throws an especially sumptuous feast for Hu Dai Liang every year. Many lesser divinities crave admittance to these gatherings, for it is a chance to impress higher spirits. Not a few promotions have been decided upon at Ahlat's parties, and the War God is able to claim some position of patronage over beings thus honored.

Many of Ahlat's social duties are working meetings in disguise. Ahlat often sups with gods whose portfolios touch upon areas tangential to his purview. For example, he has lunch with Weary Heron, the Plenipotentiary of the South from the Commission on Refugees, twice a month and a power breakfast every other week with the Black Eye Cyst, the Southern Commissioner for the Board of Ill Health.

DINNER WITH THE WAR AUROCHS

In addition to these more important social duties, Ahlat makes a point to have dinner with the war aurochs on a regular basis — at least once a week. The war aurochs form the backbone of the War God's staff, and Ahlat likes to make sure that they're well fed and contented. "A war-band that eats together fights well together," he likes to say, and since their usual fare is slain warriors, the aurochs get at least one spectacular meal a week. Outsiders are rarely welcome at this meal because the drinking and boasting tends to go on all afternoon and well on toward dawn. Usually, such evenings end with riotous personal combat, though rarely with fatal intent — more often, the aurochs are simply testing their prowess against their lord and each other.

THE AUSTRAL ACADEMY OF DIVINE BATTLE

Like many great mortal commanders, Ahlat understands the need for communication among senior officers. He regularly invites gods, spirits and elementals from other divisions and his own heads and peers to share information and methodologies. Weekly, or at least monthly during the primary battle seasons, Ahlat convenes the Austral Academy of Divine Battle, which senior divinities and junior gods alike are invited to attend. The Academy usually features a keynote address by a prominent small god (or sometimes Exalt) on emerging trends in warfare and the astrology that guides such warfare.

There then follow a series of workshop-style meetings on specific conflicts or battles. Sometimes, these take the form of battle reenactments with junior elementals standing in for individual soldiers. Occasionally, they are "what-if" scenarios pitting existing mortal units from one region against other units from a different part of the world. Other times, they are merely lectures on trends in mortal warfare or panel-style discussions on solutions to glitches in war-related areas of the Loom of Fate.

Ahlat's staff frequently attends the sessions of the Academy of Battle as it rotates through the palaces of the

regional war gods, but Ahlat himself almost never attends any sessions except the keynote lectures at his own palace. He is simply too busy to go elsewhere.

TEA AND BLOOD

Two or three times a year, Ahlat hosts a "little gathering" for 5,000 or 6,000 spirits, elementals and other honored guests. The Palace of the Golden Sahel's doors are thrown wide, and the dignitaries are offered their fill of rich foods and wines. For entertainment, Ahlat stages two or three major battles simultaneously, and allows gambling on the results, as well as direct interference by the greater deities.

The armies he assembles for these exercises are often huge, numbering up to 5,000 persons on each side. Officers and senior leadership come from various minor spirits, whom Ahlat rewards with tassels from his cloak. These are temporarily distributed, so that the spirits can take on the roles of great mortal heroes on the battlefield. The armies they command are made up of dream warriors. These warriors are made from dream-stuff shaped by the subconscious thought of Ahlat's brides into male warriors of great skill and courage. Ahlat claims these images from his brides' minds and uses them as foot soldiers in these mock military exercises. Stealing these images serves Ahlat doubly: He provides a lavish entertainment for gods he needs to impress, and he robs his mortal wives of erotic imagery of other men to love.

Technically, the use of dream warriors is highly illegal. It constitutes significant interference in the lives of individual mortals, and Ahlat could easily be charged with a Severity 4 offense for his manipulation of his brides. However, Ahlat has always claimed husband's privilege to keep his wives from examining other men too closely, and so far, no censor has found reason to try to prosecute the matter. In fact, many censors even enjoy the resulting parties, which are one of Heaven's few entertainments that are regularly unique and new.

THE GAMES OF DIVINITY

Like every divinity in Yu-Shan, Ahlat regularly goes to the Jade Pleasure Dome to watch the Celestial Incarnae play the Games of Divinity. He regards this pleasurable duty with a combination of awe and suspicion. On the one hand, the three occasions when he has taken a turn at the boards have been glorious experiences, which he has carefully recorded in dreamstones, so that he can use them to reward his subordinates, and potentially subvert the servants of his rivals. On the other, he has observed Heaven long enough to notice that the Incarnae's obsession with the Games has led to widespread deterioration in Yu-Shan above and Creation below. If everyone played the Games, Ahlat reasons, the whole of Creation would wither and die from the gods' neglect of their duties.

Still, Ahlat continues to curry favor with the Incarnae, hoping for another chance to play a turn at the boards. He

does not admit even to himself that he is addicted. Yet, the Battle God has been known to ignore his duties for days or weeks at a time while observing the games. It is a common obsession in Yu-Shan, and it grows worse with time.

THE PALACE OF THE GOLDEN SAHEL

In the glittering, gilded world of the Heavenly City of Yu-Shan, where every mean hovel is a marvel to mortal eyes, the palace of Ahlat is the dream of magnificence made real. Filling an entire “block” of Yu-Shan between four canals, the Palace of the Golden Sahel is surrounded by a wall of gleaming white limestone 300 feet high, crenellated at the top with bull’s horns sheathed in bronze. The face of the wall is covered with mosaic landscapes of Ahlat and his war aurochs in action on the battlefield.

At the center of each side is a ceremonial courtyard where the wall surrounds a wide plaza leading up to the 100-foot-high portals of mirror-bright bronze adorned with gilded statuary and heavy steel blades. Black obelisks 1,000 feet high flank each door, and 16 pairs of aurochs statues form an avenue from the canal dock to the portals. Before each statue stands a golden brazier filled with ever-burning flames. On the north and south sides of the palace, the gates are land gates. On the east and west, a private-access canal enters the palace and flows from east to west through the center of Ahlat’s domain. Four of the war aurochs are on guard duty at each of these four entryways, along with two representatives of each of the five elements who are well versed in the arts of protocol for ceremonial arrivals and departures.

Each of the four gates is dedicated to a particular sort of arrival. The North Gate is for petitioners from Yu-Shan, while the South Gate is open to petitioners from Creation, most of whom are Terrestrial little gods. The East and West Gates are reserved for the arrivals of aggrieved spirits and their seconds who intend to settle their differences through trial by combat, with challengers arriving in the East and challenged arriving in the West.

In addition to the four main gates, there are also 12 obvious secondary entrances, one at each corner and then halfway along the length of the wall between each main gate and the corner gates. Ahlat’s staff uses these to leave or arrive with less pomp than they would have to go through at the main gates — and to keep such comings and goings relatively unobserved. Each secondary entrance consists of a small landing platform on the canal and a stairway of 17 steps that doubles back on itself, leading to a passage wide enough for one human to pass, blocked by a bright bronze gate and a matching door behind it. At the corners, the first flight is of seven steps and the second has ten steps. At the other eight gates, the steps are arranged in varying lengths. There are also several secret ways in

and out of the palace, though where they enter and exit within the palace is difficult information to acquire.

Within the walls, a broad plain fills most of the space, interspersed with huge gardens, carefully cultivated wild jungles, forested hills, and high arid plateaus. Along the canal, orchards and farms draw sustenance from the land’s rich soil, and numerous mud-brick villages dot its 100-mile length. At the center, where the road between the North and South Gates crosses the canal on an elaborate stone bridge, there is a town of several hundred houses gathered around a citadel and a temple to the Unconquered Sun, whom Ahlat regards as his patron. Ahlat staffs these villages and the town with out-of-work spirits from the poorer quarters of Yu-Shan. In exchange for a place to live, these little gods become the levies in the War God’s mock armies during his little gatherings. Some spirits take the form of some of the South’s many beasts, so that Ahlat can practice hunting even when he is too busy to travel to Creation. This replica of the Southern savanna is open to Ahlat’s entire staff for hunting, recreation and strategic planning. It can also be rented for a substantial payment of Ambrosia.

By the North and South Gates are two elaborate complexes of palace buildings, functionally identical but constructed in radically different architectural styles. The Palace of the Host Beneath the Southern Stars is built of white limestone overlaid with hammered gold and is surrounded by obelisks and monolithic seated statues of the war aurochs. Much of this palace follows the architectural traditions of Yane and the Southern coast, and the many courtyards and covered porches provide pleasant places to sit and talk, listen to music or rest in delicious and luxurious comfort.

The Kraal of the Host Beneath the Southern Stars, by the South Gate, is built of fieldstone and canvas tenting shot through with threads of gold. It is built in the much rougher-hewn style of the Far South and the desert.

Each of these two palaces contains a similar range of buildings. There is a throne room and audience hall at the center, opening onto a wide courtyard with a garden for waiting appellants. To the left of this courtyard is a vast dining hall, where Ahlat eats with his war aurochs, and attached to this is a massive kitchen. To the right of the courtyard is a grand salle and armory, for practicing the skills of personal combat. Nearby is a pen for the Golden Cattle of the Unconquered Sun, a herd of particularly fine cows with golden hides and silver hooves, that Ahlat maintains in honor of his principal patron.

AHLAT’S SERVANTS

As a greater god, Ahlat has a substantial staff of elementals, spirits of warfare and battle, guardian spirits and God-Blooded, and for special operations, he can request more from the Crimson Panoply of Victory. Some military campaigns require even the divinities to draw on



expertise from all through the Celestial Order, and Ahlat is not above asking for help and later repaying that help with appropriate favors.

Officially, there should be a clear and distinct division between Ahlat's personal household staff and his military staff. The War God's personal wealth supplies the first, but the second is a function of his official role in the Celestial Bureaucracy. The war aurochs are part of his military staff, and these spirits are part of his official retinue, which serves under him as part of the Crimson Panoply of Victory. If Ahlat ceased to be War God, they would be reassigned to his replacement, and quite likely, they would take on new forms not associated with the cattle imagery of their present master. The household staff consists of cooks and cleaners, secretaries and file clerks, gardeners and maintenance spirits.

Unofficially, several members of his military retinue are interspersed into the leadership of his household. Clan Strife is part of the military bureaucracy of the Crimson Panoply, but Ahlat has appropriated his dubious talents for

his household staff to ease tensions. By and large, the members of Ahlat's household and military staffs are loyal underlings who work for regular payments of Ambrosia from their employer, plus food, clothing and housing in Yu-Shan.

However, a great number of them take bribes from gods major and minor to supplement their own incomes, and report on the doings of the household and Ahlat's planning department. In addition, the core of Ahlat's command staff is either already compromised or open to the possibility. A lack of sophistication in many Southern tribal militaries has created a blind spot in Ahlat's own military thinking: His department fails to have any sort of adequate intelligence service to keep up to date on the secret doings in Yu-Shan and Creation or to keep watch for spies within his own organization. As a result, his entire mind is often laid bare to the least spy or informant.

CLAN STRIFE, MAJOR-DOMO

Description: Clan Strife is a spirit of warfare within extended families, and he is the perfect example of a spirit



obtaining a post out of political considerations rather than merit or ability. The tall, lanky spirit spent hundreds of years perfecting his talent at setting uncles at one another's throats over real and perceived slights and miscues of propriety and at making heirs fight duels over miniscule inheritances. He was recently appointed to the post of major-domo when Ahlat's previous major-domo, Chanquaz, a wood elemental, accepted a post as Chief of Protocol within the Crimson Panoply of Victory. Ahlat found it necessary to placate the spirit staff of the Circle of Small-Minded Violence and appointed one of their number to be the head of his household. Lately, he has regretted his decision but has not yet cashiered Clan Strife.

The difficulty does not lie in Clan Strife's inability to manage a household. Indeed, in many ways, this spirit is doing an admirable job — the storerooms are always full, the cleaning crews keep the place immaculate, and the guests are lavishly well treated. The honor of the house is at stake, after all, and Clan Strife would not dream of bringing dishonor on the household by shaming a guest or being less than well prepared to receive them.

However, Clan Strife's greatest skill lies in sowing internal dissensions between branches of any household or family, and Ahlat's palace staff is very much one big happy family. Except, with Clan Strife in charge, Ahlat's palace staff is filled with grumbling, bickering and petty jealousy. Seating in the staff dining room has been upset, cliques and cabals gather in the back stairwells, and nearly every minor department has had their privileges and rights slighted in some way. The Major-Domo knows that this is a failure of his responsibility and tries to correct his acts of unconscious mismanagement with conscious attention to detail, but he is too good at being true to his nature and too proud (what family violence does not begin in pride?) to step down from his honorable post.

Ahlat is aware of the difficulties his major-domo is causing but is too busy to find an amicable solution to the problem. On the one hand, he needs a staff that operates smoothly. On the other, he has no suitable candidate to replace Clan Strife, and the palace of a war god is rarely a placid place, anyway. Ahlat is quietly



polling several colleagues about finding a competent outsider to take the job, but he has not yet been able to give the matter his full attention.

Clan Strife appears as a bald, middle-aged man with a long goatee arranged in elaborate braids. Within his clothing lie a variety of not-quite-concealed weapons, and there are always bloodstains on his silk robes. His own bloody footprints dog him for at least 30 steps all the time. Clan Strife was once a God-Blood, but he was elevated for his skill at stirring up trouble among his mortal relatives.

BLOODY BRUSH, FACTOTUM

Description: Bloody Brush is Ahlat's personal and confidential secretary, valet and bodyguard. She is present with the War God from the time he gets up in the morning to the time he goes to bed, and she watches over him while he sleeps, lying just inside the door of his chamber while he is in his palace or across the foot of his bed while he is in his tent in the field. She handles the details of his daily schedule, arranging and rearranging appointments and conferences, and she copies out his orders to his followers and staff in "official decree" format.

Her skill is such that she sends messages of encouragement from Ahlat to mortal generals in the field, in the form of bills of lading and watch schedules, which her own staff cleverly deliver to her intended correspondents in Creation. Her dire warnings also reach other commanders in the form of desertion lists and reports on troop morale and recent ambushes. Where other scribes write in black ink, all of Bloody Brush's calligraphy is written in elegant strokes of dark crimson, and the seals that she wields on her own behalf and in Ahlat's name leave behind black stains like dried blood.

A lion dog originally assigned to watch over Ahlat's very first altar back in his walrus god days, Bloody Brush elected to move south with "The Boss" (as she calls him) a long while back. She has done various jobs for him, including watching over his main temple in Kirighast and several Manses in the hinterland, and she has always displayed public loyalty to the War God himself. In private, however, she has had quite different designs upon Ahlat, for her true and perfect loyalties lie with Saturn, the Maiden of Endings. It was at the Maiden's request that she has followed Ahlat his entire career, and she has been promised an important role in the fall of the War God. Initially, she did her duty to Saturn loyally and kept firm and resolute to do whatever was asked of her when Ahlat's time was done. In the face of his newfound zeal at the start of the Time of Tumult, however, she finds herself wondering just what her role in his end will be.

HORN OF INK, OVERSEER OF CATTLE

Horn of Ink is the Overseer of Cattle for Ahlat. While cattle are officially Ahlat's primary duty in Yu-Shan, the

business of planning ambushes, battles and wars and fixing the resulting glitches in the Loom of Fate is much more complicated and takes more of his time. Therefore, Ahlat has an overseer who acts as his manager on day-to-day issues involving cattle in the South. Horn of Ink attends meetings at the Bureau of Nature's Southern Division and serves as the chairman pro tem of the Ungulates Committee.

When the spirits of particular herds come bearing petitions, Horn of Ink actually presides over the spirit court in the Hall of the South Gate and deals with matters that Ahlat himself is too busy to sit down and judge himself. Horn of Ink is sufficiently on top of likely issues that most matters are easily settled. Only one of a thousand cases ever really exceeds the overseer's mandate from Ahlat and requires the personal attention of the War God, for which Ahlat is profoundly grateful. Winnowing down the vast number of petitions is easy for a talented bureaucrat and magistrate like Horn of Ink, and he often completes the routine business in a morning. As a result, Horn of Ink is able to spend most of his time relaxing and engaging in scholarship on the quadruped poets or painting landscapes, and spending time with his family of wild aurochs in the Far Southeast back in Creation.

However, Horn of Ink has much time to ponder certain realities of life in Yu-Shan. His excellence at handling bovine matters virtually guarantees that he is incapable of being promoted, and the uniqueness of breeds in the South makes it impossible for him to transfer to another region. Horn of Ink has risen as far as he can in the Celestial Order, and unless Ahlat gives up his responsibilities for cattle to concentrate exclusively on war, the Overseer will never gain any further standing in Heaven. Meanwhile, his wife is constantly demanding a larger sanctum or a small pied-à-terre in Yu-Shan (away from Ahlat's palace, where they can do a little entertaining of their own), and his God-Blooded cattle children are always looking for good work as a prize stud or a fertile heifer worthy of a great cattle raid or maybe even a war. On his salary, these are difficult dreams to fulfill, and Horn of Ink is desperate to provide for his own family.

Horn of Ink looks like a war aurochs in humanoid form at first glance, being tall and black and having a horned bull head and golden hooves. The resemblance ends there, however, for Horn of Ink is not hugely muscular, but instead, appears rather frail and wears thick lenses in horn frames over his eyes. He carries a scroll case and a scribe's box on a strap over his shoulder. Both his golden horns have black stains on them, and his hands are similarly stained with black and red from handling ink and seal paste.

THE WAR AUROCHS

Four hundred spirit swords strong, the war aurochs are one of the more formidable regional armies of heaven.

WAR AUROCHS OF AHLAT

Description: These fierce spirits are the loyal servants of Ahlat. Legend says that warriors who die in battle for Ahlat's glory are reincarnated as war aurochs. There is no evidence for these beliefs, but Southern warriors continue to take comfort in the belief that, after they die, they will live forever as war aurochs in Ahlat's gilded halls.

In addition to going out on battlefields to honor fallen warriors by eating their bodies and collecting their memories, the war aurochs fight Ahlat's battles. On rare occasions, Ahlat also sends one or more of his war aurochs to aid others in their battles. While he mostly sends them to aid other spirits, the War God can sometimes be convinced to aid brave Exalted or even mortal warriors. War aurochs are unforgiving, however, and will only fight alongside warriors who are extremely brave. These spirits cut down cowardly allies who flee battle or who are unwilling to risk their lives.

The war aurochs appear as either vast aurochs with featureless blood-red eyes, black coats and gleaming golden hooves and horns or as hugely muscular, dark-skinned men and women with bull heads and great golden hooves for feet. When in humanoid form, they are always armed with finely made golden spears, bull-hide shields and bows.

Sanctum: War aurochs dwell with Ahlat in the Palace of the Golden Sahel in the Celestial City of Yu-Shan.

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 4

Abilities: Archery 5, Athletics 1, Brawl 5, Dodge 2, Endurance 4, Linguistics 1, Melee 5, Occult 1, Resistance 4, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3 (Fellow War Aurochs), Backing 5 (Ahlat), Influence 1

Suggested Charms: Inhuman Prowess, Materialize, Memory Mirror, Principle of Motion, Shapechange (humanoid to aurochs only), Words of Power

Cost To Materialize: 30

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Gore: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 15L Defense 9

Spear: Speed 13 Accuracy 11 Damage 13L Defense 9

Composite Bow: Speed 7 Accuracy 12 Damage 13L (Broadhead) (Rate 2, Range 400)

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 13L/14B (Spirit breastplate, tough hide and aurochs-hide shield. Breastplate 7L/5B, tough hide, 3L/3B, all incoming attacks difficulty +2.)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 59

Other Notes: Only the Celestial Exalted may use the bows and spears of the war aurochs. The weapons will not serve the hands of mortals, God-Blooded, Fair Folk or Terrestrial Exalted. The war aurochs will brave any danger to retrieve the war-gear of a fallen comrade. Each of the war aurochs can also act as Ahlat's steed, carrying him swiftly over Creation to a battlefield, though they do not travel so speedily alone.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Gore: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 15L Defense 9 Rate 1

Spear: Speed 20 Accuracy 11 Damage 14L Defense 11 Rate 2

While not as strong as the Aerial Legion or the massed forces of the Division of Battles, the war aurochs are Ahlat's personal war-band and represent his personal commitment to the business of battle and combat in the South. They are his bodyguards, his officers and his staff. Each of them serves in a bureaucratic post within Ahlat's organization, and each has some specific district in the South that he or she reports on to the War God. Each also holds responsibility over some aspect of battle, such as

Ambushes, Cavalry Charges, Personal Challenges, Fog of War and so on.

Rarely are all the war aurochs in one place at a time. Even when Ahlat eats with his personal army, many of them are on duty in Yu-Shan or in Creation, carrying out their master's bidding. Still, three of the war aurochs are always in close contact with Ahlat, and serve as his military command staff.



Below are some prominent members of Ahlat's command staff.

BROKEN HORN, HERALD

Description: Broken Horn has been Ahlat's herald since the War God was technically only in charge of cattle and was only running warfare in the South unofficially. While technically lower in the chain of command than Cunning Stratagem, her long service has made Broken Horn Ahlat's trusted advisor. The war aurochs' left horn was broken in battle with the forces of the War God of the North, the cruel beaks of Nasamara, and she has a particular hatred for the hawk-spirits, far above what is customary for the war aurochs. The missing half of her horn is on display in the trophy hall of Nasamara. Broken Horn has promised to reclaim it one day, but the stars forecast ill omens for the South on the day she rejoins the broken halves — an end to battle for 1,000 years.

Broken Horn is the head of Ahlat's messengers and his signal service. She communicates his will to distant commanders on battlefields or obscures their signals, at her master's command. She also regularly visits the courts of the other regional war gods with tidings from Ahlat. In humanoid form, her lithe, muscular black skin is tinged with gray, and a terrible scar crosses the left side of her head. No one has known her to utter any opinion but her master's alone since before the Great Contagion. If she has any disagreements with the War God at all, she airs them in one of her daily private meetings with him.

Broken Horn feels slighted for being passed over for factotum in favor of Bloody Brush. That the lion dog is competent and capable and of higher status — and has known Ahlat for even longer that she has — does not make the appointment any easier for her to bear. Broken Horn busies herself in Ahlat's more routine communications and considers whether she does not go after her broken horn out of loyalty to her commander — or cowardice.

Other Notes: Broken Horn's stats are as for war aurochs in general, but she possesses the Abilities of Investigation, Linguistics, Presence, Performance and Socialize, as well, all at ●●●●. She also possesses additional Charms relevant to her duties as the War God's herald.

CUNNING STRATAGEM, WARLEADER

Description: Cunning Stratagem is Warleader of the War Aurochs. He is in command of the war-band when Ahlat has other business, and he runs them through their regular training exercises. He makes up the watch-bill assigning them either to duty in Yu-Shan or to specific districts within the South. Believing that a soldier's duty is to perform any function, the Warleader shuffles the aurochs between many duties in the South. He includes

himself in the rotation, taking guard duty at Ahlat's temple as often as he supervises battles. Recognizing that military preparedness requires time for rest and relaxation, he schedules the aurochs for regular leave and retraining back in Yu-Shan. At any given time, a third of the force is on call in Creation, a third is on duty in Yu-Shan and a third is going through retraining or a rest period in the Heavenly City or in Creation.

The Warleader currently suffers from an addiction to a dreamstone of the Games of Divinity. The stone is in the possession of Misarand, a charming dove-spirit of the Goddess of Southern Peace, Jewel of Prosperity. In exchange for the use of the stone, he is feeding regular reports on matters in Ahlat's palace and offices to Misarand. He deeply fears discovery of his betrayal, but he fears loss of access to the dreamstone even more. He will do anything Misarand asks of him.

Cunning Stratagem has a white diamond-shaped patch on his black forehead, whether in humanoid or aurochs form.

Other Notes: Cunning Stratagem's stats are as for war aurochs in general, but he possesses Charisma ●●●●, Influence ●●, Martial Arts ●●●●●, Presence ●●● and the numerous additional Charms: Accuracy Without Distance, Arrow Storm Technique, Phantom Arrow Technique, Striking Cobra Technique, Serpentine Evasion, Snake Form, Excellent Strike, Hungry Tiger Technique, and One Weapon, Two Blows.

SHARP EDGE, DEDICANT OF THE DAIKLAVE

Description: Alone of the war aurochs, Sharp Edge carries a daiklave, and she wields it as only a puissant master can. She is the Training Master of Ahlat's school of combat, and in all the South, she is the singular spiritual champion and advocate of those who use such weapons. Nominally, Sharp Edge is the head of the Desk of Essence Users in the South, though, in practice, she ignores all but the bare necessities of her office, giving herself over to the study of her chosen weapon, a daiklave of moonsilver she received from the hand of Luna herself after the Primordials War.

That blade, Horns of the Waning Moon, is a double-edged monstrosity of jutting spikes and edges, each grooved and razor-sharp. It transforms from a shape suitable for Sharp Edge's hands when she's in humanoid form to a horrific spiked crown that mounts on her horns and head when in aurochs form.

Sharp Edge has studied the daiklave and its uses in combat for longer than that the weapon has existed among mortals. It is her policy that if she hears of any user of the weapon claiming mastery of it in the South, she will appear to him in physical form and challenge him to a duel, daiklave against daiklave without Charms or sorcery, from dawn until noon, or from noon until dusk. More often than

not, such a contest results in the death of an arrogant Exalt. If her opponent should succeed in holding his own for the stipulated length of time, however, without flagging or failing, she will point him toward a new daiklave or a powerful Hearthstone for his current one's hilt. If her opponent cheats, she will summon the other war aurochs to hunt down and destroy the offender or to chase him out of the South. If her opponent refuses the challenge or retracts his claim of mastery, she will "give him a few pointers" and thereby raise his Melee by one dot, up to the limit allowed by his Essence.

Other Notes: Sharp Edge's base stats are those of a war aurochs. However, when using her daiklave, her accuracy is 18, and her other attack and defense numbers are as a slightly enhanced grand daiklave as found on page 342 of **Exalted**: (Speed -2, Damage +12L, +1 Defense).

AHLAT'S GUESTS

Ahlat holds at least one Southern custom in great respect, at least when it suits him. The Palace of the Golden Sahel is reputed to contain 10,000 guest rooms, in addition to barracks for his followers and whole suites for his principal allies. He likes having guests around, whether valiant mortals brought in for a party or Exalts that have attracted his notice. Unlike most deities, Ahlat finds mortals somewhat amusing, and he doesn't mind having them visit. Thunderbirds, ifrits and all manner of visitors come to Ahlat's palace as his honored guests, as well. It is rare for there to be fewer than 100 guests in his palace at any given time, and for major occasions, he will host several thousand. In addition, any petitioners who come to him from Creation are often treated to several days of luxurious accommodation, until the appropriate court is in session and their petition can be heard and judged.

The difficulty is that once they have arrived, some guests often have great difficulty leaving. Frequently, it happens an escort is not currently available to take them to one of the gates back to Creation, and such honored guests of the War God cannot possibly be expected to wander aimlessly around Heaven for hours or weeks or months. No, no, Ahlat's guests cannot go about risking improprieties.

It thus comes to pass that a number of Ahlat's guests often wind up staying days or weeks or months longer than they intend. Force is hardly ever needed to keep someone in the palace, merely subtle pressure and a desire to avoid offending the War God.

AHLAT'S ALLIES

As is often the case for a being in his position and power, Ahlat has many acquaintances, friends, followers, hangers-on and assistants, who are always happy to help him out—for a price. At the moment, however, he has few true allies—beings who will help him for the sake of an old

friendship. Bright Spearpoint, the Hunting God of the South, remembers Ahlat well. Yet, he also remembers the sacrifices he used to get before the existence of cattle herds reduced the dependence of humans on hunting. Even though he professes to like Ahlat, he would require a significant honorarium to help the Lord of Battles in any serious endeavor.

AHLAT'S ADVERSARIES

Considerably more numerous than Ahlat's allies are the War God's adversaries and rivals. Presenting a complete list of Ahlat's enemies would prove nearly impossible, for such a powerful god is capable of giving offense to nearly anyone. However, those presented below are rivals who are sufficiently strong, either physically or in terms of the resources they control, to give him significant difficulties.

JEWEL OF PROSPERITY, GODDESS OF SOUTHERN PEACE

Regarding her animosity toward Ahlat as strictly business, Jewel of Prosperity still feels that his rise to power has largely pushed her down. She works both in Heaven and in Creation to increase the power of arbitration and lawsuit in personal matters, rather than allow violence to decide matters. She also works to promote treaties and alliances that bring about an increase in peace, and she works tirelessly for the suppression of banditry and piracy in the South.

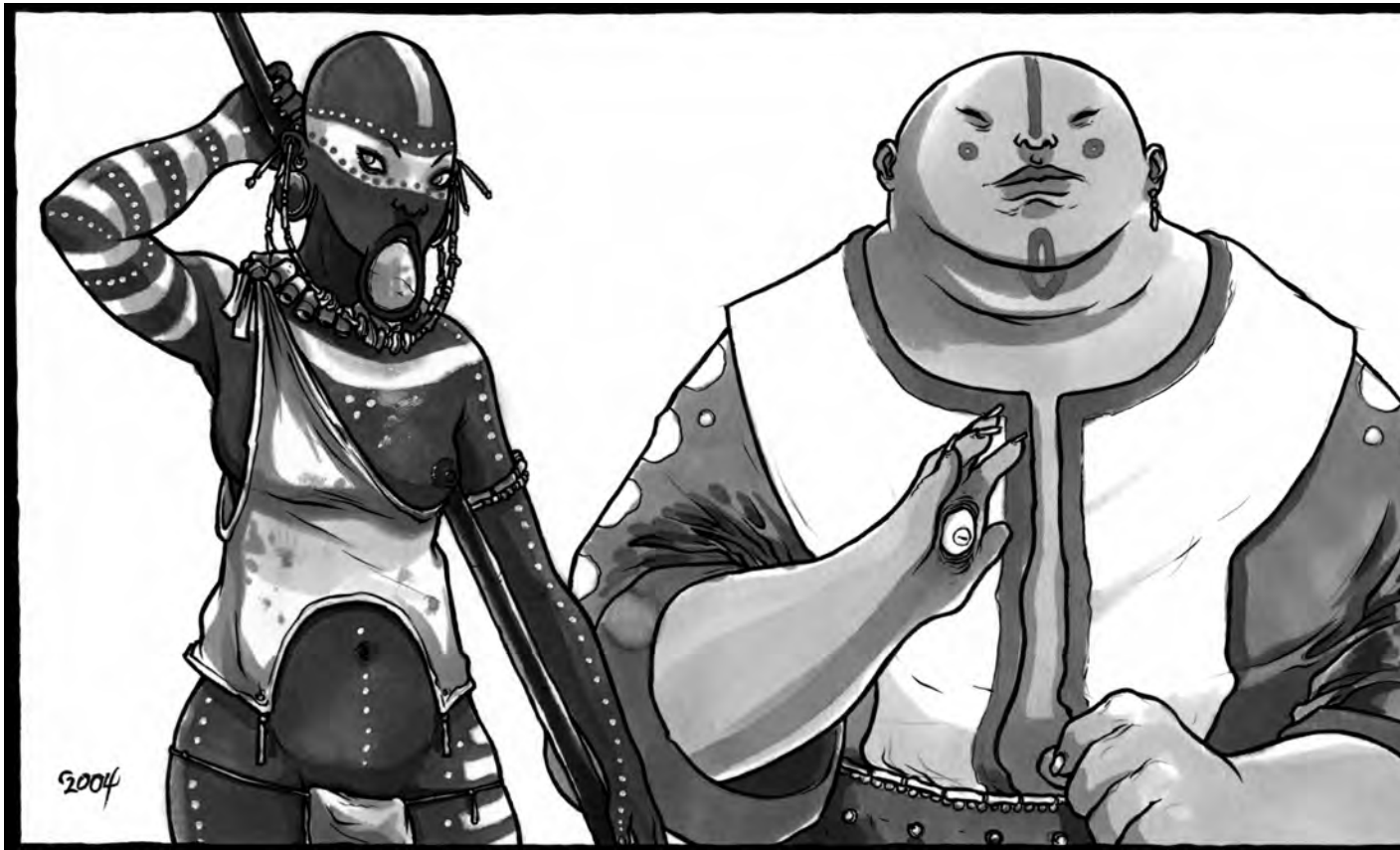
Of late, her efforts have been heavily curtailed by the appearance of numerous tangles in the Loom of Fate. Peace is not likely to break out in this region just because the Goddess of Peace wants it. Jewel of Prosperity's heavy-handed actions in an attempt to prove the contrary have actually caused more problems than they have solved. She has even been reprimanded by Wong Bongerok for her actions and will be subjected to serious censures upon the next major glitch than can be laid at her feet.

For the moment, therefore, Jewel of Prosperity has backed off from any direct attacks on Ahlat and simply continues her efforts to suborn members of his court. She is particularly interested in Cunning Stratagem and Horn of Ink. She's already successfully suborned Cunning Stratagem through his dreamstone addiction, and she is keeping Horn of Ink under close observation, looking for an opportunity to turn him to her cause as well.

WONG BONGEROK, CELESTIAL CENSOR OF THE SOUTH

Wong Bongerok has not been able to shake the feeling that Ahlat pulled a fast one on his predecessor Làu Yòu more than 3,000 years ago. Cattle and humanity should never have been allowed to combine, given that the resulting "synergy" appears to have been constant warfare. Too, Wong Bongerok resents the upstart nature of





Ahlat, who has gone from a Creation-bound walrus-spirit to a major player in Heaven.

For many centuries, Wong Bongerok has felt that his hands were tied by the apparent interest in and patronage of Ahlat by the Unconquered Sun. It wouldn't do to pull down a divinity whom the Unconquered Sun himself had chosen for such honors and responsibilities. Of late, however, Wong Bongerok has noticed that the Unconquered Sun mostly ignores the Cattle God, and there have not been as many Solar Exalts appearing in the South as there were in Ages past. Wong Bongerok believes that the Unconquered Sun has found other allies and has turned his attention to other matters, notably the Games of Divinity. Ahlat is of less interest to the Incarna now than he was previously. That makes the War God vulnerable to all sorts of charges.

Wong Bongerok's difficulty arises from the inconvenient fact that Ahlat is now a very powerful god. He needs to be able to charge Ahlat with very severe crimes in order for the accusations to matter. However, he lacks critical information, and the Southern Censor's office faced a savage budget cut several centuries ago. Faced with a choice between cutting his investigative staff and reducing his palace size and his creature comforts, Wong Bongerok made the only sensible choice and transferred his celestial lions and other investigators and enforcers to

other departments. He has demanded an appeal of the funding cut but, so far, has not been able to make much progress in getting his Ambrosia allowance restored.

QUICKENING WATER, SIDEREAL

A Chosen of the Maiden of Serenity, Quickenning Water watches informally over marriages, births and love in the South. While there are numerous divinities that keep these matters in their purview, Quickenning Water regards them as important enough to warrant her attention. What specifically grabs her attention, and inflames her sensibilities, is the way that Ahlat's brides are denied access to many of life's great pleasures — betrothals, weddings, coitus, child-rearing and, ultimately, love. So many women bred to violence and anger, she believes, is not good for the society of Harborhead. Nor is it good for the neighboring kingdoms, which will experience an increase in unhappiness when Harborhead's violent tendencies spill out at last.

Quickenning Water has adopted a three-fold strategy for breaking up the custom of virgins dedicating themselves to Ahlat. First, she has decided that she will seduce Ahlat directly and attempt to become his bedmate. Skilled as she is in the ways of pleasure, she is sure that, once he has partnered with her, Ahlat will renounce all other brides. Second, she has walked in Creation, quietly spreading the



天
 地
 人
 神

custom of sacrificing a calf to Ahlat at wedding feasts and at the birth of a child. In this way, she hopes to demonstrate to Ahlat that the potential revenue from healthy, mortal-to-mortal loving relationships is much higher than what he can squeeze out of virgin brides. Third, she has been doing some investigative work for Wong Bongorok, looking for evidence of some major misdemeanor that might be laid at the War God's hooves. She has lately come to suspect Ahlat of placing bribes to create the jade beds in Harborhead and of manipulating the Southern Censor's budget, but she has no proof of either, yet.

WAFING SWEETNESS, STEAM VENT GODDESS

One of Ahlat's former lovers, Wafting Sweetness has good cause to hate the War God. For many centuries, they dated regularly, and she spent the Essence provided by the sacrifices offered to her by mortals in exchange for her healing steam in order to bribe officials and rival gods while Ahlat built his power. She supported and comforted him when he was just the God of Cattle, defended his sanctum when he was away and spent her time and treasure to help build up and enlarge his career potential.


Then, Ahlat was promoted to War God and moved into a palace in Yu-Shan. A minor goddess of hot springs, bound to Creation, was not a suitable bride for a god with such promise as he. Moreover, had Ahlat been married, it

would be much more difficult for him to create the custom of his brides. When a god is already married to another divinity, it's more difficult for mere mortals to enter that relationship.

Robbed of centuries of accumulated wealth and possibilities by Ahlat's cold shoulder, Wafting Sweetness is angry. As a little god confined to Creation, she has little power to affect Ahlat's routine in Heaven, but she works directly against his adherents in Creation. Her steam vents and hot springs will turn boiling hot if a priest or bride of Ahlat attempts to use them, inflicting massive burn damage. Moreover, she instills the Essence that comes from her holy springs with murderous rage against the priesthood and the wives of Ahlat. Those who use the Essence from these Demesnes come to hate the Cattle God as much as she does now.

E-NALUNA, GODDESS OF WAR

E-Naluna, as Goddess of War, is Ahlat's boss and direct supervisor. Relaying the requests of the Bureau of Destiny to the Department of War is not a terribly taxing duty, but it is extremely lucrative. The goddess knows that her principal rivals are her immediate subordinates, the five regional war gods. As a result, she watches them closely for signs of disloyalty or scheming. Of late, she suspects Ahlat considerably more of trying to supplant



her than the others. The War Goddess has been conspiring with Hu Dai Liang at the Crimson Panoply to delay the outbreak of a major conflict in the South for years, knowing that supervising it would elevate Ahlat's chances for promotion. Though she lacks a significant retainer in Ahlat's household, E-Naluna has a complete network of spies in Ahlat's palace, and several members of his household and military staff report to her on the War God's doings. From these reports and from her own observations of her subordinate, it was not difficult to see that Ahlat was after her job until fairly recently.

She now has a filing cabinet in her office stuffed with every abuse of power or authority in Ahlat's domain that she has been able to discover from the last 1,200 years. Some of this material is minor, such as abusing the rules regarding cloud riding. Other bits are major, such as bribing the Jade Goddesses. Ideally, she would like to leak this information to Wong Bongeroke in dribs and drabs, a few pieces of information a year. She knows she may have to hand it over all at once if her job is really threatened, but she is reluctant to do so, knowing that Ahlat is more conscientious about his duties than some of her other subordinates.

JEALOUSY AMONG THE GODS

By no means is this list of Ahlat's adversaries complete or even a roster of his most fearsome opponents. There are deities from the North who still remember him as a walrus-mating-fight god, and others who remember him challenging his superiors. Now, they see him sitting in a golden hall, surrounded by warriors and a mighty retinue, like a Northern chief in his steading. If tongues wag and teeth gnash at his good fortune, who can blame them?

Other deities resent him for the favor the Unconquered Sun has shown him. The Bronze Faction dislikes his opulent court, as it represents a vibrant cult of the Hundred Gods Heresy that it is unable to stamp out. Not a few of its Sidereals attend his parties and see his generosity as a sign of venality and bad taste risen too high.

Underlying all these complaints about Ahlat is a wounded sense of pride. The War God has risen high and has attained great things in Creation and in Heaven on the thrust of his ambition and will. Many feel themselves deserving of his luxuries, his power, his wealth, his dominion and/or his portfolio in the Celestial Bureaucracy, and they frown at his corruption, his bad taste and his venality. Nearly all of Ahlat's detractors whisper in their heart of hearts, "I could have done it better than he has."

As a being of profound and dignified standing, E-Naluna will not stoop to engage Ahlat in anything like direct combat. She is more powerful than he simply by virtue of her office, and there is no point in testing her skills against his. Instead, she will bring him down through intermediaries, since she does not wish to be seen pushing a subordinate down. That might suggest she was weak and encourage others.

THE LION FOLK

Love the sleeping lion caught me,
held me fast in a tawny paw.
Her touch was light; she dared me to escape,
but so sweet was the fragrance of her breath,
I was spellbound. Such was love's intent.
She never stalks prey, for her meat
comes by ones and twos, as if by providence.
She feeds on these who lie down at her feet.

—Kishwan of High Plains Kraal, missing since Ascending Fire 768

Padding across the plains of the South come the purring voices of the Lion Folk, patient and puissant. Traveling in prides of between six and thirty members, they assume the form of lions by day, sunning themselves on the low rolling hills of the sahel. By night, they become golden-furred men and women, but with handlike paws and retaining pads and claws on both hands and feet. Their perpetual whiskers always betray their feline nature. The males have tawny manes of long, uncontrolled hair, and their women have short, sleek hair the color of amber. They decorate themselves with gold and beads of turquoise, lapis lazuli and carnelian. Their voices almost purr in the darkness, as they sit at the edges of villages and towns and whisper the names of their chosen prey into the little circles of firelight.

While common mortal opinion believes the Lion Folk to be the kin of the shapechanging Lunar Exalted, the wise correctly identify these cat-people as a type of Fair Folk. Rather than being natural to Creation, these wild felines are simply beings from beyond the Walls of Creation who have taken on the shape of the great cats. Choosing to hunt in the shape of animals, the Lion Folk prey upon dreams and nightmares rather than true flesh.

The methods by which the Lion Folk hunt are fairly simple. Sitting at the edges of inhabited lands, they speak in whispers that reach the ears of their chosen prey, usually the young and impetuous of a village or town. Whenever possible, the cat-people choose mortals who have been overheard admiring the grace and speed of the lion on the savanna, his nobility and greatness. With their powers of glamour, the Lion Folk seduce the mortal into abandoning his village in the middle of the night. Sometimes, the Lion Folk are so successful at seducing their prey that their victims will walk away from house, family and field in the

middle of the day, out of inhabited lands into the wilderness. Here, in both lion and human form, the Lion Folk will chase their prey, eating up their dreams by night and stalking them in a sensual hunting game, not unlike a cat playing with a mouse. Sometimes, the prey is allowed to escape for a little while, only to be seduced again and return to the hunt.

Lion Folk travel across great distances and brave the wild and hot sahel to spread a message of the rushing delights that belong to those who are prey. Their voices speak in quiet purring, contrasting the predator to the hungry lover, eager to sink teeth into the willingly unwilling neck of his partner and mate. In the daytime, these rolling, roiling whispers seem fraught with flirtation and titillation. At night, they become obscene in the extreme, lurid and rich in images of the hunt: the slow-motion fall of the victim, the sensual pleasure of spattering blood, the tearing jaws and the heaving thudding of the last breath and the last heartbeat.

In reality, the match-ups between the Lion Folk and mortals are always unequal, with the Lion Folk being the predators, and the mortals taking on the role of prey. Feeding their victim dreams of being hunted, the Lion Folk then eat those dreams themselves. Gradually, their prey is reduced to a husk of a mortal, full of nothing but lassitude and lethargy.

Though plenty of ordinary great cats roam the South and hunt their prey in prides or in solitary chases, people do not worry overmuch about being attacked by these perfectly natural creatures of Creation. True terror is reserved for the Lion Folk, that branch of the Fair Folk's twisting chaotic genealogy who call the South their home. To be eaten by a great cat is one thing. Being eaten by something that puts on a cat's shape is quite another.

The Lion Folk's standard practice is to scout around a group of villages joined by kinship and common pastureland for several weeks. Lurking in the brush, they listen in on the conversations of the men and women as they go about their tasks. In this way, they pick up the names of potential targets and savor early on the scent of the dreams and passions of their future prey. For this reason, it is considered bad luck in much of the South to say a friend or family member's name too loudly in the open, in case the Lion Folk hear. Nicknames, pet names and titles are encouraged rather than formal names, so that the faerie do not learn the names they need for their powers.

Still, once the Lion Folk have learned the names of several people in this region of related villages, they will begin whispering the name of their chosen first victim, to lure him out of his village. They will then take a second victim from a more distant village and a third from still another place. Even as they take prey and feed, the Lion Folk keep other conditions in mind. Hunting too many from one village isolates the Lion Folk's location too precisely and

makes it easy for the hunters to become hunted in turn. Moreover, like all Fair Folk everywhere, these Southern Lion Folk feed upon mortal dreams and imagination. By spreading their predations across a wide area that is crisscrossed by lines of familial relationship, gossip and trade, the Lion Folk spread rumors of their coming, which helps to intensify the dreams and passions of their future victims. Over several months, the mortals become ever more suspicious and paranoid, and their fantasies of who will next rise from her bed and hear the lion's call become as wine of the finest vintage to the Fair Folk.

In time, of course, wiser heads prevail among the mortals, and nicknames replace true names in all speech, even in the hut where the Elders gather, or names are foregone completely for a time. Eventually, the Lion Folk run out of people to target, and knowing the hunger that will come forces them to move on to a new region. Often, they are forced to travel for hundreds of miles before they find a new area where people are unsuspecting or less guarded about using their actual names.

While they tend to hunt as individuals or in triads, the Lion Folk also enjoy getting together with others of their own kind in groups they call greater prides and terrorizing a group of villages or a region all together. Three or more triads will often gather, picking off victims here and there and raising tensions to a fever pitch for several weeks. Then, when the mood is right, they will strike a village that has gone too long untouched and devour the psyches of every individual within it. The trauma that shocks all the other villages may last for several months more. Traveling in small prides or packs of between nine and twenty members, they tend to operate in regions several hundred miles across, which might take weeks or even months to cross. Within this territory, the pride will have two or three "camps" that they like to make use of on a regular basis and then numerous favored hunting grounds.

In the more civilized parts of the South, the Lion Folk who draw too near to market towns and cities are hunted down with a ferocious ruthlessness. The Guild believes the Lion Folk to be bad for trade, since they neither buy nor sell slaves, but take only those whom they have hunted for themselves. Nor do the Lion Folk purchase any other goods. The Realm hunts them as enemies of Creation and to help ensure the safety of its satrapies and protectorates.

In other regions, cults exist which worship the Lion Folk as a dark power akin to the power of the shadowlands or the more violent small gods. These cultists go to great efforts to secure the names of strangers in their lands and then whisper them to the desert and the veldt, the jungle and the bare hill. By offering the names of visitors to the darkness, these devotees of the Lion Folk hope to spare their own villages and regions the Folk's predations.



LION FOLK TERRITORIES

Like other predatory animals, the Lion Folk have territories in which they roam and seek out prey, and they are quick to take offense at those who hunt in their territory without permission — even others of their own kind must ask, so mortals must also ask (even if they risk becoming the prey of the Lion Folk themselves). These territories are often several hundred miles across and usually contain seven to fifteen or more “hunting grounds” — communities of mortal villages that are joined by ties of kinship and trade. After a period of predation, which may last up to a year, it is often five years or more before the same ground can be picked over again by the same Fair Folk pride. The hunters style themselves good managers, being careful not to over hunt their chosen prey and choosing only the weak for their quarry. The presence of so many hunting grounds means that one region may not be hit for several years in a row and a given village might lose only one or two inhabitants in a given generation. However, the stories of how they are lost are enough to keep the Lion Folk alive in people’s memories, and that is sufficient to keep the terror of their visits alive in people’s dreams.

LION FOLK

Description: Birthed from the formless chaos beyond the Southern edge of Creation, the Lion Folk take the form of great cats in order to hunt among the tribes of the South. It is on the dream of the hunt that the Lion Folk feed, and so, they often stage elaborate cat-and-mouse scenarios with their prey in order to build his fear to a fever pitch — and to whet their own appetites in anticipation of feasting on his terror.

The Lion Folk laze the day away in lion form, doing little but listening for the names of potential prey. At night, however, they transform into tawny-furred cat-people and make their way to the outskirts of nearby villages to summon select inhabitants whose names they’ve discovered and hunt them across the savanna. After hunting an area for a time, the Lion Folk move on to greener pastures before they may be tracked and hunted in turn.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 6, Stamina 7, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 6

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 2, Valor 5

Abilities: Athletics 5, Awareness 5, Craft (Glamour) 5, Dodge 6, Endurance 3, Linguistics 3, Martial Arts 6, Melee 6 (Claws +3), Occult 3, Performance 4, Presence 6, Resistance 4, Socialize 5, Stealth 6, Thrown 5



Powers:

Fearsome Mien: As per the “Fair Folk Cataphract” in the **Exalted** core book, pages 286-287.

Glamour: As per the “Fair Folk Diplomat,” **Exalted** core book, page 286.

Shapeshift: 10 motes, 1 Willpower. The faerie can shapeshift into the form of a lion. While in lion form, the faerie has the beast’s Physical and Social Attributes and health levels (see “Great Cat” on p. 316 of **Exalted**), but her own Mental Attributes and Abilities. One of the Lion Folk can remain in animal form indefinitely, but the mercurial nature of the fae means that most of them have a hard time maintaining the façade.

If a shapeshifted faerie comes into contact with cold-wrought iron, she is forced back into her natural shape, and anyone with a Perception + Essence higher than the faerie’s Wits + Craft (Glamour) can tell the lion is a transformed faerie. While in lion form, the faerie retains the ability to speak, and additionally, all Lion Folk may speak with natural lions regardless of the form they wear. **Summon:** 10 motes, 1 Willpower. The faerie’s voice becomes utterly compelling, to the point where the urge to seek out the speaker becomes irresistible. By speaking the name of her targeted prey over and over and spending the requisite motes and Willpower, the faerie’s voice will reach that person, and only that person, over great distances. The target will dream of being hunted by night and obsess about being hunted by day. The target will leave the safety of house, village, town, fort or other

shelter as swiftly as possible and proceed in as direct a fashion as possible toward the Fair Folk who summoned him. The victim of this power will also fight anyone who attempts to stop him using the most effective method in his power — physical strength for some, argument for others. Unless physically restrained, he will seek to leave until the madness washes away. Roll the hunter's Charisma + Presence — the result is the number of miles over which the Fair Folk's suggestion reaches and the number of scenes for which the effect lasts. This power does not work on targets whose Willpower or Willpower + Essence are greater than the faerie's Charisma.

Base Initiative: 12

Attack:

Lion Bite: Speed 12 Accuracy 13 Damage 11L Defense 10

Lion Claw: Speed 12 Accuracy 16 Damage 9L Defense 14

Faerie Blowgun: Speed 12 Accuracy 12 Damage 7L (Rate 3, Range 100)

Dodge Pool: 12 **Soak:** 4L/12B (Armor of human hide, 1L/5B)

Willpower: 9 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 30

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Lion Bite: Speed 12 Accuracy 13 Damage 11L Defense 10 Rate 3

Lion Claw: Speed 12 Accuracy 16 Damage 9L Defense 14 Rate 4

MANSES AND DEMESNES

In forgotten and lonely places across the South stand the ruined structures of the First Age, Manses that powered the tools of the Solar Exalted and refreshed those godly heroes and that helped to defend Creation from what lay beyond its borders. These great redoubts fell to the vicissitudes of time and malevolence and greed, as warring factions fought to maintain their possession and control of these places or to destroy them and so keep them from the hands of their enemies. Each time a Manse is destroyed by time or war, the others became more valuable — more desirable to hold, more desirable to seize, more desirable to destroy. Today, there are more ruined Manses than there are surviving ones, and each tumbled place now stands at the center of a Demesne of potentially violent and dangerous energy.

DEMESNES

Demesnes are both natural places, fully interwoven into the fabric of Creation, and quite unnatural, seeming as they do to negate natural law and function without regard to sense or order. The mere existence of a Demesne, moreover, does not mean that it is easily tamable to a

THE FIVE TROPHIES OF THE SOUTH

Among the Dragon-Blooded, for whom hunting is a combination of extravagant social display and bloody brutality, the Five Trophies stand as something of an anomaly. When the Terrestrial Exalted visit the South, for business or for pleasure, they usually take the time to go on a hunt for at least one of the Five Trophies. These five animals are considered especially fortuitous prey for the Dragon-Blooded, seeing as they are difficult to track, difficult to overcome and difficult to preserve so that they may be mounted and displayed.

A Dragon-Blooded who attempts to collect the Five Trophies needs to spend at least Resources ●●● on each hunt. There is an additional Resources ●●● cost involved in hiring a competent taxidermist to stuff and mount each beast. Finally, the Dragon-Blooded is expected to throw a party, costing an additional Resources ●●●, at which he displays his newly stuffed and mounted trophy.

The Five Trophies, in ascending order of value are the simhata (or lion horses), the desert basilisks, the furnace rhinos (always hunted during their mating season, when it's a bit more sporting because they're faster and more agile), the abacasteri and, finally, the Lion Folk.

Some have argued that there should be only "Four Trophies," and that the Lion Folk, being sentient, do not really count. They should be hunted for threatening Creation, they explain, not as trophies for individual pride.



mortal purpose. However well intentioned the builder may be, some Demesnes have no wish to be tamed by geomantic construction. The land in these places seems to act with almost intelligent malevolence against the architect and his assistants to render their efforts meaningless.

ADLA CAVE (DEMESNE ●●●●●)

Aspected to Fire, the Adla Cave is found among the old lava tunnels of a dormant shield volcano in the southeast of Harborhead. A vast section of ground heaved open 100 years ago, forming a fissure in the earth 800 feet in length, 100 feet across and 200 feet deep. At the bottom, the fissure widens into a vast chamber several thousand feet across, its walls pierced by numerous ancient lava tubes and tunnels. A series of ropes and pitons are necessary to descend into the Adla Cave without the use of Charms or sorcery.

No one is quite sure how large the Adla Cave system is. Only four expeditions from this underground hothouse have returned, and each explored but one passageway out from the main chamber. None of them traveled any great distance into

the cave, but none felt quite happy about the possibility of returning. The going is difficult, for 50 feet below the rim of the crater, the cave opens up into a vast chamber, and visitors are buffeted by hot, burning winds that blow back and forth through the cave from the many entrances and exits.

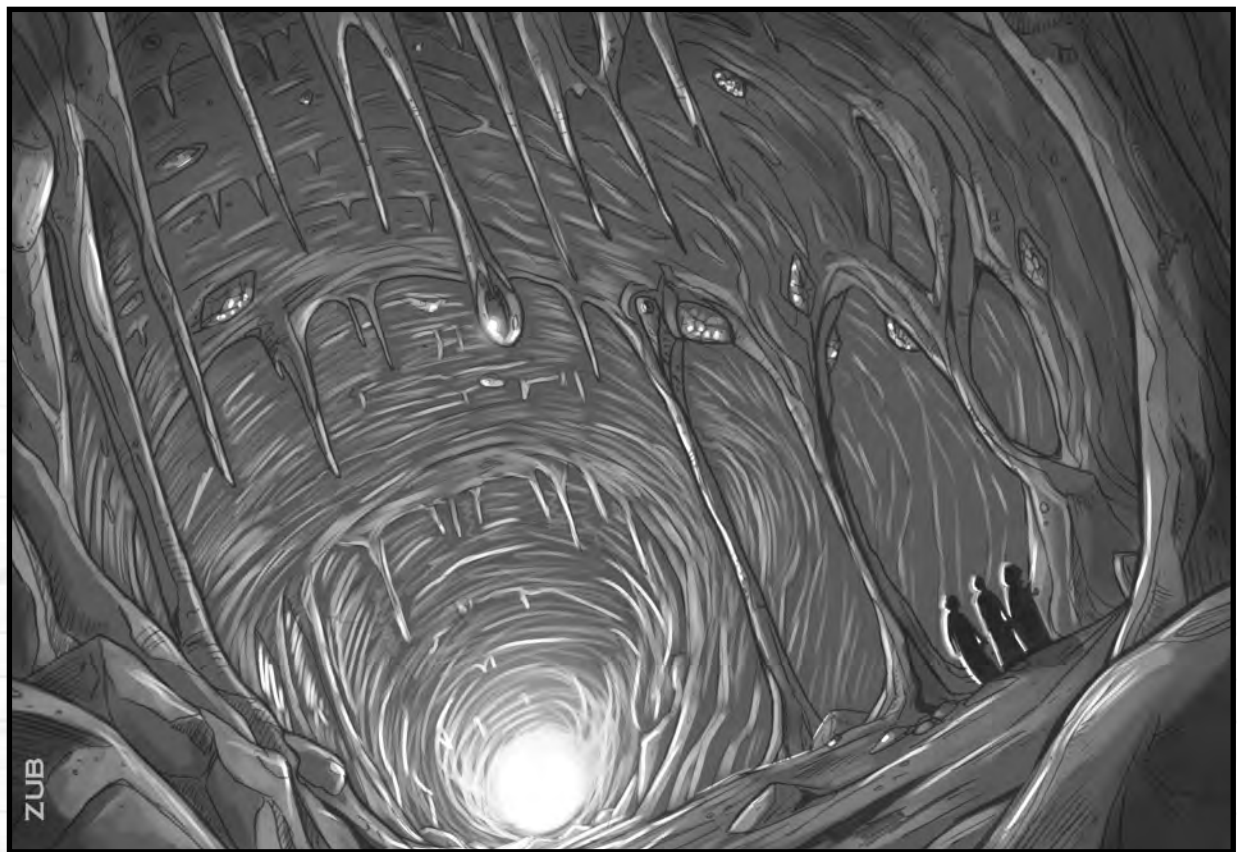
Once this great chamber is reached, visitors encounter almost at once the crackling, flaming light that charges this place with energy. Many of the surfaces in the cave do not gleam with the wet shine of water, but with a hot sleekness that causes the stone to melt and slowly shape itself into stalactites and stalagmites of igneous rock. Here is basalt shaped not in its traditional hexagons, but in dripping columns of hot gray rock. Crystals form in bulbous shapes and, sometimes, suddenly teardrop, falling from the cave roof onto passersby, where they melt through cloth and burn skin. Ordinary metal and the Five Magical Materials grow hot in this place, reaching temperatures sufficient that their colors appear to shift and their shapes temporarily warp. Charms go awry on a botch, converting into balls of flame that go shooting randomly from the Charm user and off into the larger caves.

The Realm is quite eager to have Adla Cave for itself. However, the entrance to the cave is quite distant from the centers of Imperial control in the region, deep in the hinterland. It would be a valuable prize if it could be controlled, but at present, the surrounding region is too unsettled.

THE ELEPHANT BUTCHERY (DEMESNE ●●●)

Deep in the southwest of Harborhead, an elephant graveyard lies at the foot of a high cliff. However, the elephants themselves did not choose to come here come to die. The tumbled bones piled here are the result of herd after herd of elephants being driven over the cliff to their deaths in the ravine below.

Aspected to the Abyss, the Elephant Butchery is a work in progress of an Abyssal Exalt named Bleeding Hunger, a servant of Eye and Seven Despairs who found a small shadowland here where a group of nomads had driven a herd of elephants to their deaths. The god Bright Spearpoint, a former colleague of Ahlat, presided over this hunt, hoping to make a sanctum for himself at the place where the tribe built an altar to him for their success. However, Bleeding Hunger met the god in battle at the place and fought for control of the emerging Demesne. Bright Spearpoint fled the engagement. Since then, Bleeding Hunger has worked to enlarge and deepen the power of this Demesne, raising it from a ● to a ●● to a ●●● over the last four years, sending shockwaves of Essence through the region. That Bleeding Hunger is the cause for the appearance of this Demesne is not widely known. He intends several different possible ends for his creation, however. One, it might lure a Solar or two into his master's clutches. The Demesne might also serve as a home for a future Manse for himself, as a place from which to fulfill his



HOW MANY ARE THERE?

The tide of years has caused much knowledge to be forgotten, and even locations and places can be lost in the wilderness where mortals used to live. In Harborhead, the savants of the kingdom and the Realm claim to know of only 60 Manses and Demesnes, from the Fane of the Upswept Horns to the famous Adla Cave. Many of them are Manses located in the prominent towns and cities of Harborhead, where they serve as centers for the garrisons of these towns. Of the 60 known locations, just three are rated ●●●●●, and all three are, at present, wild Demesnes, including Adla Cave detailed here. Nine, including the Fane, are rated ●●●●, while 15 are rated ●●●. Eighteen are rated ●●, and the final 15 are rated ●.

At present, the Imperial Garrison and the Kingdom of Harborhead are in a wrangle about how to cap the three level ●●●●● Demesnes with Manses and who will pay for their construction. The Realm has not been forthcoming with funds for these projects, preferring to concern itself with endeavors on the Blessed Isle, and Harborhead is too poor to pay for the massive effort itself. For now, these major geomantic sites remain uncontrolled.

The Scarlet Empire and Harborhead also wrangle about the control of the known sites, and this is vastly more important, as sometimes the Leopard of Harborhead will offer a Manse in his realm to the empire, while neglecting to say anything to the current occupants. Likewise, the Realm sometimes returns a Manse to the kingdom, while retaining ownership of its Hearthstone or allowing its local commanders to decide whether they are really moving out or not. The result is a shifting patchwork of authority and confusion, as the two sides use these geomantic sites as bargaining chips in their endless search for advantage over each other.

The Storyteller is free to decide which of the Manses and Demesnes described below are on the list of known sites.

master's purposes. He claims to have other plans in mind, but reveals them for now only to his dread sovereign. Of course, the presence of the shadowland means that this is a place where one can enter the Underworld, and the surrounding landscape has become twisted and strange.

On the surface, the Butchery appears to be piles of elephant skulls, bones and tusks all along a wall of cliffs. More than a mile and a half separates the northernmost and southernmost bone yards, and usually, there are half a

dozen elephant carcasses in the process of rotting. The region is inhabited by strange mice with black and white hides like some types of cattle, and they are the size of wild boars, several feet high at the shoulder. Each usually has two or three extra pairs of eyes and, sometimes, a pair of long, tusk-like teeth. The skulls often form their houses. The Demesne extends outward from the base of the cliff for more than a mile in a wavering line, and the region is often cloaked in a foul gray mist filled with the ghostly shapes of the murdered pachyderms.

THE DRY WOODS (DEMESNE ●●)

Local stories call it the Wood of the 500,000 Thirsty Trees, and it has been here a long time, perhaps since the beginnings of Creation. Aspected to Wood, this forest appears to be a wild and tangled thicket of barren, leafless trees, ready to burn and vanish into the dust of the dry hills where it grows. Sixty miles long and averaging 10 miles wide, the Dry Woods is a sprawling mass of tangled, gnarled branches, thorn trees, dead-looking underbrush and weary-looking bracken. The whole woodland looks dead and ready to be cut for firewood.

Once a year, on the 17th day of Ascending Fire, a rain cloud gathers over the Dry Woods as if out of thin air, and at exactly noon, a great thunderclap heralds the opening of a tremendous storm that sends heavy, slashing rain down upon the Woods. The gulches and wadis that lead out of the Woods overflow in great torrents of water, and the surrounding countryside turns lush and green until late in the season of Fire. The Dry Woods sprouts not a single leaf. In fact, the only time that the Dry Woods has ever been seen to blossom was during an ill-fated raiding expedition during RY 766.

In that year, a group of Royal Guardswomen staged a raid on Varangian territory beyond the Dry Woods. Their strategy called for them to pass through the Woods on the way to the site they planned to attack. However, the Guardswomen failed to arrive at their target in the night. They simply went into the woods and never came out. The following morning, the whole of the Dry Woods was lush and green, leaf-covered and beautiful as if it had been soaked in magical rain. The day after that, the Dry Woods returned to its normal state, with not a leaf nor shred of green anywhere to be seen.

The neighboring land of Varangia regards the Dry Woods as one of the more useful features on the common border between Harborhead and its own lands. The Varangians have made no effort to build a Manse on the site and have formally and informally discouraged others from trying.

This is not to say that the Dry Woods are abandoned or empty. A group of Lunar Exalts joined to the Jackal Tribes call this forest their home, even though they do not enter it often.



RAT STREET (DEMESNE •)

When the Realm built its principal compound to control a geomantically active area near the shore outside Kirighast, Harborhead was a backwater kingdom with no particular resources other than violence and slaves. Few imperial servants wanted to waste their time in such a backwater, and few were paid enough to do so. The poorly connected, or those with no standing at all, often came to Harborhead and lived wretched miserable lives hoping to be recalled to some more glorious duty elsewhere. One such was the geomantic architect Mnemon Imane, unfortunately an opium addict by the time he washed ashore in Kirighast. He designed and supervised the construction of the Manse on the grounds of the Imperial Garrison, and his flawed work has served the Scarlet Empire in an erratic fashion for about 200 years.

An unfortunate side effect of the creation of his Manse, however, was the appearance of Rat Street, just outside the compound's wall. Four squalid lines of rough, squalid hovels line the street and alleys. All of them are filled with huge-eyed, bulbous-headed people with too-thin necks and malformed stomachs. The flies in Rat Street are too large, and their bites leave red lesions the size of nail heads on the skin.

An unfortunate and ill-favored angle between the Manse in the Imperial Garrison and the Fane of the Upswept Horns has resulted in the appearance of this Demesne, aspected to Air. A hot, reeking stench of stale piss and feces mixed with days-old half-rotted food fills the street at all times of day and night. The wedge-shaped clot of ground, filled with the hovels of those too poor to squat elsewhere, slowly twists its occupants. Only the rats seem unaffected by the mutations of the Demesne, as they hungrily devour all the food the humans seem unable to eat.

The government of Harborhead blames Rat Street on the Imperial Garrison and demand that the Realm cap it with a Manse at its own expense. The Realm insists that it is Harborhead's problem and no fit matter for the Scarlet Empress or her designates. The two sides argue back and forth about who is responsible for the Demesne's creation and who should have to pay for fixing it.

The truth is, no one has any clear idea how to fix the problem. Every plan so far for building a Manse on Rat Street will clearly interfere with both of the nearby existing Manses, each of which have their own entrenched power bases and bureaucracies. It is in the interests of both groups to see to it that *nothing* is built on Rat Street. Meanwhile, the people who live there continue to be slowly twisted and mutated by the strange airs that linger on the wind.

MANSES

Many of the Manses of Harborhead have been replaced or rebuilt three or four times or more since the First Age. As wars have passed through the region, the Manses have proved such vital resources that they have become regularly besieged citadels. In time of war, it is often easier to raze such a structure than to hold it, at least until soldiers worthy of such a barracks can be found and freed from other duties.

While the skills of geomancers from the Realm are good and improving in this new Age, those same talents are not so well developed in the South. As a result, with each reconstruction, the quality of the Manse often declines. More Essence leaks out of the structure, flowing back into the Demesne around it and slowly warping the people, plants and animals that live nearby. Nearly every Manse in the South is affected to one degree or another by this failure of architects, builders and residents. The subtle war of corruption and rebellion between the Imperial Garrison and the people of Harborhead has only exacerbated the situation, with the Realm's Dragon-Blooded seizing the best locations for themselves, and the locals sabotaging their treasured heritage to prevent it from being plucked like fruit from their orchards and groves.

When the Manse is held, the Hearthstone frequently left with the retreating former occupants. The Hearthstones of the South are now in hands at the four corners of Creation. Only rarely do they return home to the Manse that made them. More frequently, they are used and passed on in distant places before being destroyed. Many are in the hands of the Realm, tokens and trophies of past victories. Others belong to outcastes or, worse, are in the clutches of the Fair Folk or the Deathlords.

THE FANE OF THE UPSWEPT HORNS (MANSE ••••)

The Fane of the Upswept Horns is the principal temple of Ahlat in Harborhead and is vitally important as the political and cultural center of the War God's cult, in addition to being a Manse of no small importance. The Fane stands near the center of Kirighast, a towering structure of glazed, kiln-fired brick and stone. From the outside, the Fane appears as a high, broad platform, 400 yards long and 1,000 yards wide. Upon it is a four-story structure, substantially smaller than the platform on which it stands, with four towers set at the corners of the building, which rise another five stories into the air. The walls are tiled mostly in glazed bricks, with occasional gold and silver-faced bricks and precious stones. These are arranged in mosaic patterns to display pictures of Ahlat and his war aurochs engaged in a mighty cattle raid, with mortals, gods and Exalts. The mural wraps around the building on all four sides, and it continues

onto the pavement of the platform. Stylized bull-horn shapes of black stone top the walls.

Twenty altars stand around the perimeter of the platform for the offering of sacrifice. A perpetual fire fed by Essence burns on each altar, to consume instantly anything that is offered to the War God. Between each altar is a garden square that holds a tree from a famous battlefield in the South and numerous plants harvested from those battlefields. Before the main doors of the shrine are a pair of fountains with 100 individual spigots over tiled basins, for ritual bathing before entering.

The main portal of the Fane opens into a chamber the height of the building. A massive carved ebony statue of Ahlat sits on a golden throne here, his weapons in his hands. He is arrayed in massive reproductions of his tasseled cloak and kilt, which are renewed and replaced every year in ceremonies honoring him and his power and which help to maintain the power level of the Manse. Forty bronze braziers light this hall and send up continual clouds of incense in this space, which is dimly lit through thin panels of alabaster in the roof and the highest reaches of the walls. Pillars line the hall to the left and right of the doors, and galleries circle the chamber at the level of the second and the fourth floors. Staircases ascend to each of these levels in the corners at the far end of the chamber, in the darkness behind Ahlat's massive hooves. A golden altar stands directly before the statue, where the priests of Ahlat used to offer up the lives of any heroes who surrendered in battle to Harborhead. Since the imperial legions came to the city, no such mortal sacrifices have been offered, but many priests would like to see a return to the old ways.

To the left of the main temple chamber is the House of Battles. Four archways open from the temple into the House of Battles. The first and the last open into the same U-shaped corridor, off of which are living quarters for the priests of Ahlat and rooms where the priests can meet with visitors in private and relative comfort. The library and the archive are found on the second and third floors of the House of Battles, while the fourth floor is given over to a massive parade and practice ground where the priests practice their combat skills to prove their dedication to the War God.

To the right of the main temple chamber is the House of Vigilance. Though its chambers are laid out as an exact mirror-copy of the House of Battles, these are given over not to the priests, but to the Brides of Ahlat, where they may meditate and contemplate the perfection of the War God.

Behind the statue of Ahlat, a single door from the gallery on the second floor opens into the House of the God. Stairs connect the four levels, which contain a single room on each. On the level of the door is a sitting room filled with golden furniture. On the level below is the Temple Treasury, filled with gold that has been shaped

into massive blocks and bag-shapes to resemble supplies in a fortress during a siege. On the third floor is the Chamber of the Bridegroom, where there is only a single massive bed. The rites joining Ahlat to a new bride are performed here, and each bride takes a turn defending the House of the God, usually three for each floor, for three nights at a time. On the floor above this bedroom is the Chamber of the Stone, where the Manse's Hearthstone grows when the old one is destroyed.

The middle doors from the temple into the Houses of Battle and Vigilance open into the armories. Here, arrayed like paintings in a museum, are many of the famous trophies and spoils that the Leopards of Harborhead have dedicated to Ahlat, in thanks for the help he has given them on the battlefield. The Armory of Battles displays the armor and weapons of defeated kings and heroes, while the Armory of Vigilance displays dioramas of famous brides of Ahlat in their moments of greatness. Visitors may inspect the trophies on the seventh day of each Ascending month with the payment of a Resources •• fee to the temple attendants.

Aspected to Fire, the Fane of the Upswept Horns underwent careful repair and maintenance for the first several hundred years after its construction. A general lack of high-quality materials since the days of the Great Contagion, however, has resulted in a great fragility in the structures that maintain the Essence flows within the building and have reduced the Manse from ••••• to ••••. As a result, when attempting to disrupt the flow of Essence through the structure, the difficulty of an act of sabotage is reduced by one.

THORN TREE KRAAL (MANSE •••)

Thorn Tree Kraal, in the deep hinterland of Harborhead, is a collection of plain fieldstone buildings thatched with straw and centered upon a 40-foot-high tower that provides lookouts with a commanding view of the surrounding plains. At the center of the kraal is a thorn tree that is the namesake of the place. A small garden of tender succulents lies among the roots of the thorn tree. A herd of over 2,000 head of cattle call Thorn Tree Kraal their home, and it is at least partly because of their presence that the Kraal is as powerful a Manse as it is.

Thorn Tree Kraal is in the hands of the Realm. Four Dragon-Blooded, among them their commander, Sesus Lapis Chrysanthemum, hold the Kraal as a strongpoint in the veldt and as a signal station and forward-warning post of any uprising against the Scarlet Throne. They and the talon of regular Realm forces, plus another 2,000 loyalists from the local Yathras tribe, have already beaten off four cattle raids this year. Recently, there are rumors of an impending fifth raid. There are also signs of sickness in the herd. Lapis Chrysanthemum feels a tremor in the Essence flows of late and suspects someone has subtly tampered with the Manse. She does not know whether the building



is collecting unstable Essence or not, but she fears the structure may soon explode.

The Hearthstone of the Kraal left the day the Realm took control here, 50 years ago. The Satrap at the time appropriated it as a personal trophy and walked away, leaving the defense of the Manse to others. The legionnaires tend to regard the Kraal as a hardship posting, since it is difficult to get to, distant from any amenities and offers much chance for combat with little chance of recognition or promotion.

THE MANSE OF THE IMPERIAL GARRISON (MANSE ••)

The day the Realm claimed a section of Harborhead for a compound, nominally for a trade outpost and diplomatic center, they had this bit of ground near the coast in mind. Only five miles from the capital, with sightlines to the Royal Palace and the Fane of the Upswept Horns, it would give the Dynasts some advance warning of an attack. Moreover, the ruined Manse on the site could perhaps be recovered and reconstructed and the wild Demesne put to good use.

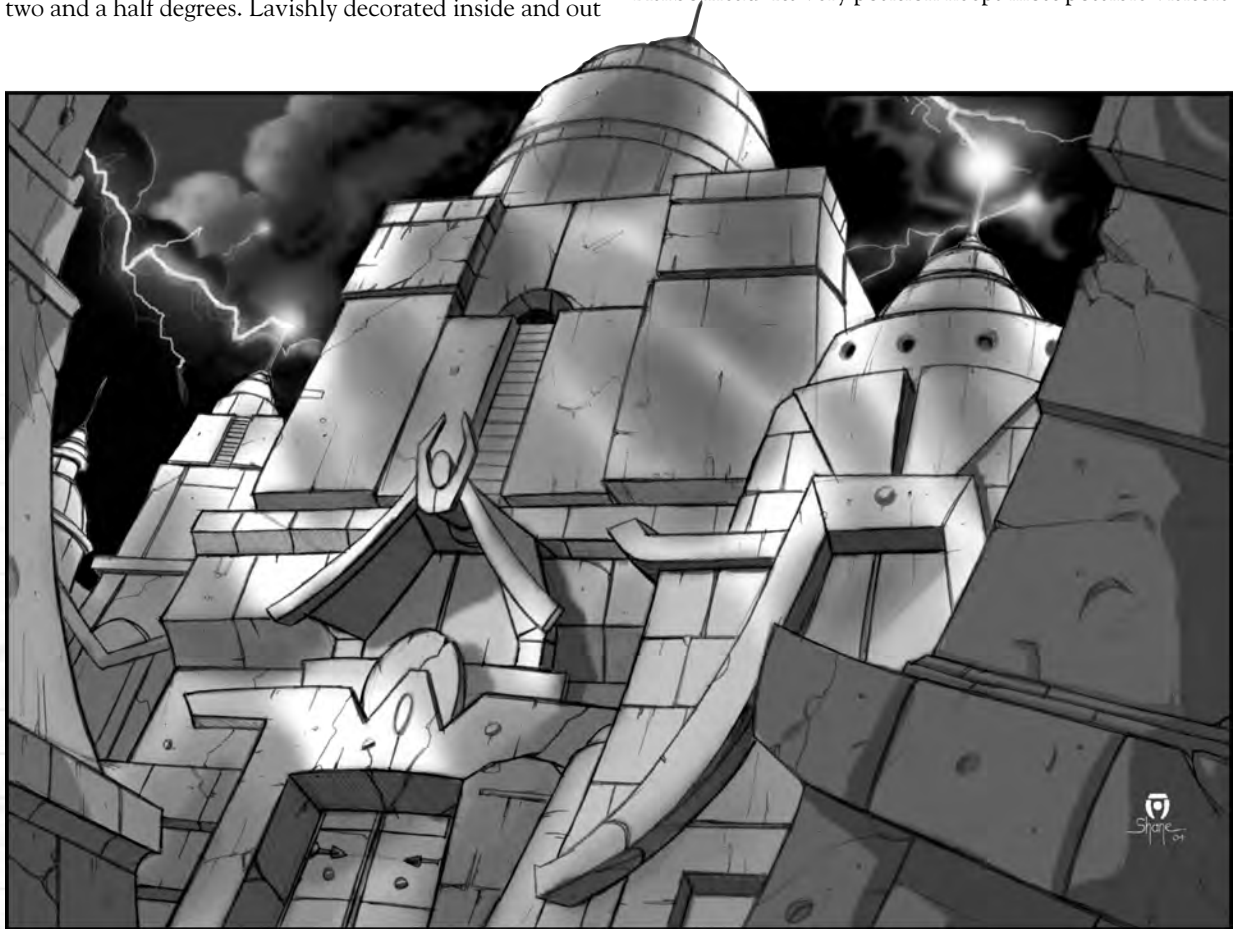
Geomancer Mnemon Imane redesigned the building that now sits in the center of the Imperial Garrison, its walls out of proper alignment with the true directions by two and a half degrees. Lavishly decorated inside and out

with stained glass, expensive marble and enameled tile, the building is a decorative marvel intended to rival the Fane of the Upswept Horns on the next hill over. Instead, all it succeeds in doing is help to create an embarrassment in the form of Rat Street in the slums beyond the compound walls.

The only real solution to the problem is that the Manse's four principal walls each must be shifted two and a half degrees, back into proper alignment with the four poles. The cost of doing so, however, is prohibitive — perhaps as much as 40 or 50 talents of jade to pull the whole structure down safely and rebuild it using new materials. Meanwhile, the Demesne beneath it would spread its mutating effects upon all within the Imperial Garrison, and the Dragon-Blooded commanders would have no place to regenerate their Essence in the event of an uprising by the people of Harborhead.

KHROSAL FORTRESS (MANSE ••)

Nestled below a lonely outcropping of rock halfway between Kirighast and Yane, Khrosal Fortress is carefully hidden from the sea by a jutting peninsula of rock and from the nearest road by a maze of shifting dunes. These geographical obstacles keep it well-hidden from both the periodic sweeps of the Fire Fleet and the Royal Guard of Harborhead. Its very position keeps most possible visitors



from land or sea from approaching closer than about six miles — thus disguising its Essence somewhat from any unwanted visitors who might seek to expel its present denizens, some outcaste Terrestrial Exalts who operate the most profitable slave trade in the South.

Aspected to Earth, the Khrosal Fortress is built of heavy stone walls, with doors of stone balanced on iron pivots. Iron lightning rods conduct the energy of coastal storms down through the stone into the dungeons of the fortress and keep the structure rooted deep. The vaulting of the halls is low and oppressive, and the eternally lit lamps that light its corridors are made of iron and dark bronze rather than gold or silver, and the light they cast is guttering and full of shadows.

In the First Age, this place was a fortress of the Old Realm, though why such a frowning outpost was needed here is a thing lost in memory and the scholar's books. For many hundreds of years now, it has been a place of suffering, where slaves bought or traded or raided for can be brought and sold away to West or East or North or Realm.

An outcaste Dragon-Blooded named Sankhe holds the Fortress for the Guild. His orders are to beat off any attack by lesser mortals, to suborn or ally with other outcastes who come his way and to encourage rebellious Solars who find the fortress and put them in touch with the Guild. His orders regarding a superior force from the Realm are also quite clear — to destroy the Fortress or subtly sabotage it before it falls into imperial hands.

THE HOUSE OF THE CLEANSING SWEAT (MANSE •)

This Fire Manse appears to be a somewhat run-down bathhouse with a walled garden on a side street in a minor market town. The three-story domed structure has narrow iron-barred windows and sand-colored walls. A small porch with three steps leads to a door of palm wood bound with iron, which leads into a lobby with several changing rooms.

Inside, the building reveals itself as elegantly and richly decorated, with several large pools in the cold, warm and hot rooms. Though the outside appears dilapidated, the interior glitters and glows like a jewelry box. The floors and walls are covered with tiles of semiprecious stone, set

in elaborate geometric patterns based on plants native to the South. Gold and silver lamps light every room, and glittering crystals reflect the light, illuminating every dark corner. In addition to the baths, there is also a workout room and a small but fine library. There are also six private rooms on the third floor, suitable for use as cramped guest rooms or offices.

Off the main hot room is a small dark steam room with benches of fine cedar and tiled with patterns based on bromeliad flowers from the Southeastern jungle. This room is the center of the bathhouse, and meditating here produces the effects of a level-1 Manse.

Another chamber, almost a closet, behind the warm room, contains tiles arranged like the leaves of giant ferns, pointing to and appearing to drape over a pedestal at the center of the room. Here is where the Hearthstone of the Manse is normally generated, a stone of passion (see **The Book of Three Circles**, p. 111). However, the Hearthstone has been missing for more than 100 years, and it has not yet regenerated.

As this Manse is powered by hot water from steam vents, the Essence collected at this Manse is tainted with the desires and beliefs of Wafting Sweetness, the goddess of steam vents and hot springs in the South. Recharging one's Essence here more than four times results in a gradually growing animosity toward the Cult of Ahlat, its priesthood and the War God's brides.

The exterior of the bathhouse, with its walled garden and ramshackle roof, is not a deliberate affectation. The building really has become somewhat worn down over the centuries since its construction. A building restoration program, costing Resources ••••, could remake the exterior of the building and turn it into a Manse •• structure.

At present, an outcaste Dragon-Blooded named Saban is using the House of the Cleansing Sweat as a refuge and safehouse for his gang, who are terrorizing the surrounding countryside. At first, they were considered the champions of the people, rogues who fought the Realm and the kingdom alike. Increasingly, however, their violence is turned against the Cult of Ahlat, and they have attacked his local shrines and priests in the streets. As of yet, no one has connected them with the House of the Cleansing Sweat, but it is only a matter of time.







APPENDIX
THE COURT
OF THE
ORDERLY FLAME



The Court of the Orderly Flame (see *Games of Divinity*, p. 65) is the most important, prominent and powerful of all the fire courts in Creation. Its proceedings are carried out in secret, and neither the Celestial Bureaucracy, the Court of Seasons nor the majority of Creation's fire courts officially recognize its resolutions. Many other smaller fire courts exist, but none are as widely regarded as masters of all matters concerning the fires of the world — or more despised for presuming to impose their will on Creation. Most of these smaller fire courts grudgingly acknowledge the Orderly Flame's superiority, though few outsiders, even among fire elementals, understand the full extent of its power and influence.

The Orderly Flame also has a renowned expertise in the politics of the South and has famously indulged the requests of kings and princes who sought to employ its diplomatic acumen in arbitrating treaties and concords. Such respect has led to wide-ranging regard for the Orderly Flame from even the lowest subjects throughout the South, for its efforts have cut short, and in some cases prevented altogether, wars, famine and genocide.

Such political mastery and near-universal approval was, and is, hard-won, however. In order to secure its position, the Orderly Flame employs the largest and most comprehensive espionage enterprise in the South. Its agents are legion, with many holding high positions in the courts of the mighty, and others operating the hundreds of


embassies throughout the South, with a significant presence in the regions of Gem and the Varang City-States. Still others take the Orderly Flame's mission abroad, secretly insinuating themselves in hostile lands and uncertain circumstances.

The Court of the Orderly Flame's ambitions stretch beyond Creation, however. It hopes to someday gain Celestial sponsorship to lawfully gather all of the fire courts together under its own management. Thus far, the vagaries of circumstance and the meddling of the South's censor, Wong Bongerok, have prevented its success.

The Court of the Orderly Flame exists on the precipice between Creation and Heaven, attempting to supervise and protect the world, while simultaneously mounting a struggle in Yu-Shan for a Celestial sanction to do so. The Orderly Flame's condition mirrors the uncertain and disordered world around it of the unruly subjects of the South who do not want to be ruled by the Realm and masters deaf to the pleas and uprisings of their minions.

THE ORIGINS OF THE ORDERLY FLAME

Following the Usurpation, the South, like most of Creation, was lawless and corrupt. The natural world could not be governed, and men no longer had any use for nobility or scruples. The Realm imposed a schema of order



that prevented society from decomposing beyond the point that it could be usefully exploited, but no one in the South pretended, except for the sake of politics, to have any love for the Realm. Hence, most considered an alliance with the Empress to be a mark of shame, a presumption that the nations of the South could not govern themselves.

Two individuals, Swan Dragon and Lusa Seragon, changed the course of history and gave back to the South a sense of self-respect, promoting lofty ideals and the sovereignty of Southern nations. The story of how the Court of the Orderly Flame came to be follows Swan Dragon and Lusa Seragon through hundreds of years of history, beginning with Swan Dragon's tenure as Censor of the South, through the Great Contagion and onward to the present day.

SWAN DRAGON BEFORE THE CONTAGION

Swan Dragon was the Censor for the South from the time 345 years after the Usurpation up until the last days of the Contagion. An optimist and visionary, he did his best to uphold the virtues of justice, fairness and reason in a land where strength, savagery and exploitation were chief characteristics.

For the first few hundred years of his tenure as censor, Swan Dragon quietly and humbly went about his duties, usually administrating the gods of the South who interacted the most with mortals for the Bureau of Humanity. He cultivated an interest in beautiful, lofty things, such as music, poetry, history, porcelain and, especially, philosophy. In time, he developed an expertise in matters of justice and ethics. This interest spawned from the observation that, although morality seemed to be endorsed by men and gods, there was a particular indifference toward it in real-world practice and a general neglect in acting to preserve such lofty ideals in society. As time went on, Swan Dragon saw cruelty, cannibalism, intemperance and corruption prevail more than ever, while such immorality was met with leniency and regarded with the highest indulgence.

Swan Dragon made the South his home, visiting his mansions in Yu-Shan but infrequently, and swiftly became known throughout the Southwest as a benevolent individual concerned with humanity's fate. Early in his tenure, he came to appreciate Southern society, and many Southern tribes, even though they tended toward brutality and prejudice, thrived and came to share Swan Dragon's commitment to many virtues. Swan Dragon encouraged shared regional traditions and customs regulating trade, language, agriculture and the management of intertribal disputes. He employed several lieutenants to put pressure on less powerful local gods to introduce and advocate his idealistic philosophies, which would later become, in large part, the precepts of the Flame Council and the Court of the Orderly Flame.

In Yu-Shan, Swan Dragon was celebrated as one of the most effective and wisest censors that the South had ever seen. Some of the gods bitterly opposed Swan Dragon's approach to litigation, claiming he did not spend enough time personally attending to his superiors in the Celestial Bureaucracy, but few could argue with his results. With his guidance, many Southern dominions emerged as worthy and formidable powers. These realms were respected, feared and widely emulated throughout much of the South, while most of their gods were considered the most law-abiding in Creation. Receiving many favorable critiques for valuable service to the Celestial Bureaucracy, Swan Dragon was known throughout his tenure as censor to be one of the most trustworthy and virtuous of all the lesser elemental dragons and a credit to the office of censor.

THE AHTOLINE CONSPIRACY

Despite Swan Dragon's vigilance, much of the South was still rife with corruption. Most problematic incidents were mere footnotes in Swan Dragon's career in comparison to the rarer instances of significant tumult. Few of these had consequences felt down through the Ages. One such notable incident became known as the Ahtoline Conspiracy, which, although the conspiracy was foiled, set in motion a chain of events with massive repercussions for both Swan Dragon and the South itself.

The Ahtoline Conspiracy came to light during the trial of Subrihan Wind Tiger, the God-General of Asherta, a military colony far to the South of Yane. Ahtol, the opulent god of the neighboring indulgence-ridden city of Casine, accused Subrihan of conspiring against him in an attempt to expand Asherta's borders and widen his own influence at Ahtol's expense. While most gods met Ahtol's claims with skepticism (for that god was known for sarcastic accusations and a boldness that belied his relatively ignoble position in the Celestial Bureaucracy), the evidence against Subrihan Wind Tiger mounted. Several violent dissenters who had loudly proclaimed their loyalty to Asherta within the walls of Casine later turned out to be in the employ of Subrihan Wind Tiger himself. Vicious rumors painting Ahtol as a friend to the Fair Folk spread throughout Yu-Shan and eventually led back to members of Subrihan's court. The murder of Ahtol's son by what appeared to be the Wind Tiger's personal guard was the last in a succession of damning proofs. In time, when it seemed that Ahtol would certainly seek his revenge by dispatching his armies on Asherta directly (for he was also known to be a most incautious god), he caused quite a stir by appealing to Wun Ja herself.

Wun Ja loosed her fury at Subrihan Wind Tiger and requested the Censor of the South, Swan Dragon, investigate the case and lay the direst punishment upon the guilty, strongly implying that Subrihan Wind Tiger should be held as an aggressor and punished. As he collected evidence, Swan Dragon grew dubious of Ahtol's suit,

finding many inconsistencies in the various testimonies he was hearing from those speaking for both sides. Before he had a chance to reveal these discrepancies between facts and claims, however, Swan Dragon's attention was drawn by treachery. An unknown cabal kidnaped the Censor's brood and promised to slay the lot of them if Swan Dragon did not recuse himself from the case, believing that the ever-noble censor would not allow those he loved to suffer for his sake.

These beings were, however, mistaken. Swan Dragon was bound to his duty as censor and proceeded with the tribunal, issuing the direst of warnings to the kidnapers. Swan Dragon had no wish to put his duty before his family, but he was of sound opinion that his children were in little danger, for his daughters were, each of them, formidable martial artists proficient with many potent Charms, despite their apparent youth.

Soon after, in a tribunal scene worthy of the wide acclaim it later received in Yu-Shan, Swan Dragon revealed, contrary to the apparent evidence, that Ahtol himself had perpetrated several acts of conspiracy with the aim of gaining control of Subrihan's seat in Asherta. He had staged protests against himself, planting evidence implicating Subrihan Wind Tiger, and he spread vile rumors about himself and his kin, implying questionable loyalties. He even murdered his own son to make his deception all the more convincing. Swan Dragon recounted his investigation to all present, including Wun Ja, and formally accused Ahtol of violating the Heavenly rights of Subrihan and his kin. At the end of his declaration, Swan Dragon lodged a more serious charge against Ahtol, that of exploiting the individuals and procedures of the Celestial Bureaucracy, including the Director of the Bureau of Humanity herself, in the aid of his crimes (amounting to a Severity 4 offense).

Wun Ja, offended and at a loss for words, demanded immediate satisfaction against Ahtol, who frantically proceeded to offer justifications for his crimes, which the Censor met with the skepticism the claims deserved. In the end, Swan Dragon sentenced Ahtol to 77 years of imprisonment in the mountaintop penal vaults known as the Sky Chambers under the guardianship of the Thirteen Mountains. In addition, Casine, a relatively young city whose only purpose seemed to be the spreading of vice and corruption, was to be removed from Ahtol's purview and left to ruin without a Celestial presence. Swan Dragon removed Ahtol's jade crown and crushed it in his four-clawed hand. At once, Ahtol diminished in size and beauty, taking on the appearance of a round, spotty, worm-like human, bald of head and with yellowish skin. He howled in rage and shame as two celestial lions carried him off to the South.

Subrihan Wind Tiger, Lord of Asherta, kept a droll silence throughout the ruling, apparently eager to return to the comfort of his throne, which he did in time,



NOI SACKDA

NOI SACKDA

accepting no reparations and giving brief thanks to Swan Dragon for his keen sense of judgment.

Swan Dragon left swiftly following the closing of the proceedings, intent on finding his daughters and fully expecting to find the kidnapers already slain. He found this — and more. He found a massacre. One of his daughters lay dead on the seashore, her body transformed by Wyld energies into a great yellow bloody fish and left to perish mere yards from the sea. Another of Swan Dragon's daughters washed up on shore, bloated and bleeding, poisonous, seeping abscesses encrusting her flesh, her mouth frozen in such an expression of fear that Swan Dragon wept and beat his breast in despair. His third daughter, metamorphosed into a mere scattering of sticks and wooden idols in the shapes of bones and internal organs, lay arranged in an apparent message for Swan Dragon, though the words were meaningless.

Swan Dragon found his youngest daughter, Ulito Swan, standing over the dismembered corpses of her four Fair Folk captors, her downy feathered face and hands beading with their opalescent blood. He tried to question Ulito Swan, to learn something of who could have been behind the conspiracy and subsequent slaughter, but his daughter knew very little. All she had learned were the names of her captors' masters, invoked as she slew them one by one. Indeed, Ulito Swan was very surprised that these minions did not beg for mercy, but instead shut their eyes and cried out in a voice that did not travel outward, but turned back on itself, echoing off of its own sound infinitely. Their voices were in unison. They called out blindly for the coming of the Rain Princes, their summoning cut short by Ulito Swan's final sword-strokes as thunder roared and clouds burst in the distance to the South.

Swan Dragon had not yet heard of these Rain Princes, and his first attempts to find them proved fruitless. He received counsel that Fair Folk nobles are not the sort to be trifled with and that if Swan Dragon or his kin had offended them, there would be no need to go off in search of them, that the Rain Princes would certainly find him.

The tragedy sparked a vigilance in Swan that he had not known before. Never again would he look upon the world as a place where reason and justice held sway. For the first time, he saw the desperate and perilous state of the South — and of Creation itself. He determined to set aside his weary optimism in favor of vigilance and set about recruiting those of like mind who would aid him in ridding the South of corruption.

LUSA SERAGON AND THE FLAME COUNCIL

Lusa Seragon, a noble ifrit of the South, toured much of the world, noting in his travels the disappointing and inefficient state of the fire courts throughout Creation. Many of the fire courts he found were complex to the point of complete inefficiency, while others were mere window dressing for wealthy and egotistical individuals intent on

exploiting the courts for their own ends. Disgusted by this state of affairs, Lusa Seragon sponsored the creation of a powerful, central fire court, called the Flame Council, which would act as a guide and serve as an example for all of the fire courts in Creation.

Several fire courts accepted Lusa Seragon's proposals and adopted new policies that served to organize individual fire courts and to make each court's rulings compatible with one another. Given time, Lusa Seragon thought it possible to align the newly confederated fire courts with the Celestial Bureaucracy, specifically the Bureau of Seasons, in the same way that the wind courts were linked to the Court of Seasons. But other elemental rulers rejected Seragon outright and denounced him as a meddler and a fool, while Seragon's applications to the Celestial Bureaucracy were met with annoyed silence. Without results and with several decades having passed, Lusa Seragon found himself less welcome in foreign fire courts and his entreaties likewise met with less enthusiasm. Murantru Ota, a famed ancient garda bird and Dawn Rhodra of a fire court in the Southwest called the Red Volkan Ledge, grew weary of Seragon's appeals and banned him from even entering his domain.

But Lusa Seragon would not accept failure so easily, paying regular visits to those who would listen and bearing the threats and insults from those he could not convince. A few years into his campaign, he met Swan Dragon, who was pleased with Seragon's efforts and offered his support. Swan Dragon's involvement caused many skeptical hold-out courts to capitulate and join Lusa Seragon's initiative out of respect for the Censor. Even obstinate individuals such as Murantru Ota and others who would not listen to Lusa Seragon were willing to lend an ear to the famed Swan Dragon.

Murantru Ota grudgingly came to respect Lusa Seragon and admitted that even the Red Volkan Ledge would benefit from Seragon's wisdom and the policies he advocated. In time, he would become an avid supporter of the newly born Flame Council and a great friend to Lusa Seragon and Swan Dragon. Although the Flame Council never gained universal acceptance in the South, its name traveled well, and it came to be widely known as, at the very least, a boon to the South.

At the height of the Flame Council's success, Lusa Seragon, Swan Dragon and Murantru Ota each visited many remote fire courts to issue the council's edicts and to offer advice and guidance to the court governors. Surprisingly, their hosts received them cordially for the most part, and honored each of them frequently with triumphs and praise. For a time, it seemed that the Flame Council might aspire to acceptance from the Celestial Bureaucracy and gain credibility nearly unmatched among elemental courts. It was not long before the success reached its zenith, however, and the Flame Council began to unravel.

When the Flame Council was born, several of the Southern fire courts in membership had extant contracts with a mysterious group of powerful Fair Folk nobles called the Rain Princes. Almost immediately, due to the role of the Rain Princes in the murder of Swan Dragon's daughters, the Flame Council ruled that any contractual affiliation with the Rain Princes was prohibited. Angered, the Rain Princes sought revenge, at first politically through those Southern fire courts that did not join the Flame Council. These actions proved ineffective against the combined influence of the Flame Council and were soon abandoned in favor of direct assaults upon individual Flame Council holdings. Before long, tiny wars broke out along the Southern edge of Creation and slowly crept northward through the desert, swallowing and destroying many small communities as the years wore on.

The Flame Council could not survive, despite the best efforts and intentions. The difficulties of war and the realities of political fallout caused many to sever their ties with the Flame Council mere years after pledging their obedience. This continual strife also eventually came to the attention of the Bureau of Humanity, as many Southern gods cried out that their realms were being laid waste. As a result, the Bureau of Humanity retracted its already middling support of the Flame Council until it could repair the damage for which it clearly seemed responsible. In addition, justice and reason seemed concepts utterly foreign to most fire courts, and without direct constant supervision, they slipped again into treachery and folly — some even siding with the Rain Princes themselves against the Flame Council. Promoting efficiency among many of the loyal fire courts proved unfeasible as well, as most reverted to the archaic rituals and procedures that dominated their courts for Ages before the coming of the Flame Council. Once everything began falling apart, it was only a matter of time before the Flame Council's influence and power faded away.

THE RETURN OF AHTOL

Several years before the Contagion struck Creation, a Sidereal Chosen of Endings called Vizard of the Pearls received an unfavorable audit from Swan Dragon. She had illegally provided a peach of immortality to her Dragon-Blooded lover, that he might be returned to youth and remain at her side. She received a Celestial audit in response when investigators in the Bureau of Heaven discovered the crime. Following a swift tribunal, Swan Dragon found Vizard of the Pearls guilty, fined her heavily and devoured her lover, who was found to be living beyond the ordained term of his life. Enraged, Vizard of the Pearls drew her daiklave and bore down on Swan Dragon, vowing to cut her lover free and skewer the Censor upon her sword. Before she could strike, however, she found herself paralyzed, harnessed by a collar of dutiful submission.

For seven years, Vizard of the Pearls served under Swan Dragon as discipline for deigning to violate sacred Celestial laws by assaulting the person of a censor. In shame, she served the Censor dutifully, but her hatred for Swan Dragon never abated. At the end of her sentence, she proceeded to plot her revenge.


Soon after gaining her freedom, Vizard of the Pearls approached the Sky Chambers, the mountaintop penal vaults to the South of Gem devoted to the incarceration of Celestial offenders. Greeted coolly by the Thirteen Mountains, for they were well aware of her prior crimes, Vizard of the Pearls produced a writ guaranteeing the freedom of Ahtol bearing the signature of Ryalza, the Shogun of the Department of Celestial Concerns. "The criminal called Ahtol, formerly divinity of the accursed nominal municipality of Casine, shall undergo early release, the conditions of which include the completion of a task to be related to his person by the accompanying messenger."

In truth, Vizard of the Pearls did not know what task the Department of Celestial Concerns had in mind for Ahtol. Three days prior she had relieved the true messenger of the missive and his breath, pitching his expired corpse into the sea. Vizard of the Pearls had her own ideas, however, and when she was alone with Ahtol as they made their way down the mountain, she told Ahtol her plans of revenge and invited his support, which Ahtol rabidly agreed to grant. In the months that followed, Ahtol met secretly with his old confederates, the Rain Princes, who still sought revenge from Swan Dragon and his remaining kin.

Vizard of the Pearls and Ahtol made fast friends with several of the corrupt rulers and little gods of the region, who spared no love for Swan Dragon. Spies and assassins in their service soon took influential positions in local governments. The seeds of corruption had been planted even amongst those believed to be endowed with extraordinary integrity, such that this cabal was able to feed false information in the guise of good intelligence to the Flame Council and what allies it had managed to keep. As a result, clashes with the Rain Princes and other powerful threats frequently went sour for Swan Dragon and the Flame Council, forcing them to adopt secret contrivances of their own.

Many of the lesser schemes perpetrated by Vizard of the Pearls and Ahtol's cabal led up to an attempt to force Swan Dragon into an ambush by murdering his mortal consort, Ofara Santalar, and delivering his now-grown daughter, Ulito Swan to the Rain Princes. The Rain Princes desired their own revenge for the slaughter Ulito Swan brought upon their Folk all those years before, aiming to spirit her away to the Deep Wyld as a slave. Each of Swan Dragon's company in turn begged for the honor of returning Ulito to his arms and meting out revenge to the villains responsible. Hunters tracked Ulito Swan's abductors to the small, desolate village of Teran-Woo, where they discovered a mighty bridge in the last





stages of construction. Several of the Flame Council stormed across the bridge into the unknown. Hundreds of their ifrit hunters were ambushed and slaughtered in the pursuit, Lusa Seragon himself suffering a near-mortal wound. Murantru Ota and his five garda bird lieutenants met with success, however, losing only one of their number to unpredictable fae magics.

Ofara Santalar could not be saved. Her wounds proved too extensive. When she was found and brought before Swan Dragon, she could not speak for the pain and lasted mere hours before expiring. Swan Dragon was to spend years in mourning.

Vizard of the Pearls and Ahtol managed to elude capture.

THE RAIN PRINCES AND THE TERAN-WOO BRIDGE

Numbering nine, the Rain Princes were a faction of the Southern Fair Folk's royal elite during the First Age. They once traveled the South with their itinerant courts, demanding obeisance from isolated desert communities in exchange for promises of rain. The Rain Princes also commanded batteries of Fair Folk warriors and Wyld-corrupted thugs who violently abused or publicly butchered dissenters.

During the latter days of the First Age, the Rain Princes scourged and tormented much of the South. The sight of the One-Legged Fowl, the harbinger that signified the Rain Princes' imminent arrival, usually proved enough to cause the populations of entire villages and towns to abandon their homes.

Hoping to avert the approaching disaster, one community sought to destroy the One-Legged Fowl, dispatching their most capable hunters, who brought the bird back to their village easily enough, but delivered the bird with obvious discomfort, telling the village elders that they suffered terrible visions upon looking into the One-Legged Fowl's hollow eyes. When the village elders cut the One-Legged Fowl open, a gluey black putrescence oozed out, though no organs or meat could be found. At the heart of the black goblet, the elders found a clear, hollow crystal, with a dark fire within. Surprised to find this token, the elders accidentally let it drop to the floor, where it shattered. It was their last act, and all trace of the village disappeared. Even those who had visited the place many times seemed to have trouble recalling where it was or when they had visited, leading many to believe that the place existed only in their dreams.

Such instances caught the attention of the Celestial Bureaucracy, many members of which voiced concern over the many mad little gods running amok in the South, their holdings and worshipers destroyed. These dozens of powerful beings with crazed, deranged or paranoid dispositions had very little grasp of their own identities. Celestial authorities investigating the incidents marked the Rain

Princes as the aggressors, though all attempts to find those beings came to nothing. Eager to move on to more productive matters, Swan Dragon, as Censor of the South, was given the task of finding and destroying the Rain Princes, a task he was more than eager to attend to.

Before long, Swan Dragon and his associates again pinpointed the village of Teran-Woo as a place of particular interest to the Rain Princes. By this time, the Teran-Woo Bridge was a truly impressive structure, gilt in gold and green jade and built larger than the nearby village itself, measuring 1,900 feet across and 250 feet wide. The Bridge traversed a high, hazy ravine in the arid mountains, though the other side was lost in a purplish mist. Scouts crossing the bridge, however, did not find the other side of the ravine. Instead, they encountered a landscape of madness, for the few mortal men found there possessed no faces and wandered the land senselessly dreaming and muttering dire rhymes. Impossibly, no sky or stars were visible above the azure and gold fields of wild grasses, distant mountains of flowing, honey-hued nectar and forests of trees with leaves of flesh-colored flames. Those few mortals who survived the experience and returned across the bridge never recovered their sanity, and many of their minor involuntary bodily operations, such as hair growth and saliva production, ceased altogether.

The many villages in the region of the Teran-Woo Bridge that the Rain Princes had not destroyed had pledged devotion to the Fair Folk and surrendered all their possessions. In return, they were granted rain that sustained their lives but enslaved their minds. These poor souls continued on as mere empty husks charged with guarding and maintaining the Teran-Woo Bridge. Those who presumed to challenge the bridge's defenders found Wyld-stricken savages who fought with the most primitive of weapons but possessed an unnatural amount of strength and vigor. In the end, most strangers inevitably found themselves overtaken and led over the bridge in chains, never to be seen in Creation again.

The Rain Princes have not been seen in Creation since the Great Contagion. It is thought that Swan Dragon slew seven of them during their final battle, but recent reports of similar, albeit smaller and less grandiose, bands of Fair Folk nomads have surfaced again in the South, attracting the attention of the Court of the Orderly Flame. The recent appearance of the One-Legged Fowl in the outlying communities surrounding Gem have caused those few who understand the significance of such an omen to approach authorities in Gem and beg for protection.

THE GREAT CONTAGION

The Contagion exterminated the denizens of the South much as it did the rest of Creation, but the Fair Folk invasion that followed on the Contagion's heels did not penetrate as effectively in the South as it did elsewhere.

The clashes that did occur, however, were epic in scope and have been preserved in the region's legends and histories. The first of these battles went in favor of the Fair Folk, specifically the Rain Princes and the monstrous aberrations they commanded, which devoured many of the South's bravest warriors.

As the Contagion raged and the Fair Folk found victory after victory throughout the South, the Rain Princes cast their lot and advanced the whole of their forces over the Teran-Woo Bridge and across the South. One at a time, the Rain Princes spread their armies over the land, surrounding and devouring the small armies of the South.

The warriors of the defiant South, however, enjoyed their victories as well, though these were hard-won. The smaller bands of Southern soldiers resorted to guerrilla tactics as the only feasible means of defeating foes superior both in strength and number. Their efforts were further complicated by the floods of Wyld-ridden rain the Rain Princes called down from the heavens, which destroyed villages and poisoned food and water throughout the South.

With the aid and sacrifice of the Flame Council and other powerful allies such as the Flame Tigers and several Sidereal Exalted, the armies of the South stopped many of the Fair Folk on the battlefield and caused many to retreat back across the bridges and out of Creation. But these victories gave little comfort to a world that had already been ravaged by disease and Wyld magics.

THE BATTLE OF TERAN-WOO BRIDGE

Five-thousand flame ducks swarmed in advance of the hundred tiny, haggard armies raised by the Flame Council, who hoped to launch one final offensive in order to destroy the Teran-Woo Bridge and prevent any further fae incursion into the South. The enemy, a force of 15 million Lion Folk regulars and Wyld-addled mortals accompanied by frightful wyrms and other fae creatures led by seven of the Rain Princes, spread themselves out in baffling formations across the land on Creation's side of the Teran-Woo Bridge.

Swan Dragon drew Shurtimu Ji and charged the Rain Princes one at a time. One Rain Prince, the ill-famed Nuala Shuval, fell to Swan Dragon's blade immediately, causing Shuval's army to panic, break formation and flee across the bridge. Each of the next three Rain Princes to combat Swan Dragon proved more challenging and cunning than the last.

Lusa Seragon held the Lambent Fire Gourd on high, almost afraid to loose whatever awaited within. The storied gourd of black jade and silver had not been opened for 1,000 years, with only legends of apocalypse and dread to warn those who would trespass by breaking the gourd's ancient seal. But Lusa Seragon cracked the seal open, immediately spilling swords of flame and thousands of need fires that spread out over the enemy armies, driving many of them into the ravine or back across the bridge.

SHURTIMU JI

Swan Dragon's blade, the white starmetal daiklave called Shurtimu Ji, was forged by Swan Dragon himself, the blade cooled in his own blood. He fashioned the hilt from one of his teeth and wrapped it with the skin from his wings, granting its wielder the power of flight. The blade's guard is made of a sliver of bone carved from a dead god's brow and makes the wielder invisible to scrying sorcery. In Swan Dragon's hands, the daiklave bleeds motes of fire and, simply by wielding it in esoteric patterns known only to him, may strike foes up to 300 feet away without the sword leaving his hand, causing wounds to appear on his foes' flesh as if from thin air.

Shurtimu Ji was last seen months after the Battle of the Teran-Woo Bridge. Survivors searching through the rubble left after the bridge fell found the blade buried in the heart of Faloud Sutigi, the most fearsome of the Rain Princes. But the sword was lost, and in the intervening centuries, Shurtimu Ji has made its way throughout the forests of the East and the blasted terrain of the frozen North, being carried by one warrior after another, all oblivious of the blade's origins.

Soon, a great blaze broke out on the bridge, growing into a mighty conflagration that brought ruin to the Fair Folk legions that had paused there. Try as they might, the Rain Princes could not douse the flames, despite the deluge of rainfall they summoned from the sky and the floods they caused to roll across the land. Thousands of the Fair Folk fled, many burning as they did so.

Murantru Ota burst onto the battlefield in his phoenix form, ravaging the packs of Wyld-addled abacasteri and Fair Folk sorcerers with his six flaming swords, while Ulito Swan commanded a fleet of Fire galleons that flanked one entire side of the battlefield, preventing any escape to the West. But even with some of the Fair Folk discouraged or on the run, the armies of the South were still at a disadvantage. The Wyld-scourged warriors of the Fair Folk were worth 10 mortals each, and while Swan Dragon and his allies were formidable in their own right, they could not tip the balance alone. The battle seemed more hopeless than expected. The armies of the South did not seem to have the numbers to hold the enemy at bay. With little or no resistance beyond Teran-Woo, the Fair Folk were sure to overrun the South unchecked.

The dead were piled up 10 high on the field of battle, and the terrible lion-faced Fair Folk warriors still came, with more making their way over the flaming bridge to replenish the fallen, every one of the dead being replaced by three fresh soldiers. But still the battle raged on for six





days with no quarter given and no sign that any of the combatants grew weary. Many of the Fair Folk legions did not even bother about engaging the defenders, obviously intent on breaking through their ranks and marching toward the Blessed Isle. Those remaining behind to fight at Teran-Woo Bridge were those under order from the Rain Princes, who by now desired revenge above conquest.

In Yu-Shan, the Maiden of Battles turned her eyes away from the Games of Divinity momentarily and noticed Swan Dragon's bold struggle with three of the most powerful of the Rain Princes. Pleased with Swan Dragon's valor and courage, she opened up the clouds and dispatched a gift to Swan Dragon, that he might better combat the enemies of Creation. At that moment a shimmering shaft of light pierced the smoke and soot in the sky, focusing itself tightly upon Swan Dragon. A brief shower of iridescent crimson dust kissed him as he looked up to see the legendary Celestial Chariot, the grand battle conveyance of the gods, descending from the heavens toward him, pulled by seven golden-winged stags. Praising the Maiden of Battles, Swan Dragon leapt aboard the chariot and soared over the heads of his foes. The mightiest of the Rain Princes, the vainglorious Faloud Sutigi, leapt about the Celestial Chariot as Swan Dragon descended for his first strike. The two crossed swords, Sutigi's face burning in anger, his sword trailing depraved illusions.

The Teran-Woo Bridge had, by now, weakened from the fires and the weight of millions passing over it, but still it teemed with soldiers. The Celestial Chariot sailed high amongst the pouring storm clouds, all but invisible to those on the ground.

Ulito Swan spread her Widow's Shawl over the field of battle, and for a moment, all the mysterious fae devices and Charms lost their potency. She found and crossed swords with Ahtol, in her battle-rage penetrating his mighty helm and breaking his skull with her long silvery rapier, Subtle Pin of Jade and Fury. Ahtol began to curse his slayer as Ulito drew her sword back for another blow, but the last of his breath passed out of his lungs, leaving the hex stillborn in the air.

The sound of the Fair Folk's battle song intensified, with gongs pealing and drums reverberating in the air for miles around. The slaughter was so great that the spirits themselves wailed throughout the night and prayed to the gods to end the desolation and death.

Swan Dragon and Faloud Sutigi locked swords as Swan Dragon piloted the Celestial Chariot, laying waste to an entire host of fae warrior while effortlessly slashing and parrying with Shurtimu Ji. In the midst of their struggle, the lead stag guiding the Celestial Chariot was struck by an errant arrow, causing the chariot to spin upside down and out of control. Swan Dragon and Faloud

Sutigi were able to avoid falling, but they could not continue their melee before one of them righted the course of the chariot, which was heading straight for a contingent of Southern soldiers. Swan Dragon steered clear of crashing into his allies, and then, just as Faloud made to stab him in the back, changed into a dragon and flew above the chariot. Faloud, considering himself struck with an extraordinary amount of luck, piloted the Celestial Chariot toward the bridge, intending to take it back with him as a prize to fae-lands.

Sensing his enemy's intentions, Swan Dragon grasped the Celestial Chariot with his claws, but underestimated both the difficulty in trying to force the course of the chariot and Faloud's ability to fly it. Managing only to subtly influence the chariot's path, Swan Dragon did succeed at causing it, and himself, to spin out of control and into the Bridge of Teran-Woo, the force of which caused the bridge itself to finally collapse. As they fell into the ravine, Swan Dragon again took up the shape of a man and called Shurtimu Ji to his hand. The two fought until they were lost to sight, but when the dust cleared, Swan Dragon, Faloud, the Celestial Chariot and much of the bridge's remains were gone.

The battle continued for several more days, but with the bridge destroyed and many of the Fair Folk having continued on their march northward, the Rain Prince's forces seemed to wither with each passing hour. At least a semblance of victory seemed certain. And within days, this certainty was confirmed, for it was then that the Scarlet Empress activated the Blessed Isle's defenses and threw the Fair Folk back. The Southern armies stood in awe as millions of fae soldiers soared high overhead, a great cloud moving swiftly across the sky toward the edge of the world, blotting out the sun for hours, such was the force of the initial blast. At that time no one in the South knew the truth of what had occurred — it seemed as if the gods themselves had heeded their prayers and the war's outcome had been decided in their favor. To see the enemy so broken was all the Southern armies needed to launch a final bold assault on the remaining fae legions. Cowed by the display overhead, the one remaining Rain Prince, Ghulazi Abin, ordered his forces to retreat, and many fae were cut down as they did so.

Such was the Battle of Teran-Woo Bridge. Some say it was the greatest victory against the Fair Folk in the history of the South.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE CONTAGION

Shock and misery prevailed once the Contagion had passed and the Fair Folk were finally thrown back past the edges of Creation. The Rain Princes seemed to be gone, but Swan Dragon could not be found among the wreckage of the Teran-Woo Bridge or anywhere else. None in Creation or in Yu-Shan knew what had become of the Censor. The situation seemed most dire when several

THE SEARCH FOR SWAN DRAGON

No one is actively searching for Swan Dragon. Most presume that, if Swan Dragon is not dead, he is a prisoner of the Fair Folk and, therefore, unreachable. In the first years following the Contagion, envoys were sent into the Southern deserts with messages and offers of rich rewards should Swan Dragon be returned. None of these envoys were ever heard from again.

After years of receiving no word or clues concerning Swan Dragon's fate and without even the Bridge of Teran-Woo to storm over into the Wyld to attempt a rescue, Murantru Ota and Lusa Seragon resigned themselves to the loss of their friend and mentor but were determined to carry on in his name. The active search for Swan Dragon ended soon after the Contagion, though those gathering information throughout Creation all hope to one day discover the truth.

Wun Ja has spies keeping their eyes open for news of Swan Dragon. She hopes that finding him and putting him to work for the Bureau of Humanity will give the bureau much-needed credibility and might entice others of a more principled bent to join as well. She also knows how influential and persuasive Swan Dragon is and wishes to use his silver tongue to convince the cities of the South to worship her and then use their growing military might to eventually threaten the rule of the Realm itself.

Jagalza, Wun Ja's closest ally and lover, has provided her with a Gold Faction Sidereal Exalted called Dozima Wokish to lead the investigation into Swan Dragon's fate. Unfortunately, most of his attention thus far has been paid to the region of Teran-Woo in the Southeast, where Swan Dragon was last seen centuries ago. Wokish has worked with the Orderly Flame in the past on several missions and has become a trusted friend to Murantru Ota and Lusa Seragon, though neither of them share Wokish's optimism concerning Swan Dragon's fate.

Wong Bongerok is not searching for Swan Dragon. If he happened to find the mad former censor, however, he would not hesitate to kill him, fearing for the security of his position as censor. If he received word of Swan Dragon's existence, Bongerok would charge several of his No Moon Caste Lunar Exalted allies with hunting down Swan Dragon and slaying him before he could be returned to sanity or be discovered by the Orderly Flame.



Southern warriors reported seeing a glimmering, sumptuous calash being carried through the air by laughing Fair Folk minions, but Lusa Seragon and the Flame Council held out hope for several years. They even attempted to dispatch heralds to meet with the Fair Folk and negotiate Swan Dragon's return, but these envoys disappeared without a trace as well. Ten years after the Contagion ended, the Flame Council officially disbanded, while its members continued to focus their efforts on reconstructing much of the South.

THE BIRTH OF THE ORDERLY FLAME

Lusa Seragon watched helplessly as Swan Dragon and Faloud Sutigi disappeared into the mist. He held his breath, hoping that Swan Dragon would appear at any moment bearing the severed head of his enemy. Seragon

stood a long time like that, with the enemy closing in around him and tears welling up in his eyes. He knew at that moment that, should he survive the battle, his world would never be the same.

During the reconstruction, Lusa Seragon, Murantru Ota and Ulito Swan made useful contacts and managed to turn many who had been enemies into dependable, albeit now-powerless patrons. Lusa Seragon's vast fortune remained intact, however, and soon enough, the time came to continue to promote the lofty goals and ideals of the Flame Council.

Many of the fire courts of the South readily assented to being governed by a central court, as most of their leaders were in debt to Lusa Seragon and Swan Dragon's armies for their very survival. Fire courts from elsewhere in Creation were resistant to the idea of accepting outside

FIRE GALLEONS

Role(s): Secret transport, small war galley

Length: 100 feet

Beam: 18 feet

Draft: 5 feet

Rig Type/Closest Tack: Abalone/3 points

Speed: ●●●●

Maneuverability: -6

Standard/Minimum Crew: 15/6

Soak: 20L

Health Levels: 30/60

Other Notes: The Court of the Orderly Flame's fire galleons are mounted with fire projectors (Accuracy -0 Damage 12L Rate 1, then must reload four barrels Range 15, with no extended range Crew 1 Resources ●●●●) and light ballistae (Accuracy -0 Damage 7L and halve soak value of hull when applying damage Rate 1/5 Range 300 Naval Rate 3/turn Naval Range long Crew 2 Resources ●●●). Crew also commonly use fire arrows (Accuracy per bow Damage 2L Rate 1 Range 100 Naval Rate 3/turn Naval Range short Crew 1 Resources ●). Naval Rate and Naval Range are used in naval combat, as described in *Savage Seas*, page 90.

Description: Fire galleons are First Age land ships that sail the deserts of the South. Their sails are flames molded to catch the wind and propel the ship along at high speeds, leaving short trails of fire and smoke in their wakes. They travel very swiftly and can cover over 100 miles per day. Only captains trained in piloting fire galleons can do so effectively. Characters with Sailing may make the attempt at -3.

Fire elementals are especially suited to pilot and crew fire galleons, as they are able to power the ships elementally, committing a mere 5 motes of Essence (10 motes are required for all other characters operating a fire galleon). Flame galleons have no battery, so the required Essence must be expended once every hour or else the ship will run aground in the sand. The Court of the Orderly Flame commonly have need fires and llama-yu on board their fire galleons to provide fuel.

These ships can only travel through desert terrain. Any attempt to sail a fire galleon on any other terrain, including water, automatically fails.

Very few fire galleons exist in working condition. Those that do are almost exclusively owned and operated by the Court of the Orderly Flame, which possesses 18 in various states of repair. Others may exist, however, that have either been kept secret or remain lost.

Each fire galleon maintains a number of fire projectors equal to (number of crew/10). These special fire projectors spout red flames that cannot be doused with ordinary water. Similar to Greek fire, the fires stick to their targets and burn and do full damage for a maximum of 10 turns if not magically doused. The Orderly Flame also equips their fire galleons with fire arrows and light ballistae.

control over their affairs and rejected Lusa Seragon's gestures of goodwill. All of the South, with very few exceptions, mourned Swan Dragon and dreaded the day when the South's new censor would be named.


Thirty years after the Contagion, amidst political doubts and foreign hostility, the Court of the Orderly Flame came into being. Headquartered in Lusa Seragon's private palace over 500 miles south of Asherta, the Court of the Orderly Flame began again the task of governing and aiding the Southern fire courts. Seragon nominated Murantru Ota as the master of this new, more modest initiative. Ota confirmed that they would no longer seek to force other fire courts to accept their rulings but that they would welcome any requests for aid or advice that reached their ears. In support of this, they would place operatives in all the capitals and great cities throughout the South, that any might have the opportunity to seek their counsel.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE COURT OF THE ORDERLY FLAME

One year after the Court of the Orderly Flame was born, the Bureau of Heaven named a new censor for the South, another lesser elemental dragon of fire called Wong Bongerok. One of Bongerok's first actions as censor was to order a full investigation of the Court of the Orderly Flame. During this investigation, Bongerok's aides made many attempts to bribe and bully the Orderly Flame's members into becoming the new censor's stooges and informants. Receiving no takers (for the Orderly Flame's membership was very selective in those days), Bongerok declared that the Court of the Orderly Flame was composed of corrupt conspirators and meddlers in the delicate geopolitics of the South. Many in Yu-Shan who had no time to look into matters themselves or who had little interest in doing so were duped by Wong Bongerok's report, effectively killing Lusa Seragon's hope of linking the Orderly Flame with the Celestial Bureaucracy, at least until a new censor was appointed who would be willing to act as its advocate in Yu-Shan.

Most communities in Creation, however, were unaware of Wong Bongerok's report, and thus, the Orderly Flame continued on with high honors throughout the South, gaining a reputation for being not only an effective body for organizing the South's fire courts, but also for its sense of honor and justice in its dealings with all who sought its counsel. Many local governments, citing the Orderly Flame's famous impartiality concerning mortal affairs, insisted that their local Pyric Ministers be involved in controversial legal decisions and negotiations in order to give the results added weight.





Throughout the Orderly Flame's first years, Wong Bongerok made frequent appearances at its official functions and the negotiations it assisted in, sometimes in disguise. Even in disguise, however, Wong Bongerok's presence was felt, for he showed an insatiable desire to be the center of attention and to question even the most obvious rulings. Bongerok's aides sometimes seized portions of Lusa Seragon's wealth, citing vague Celestial violations, and demanded his immediate appearance at the Censor's office in Yu-Shan. Seragon always complied, waiting hours at a stretch to be informed of insignificant new laws and Wong Bongerok's insupportable interpretation of them. Lusa Seragon filed several complaints about his treatment, citing the harassment and deceit Bongerok continually wreaked upon him and the rest of the Court of the Orderly Flame, but nothing ever came of the efforts, and Seragon eventually chose to apply his efforts elsewhere.

Elsewhere in Creation, the Orderly Flame has been a less-than-welcome presence. As expected, the Realm rejected any presence of the Orderly Flame on the Blessed Isle outright, threatening any choosing not to heed its warning with death upon arrival. In aid of this policy, the Scarlet Empress placed the governance of the Blessed Isle's fire elementals in the hands of Ragoly Aglde of the Wings Conjoined in Lure, a domineering and haughty God-Blood fathered by an ancient ifrit. Ragoly Aglde hated Lusa Seragon, considering his ambitions an insult to his own sovereignty, and issued an edict stating that any member of the Orderly Flame daring to trespass on the Blessed Isle did so at her life's peril.

In the West, where water and air courts have the most influence, the Orderly Flame ministers endured many threats and much violence and were forced into acting in secrecy almost from the start. Even Fakharu, the censor of the West, sent several of his aides with missives of counsel to the Orderly Flame's ministers, both admonishing them for their presumption and warning them of the dangers any attempted operations would entail. Most Western mortal communities proved untrustworthy and nearly always revealed the locations of the Orderly Flame's secret embassies to the air and water elementals they venerated when given the opportunity. A few communities allowed the Orderly Flame to remain in exchange for expensive goods from the South, but supply lines have never been constant or dependable, and such deals usually ended badly. Because of the general prejudice against fire elementals in the West, the Orderly Flame never supports entreaties made by even powerful water elementals. The Western denizens of the air have done their share to curry the favor of the Orderly Flame, however. As such, they have enjoyed several temporary alliances with one another.

In the East dwell the kings of the wood, who fear the flames and have in the past endured the minor Orderly Flame presence with quiet acceptance, if only because they helped keep their local fire courts in line. Given the cosmo-

politan nature of many of the cities of the East, the Orderly Flame's ministers found it easy to navigate and do business in this region of the Threshold, quickly establishing embassies out in the open and experiencing almost none of the resistance encountered in the West. Mortal communities here were quite accepting of both the Orderly Flame and its ministers as individuals. Smaller villages tended to be somewhat xenophobic, especially when it came to foreign spirits, but even these could be won over with effort. Only those communities deep within dense forests rejected the Orderly Flame, but the Orderly Flame's ministers saw the wisdom in not wanting fire spirits dwelling in these places and did not seek to defy their wishes, as war could be the only logical outcome of any sustained presence. Nowadays, the Orderly Flame operates no embassies anywhere North of Kirighast. Since the Empress disappeared, the world has become too dangerous to spread one's resources too thin. Although the people of the East would surely renew their goodwill toward the Orderly Flame, many troubles at home in the South have emerged and must be faced before expansion can again be considered.

Due to the distance and the bleak temperatures in the North, the Orderly Flame began with a very minor presence there that fizzled out almost immediately. Most citizens in the few towns in which magistrates were placed had little need or desire to interact with fire spirits, apart from those who would promise warmth. The fire courts to the North tended to be incomprehensible even to the wisest Pyric Ministers and showed no desire to adopt new policies or methods, leading most to view any governance of those bodies as unlikely at best, if not undesirable.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

The Orderly Flame works simultaneously on two fronts. In Creation's Southern regions, it operates ostensibly as a group of independent political brokers and as a would-be governing body for whatever fire court embraces its doctrines, while simultaneously working clandestinely against rival fire courts and enemy regimes. In recent years, Ulito Swan has enrolled hundreds of like-minded fire elementals and God-Blooded fire scions to act as spies throughout the South.

In Yu-Shan, Murantru Ota plays politics among the gods, ever in search of a mandate from the Celestial Bureaucracy. He has found several sympathizers among minor divinities, but most bureau directors have little inclination and, thus far, no reason to personally involve themselves in the low business of the elemental courts.

The Realm: It was inevitable that such a powerful body so concerned with the welfare of the South would eventually come into conflict with the Realm. In these conflicts, the Orderly Flame has at least one advantage: It has thus far been able to choose its battles. Between the Empress' disappearance, the return of the Celestial Exalted and the coming of the Deathlords, the Realm is too

distracted to notice the careful creeping and plotting of the minor spirits in its midst.

The Court of the Orderly Flame has been banned from the Blessed Isle, such that all of its activities there must be carried out with the utmost secrecy and care. Obviously, there are no embassies, and the Pyric Ministers secretly stationed there are more spies than simple ambassadors. These Ministers do frequent local fire courts, such as the Red Tables of Ragoly Aglde, but always in disguise. Three God-Blooded spies have been placed on the Blessed Isle thus far. As more opportunities present themselves, the Orderly Flame will certainly seek to infiltrate further. Ulito Swan serves as the chief of these agents and the secret Superintendent of the Fire within the Realm, though her Essence and reputation prevent her from setting foot on the Blessed Isle itself. In recent years, Ulito Swan has been primarily concerned with collecting information concerning the Realm's business and military interests in the South. Occasionally, she has used gathered information as a means to foil attempts to harm or exploit Southern communities. Though they are not common, ambushes and even assassinations have been carried out "for the good of the South," and several autocratic governors for the Realm have mysteriously gone missing and been replaced by more tolerable individuals.

Chiaroscuro: Ulito Swan lives and works from Chiaroscuro, enjoying the protection of the Tri-Khan. The Court of the Orderly Flame and the Tri-Khan have assisted one another many times against the Realm, and both parties seek to maintain this quasi-friendly relationship. The shrewd and charming Olia Burninghair, a God-Blooded daughter of a Southern ifrit nobleman, administers the Orderly Flame's embassy in Chiaroscuro. She and Ulito Swan work closely together to maintain the secrecy of their operations (as even the Tri-Khan does not know where the Orderly Flame's embassy is in his own city) and to safeguard their alliance with Chiaroscuro.

While the location of the Orderly Flame's embassy in Chiaroscuro is apt to change, Ulito Swan's intelligence headquarters is located beneath an apparently ruined and condemned glass tower near the Plaza. To reach it, one must traverse deep, ancient sewers and dark, labyrinthine catacombs. The headquarters itself is shocking to behold after such an unpleasant trek, as it is immaculately clean and furnished with First Age devices that even the Orderly Flame does not fully understand. This subterranean structure enjoys the protection of dozens of ancient and powerful ifrit operatives, at least 50 llamma-yu defenders and the occasional company of the Gold Faction Sidereal Exalted Dozima Wokish, a trusted ally of the Orderly Flame.

Gem: The Court of the Orderly Flame carefully maintains an alliance with the Despot of Gem, finding a common distaste for the Realm. As such, Gem has granted the Orderly Flame a sizable section of the city's lava tubes for use as an embassy, expecting in return intelligence

regarding the Realm and such information that may give Gem an advantage in its ongoing rivalry with Paragon. Miso Farrah has served as Pyric Minister in Gem for 170 years. He has an incredibly wide array of contacts and sources in Gem, such that next to nothing happens in the city without his knowledge. Should tragedy befall Ulito Swan, Miso Farrah is poised to take her place. A force of 130 llamma-yu defenders stand guard at the gates and throughout the embassy, as well as fluctuating forces the Despot spares for the Orderly Flame's security.


Varang City-States: The Realm has demanded the removal of or the capture and execution of all Orderly Flame operatives in this region. As a result, the embassies here are small, portable affairs and function more as passive information-gathering operations than anything else, as any true infiltration would likely be detected and valuable agents lost. Most of the information gleaned from operations in the Varang City-States is of little value, as, thanks to the Varang tendency toward isolationism, most of the ongoing intrigues in this area do not much concern the wider world. Pyric Ministers here, such as the God-Blooded outcaste Eveli Shushu, Talt's Pyric Minister and daughter of a House Peleps Terrestrial Exalted and a flame duck prostitute, are constantly in danger and are fairly on their own, as a defensive force of any size would be easily detected.

Harborhead: The Court of the Orderly Flame is not welcome here, and the successive Pyric Ministers of Harborhead (as many have been captured and executed recently) have barely been able to maintain enough of a presence to disrupt the occasional slave shipment to the Realm (hence the executions). Due to the obvious dangers, the nation's Pyric Ministers are always poised for a speedy withdrawal, especially given the increasing likelihood of a war between Harborhead and the Varang City-States.

Paragon: Dozens of agents have been lost to the Perfect in Paragon. As a result, the Perfect knows much about the Court of the Orderly Flame and has passed that information on to the authorities in the Realm. He has also offered promotions and rich rewards to those among his people who are able to locate Lusa Seragon's palace, though all have failed thus far. Because of this overt hostility and the almost insurmountable difficulties involved in maintaining a lengthy presence there, the Orderly Flame does not operate an embassy in Paragon and will not send agents there except when absolutely necessary.

Asherta: 250 miles South of Yane sits Asherta, a notable military colony and war academy. The Court of the Orderly Flame maintains a gracious welcome here, thanks to Swan Dragon's favorable ruling in the trial of Subrihan Wind Tiger and the Flame Council's boldness and valor at the Battle of Teran-Woo Bridge. Subrihan Wind Tiger is still master of this colony and has a long memory. There is no love lost between he and the Realm, and he would expel its presence from the South if he had the means. Asherta provides training for many of the





Orderly Flame's operatives and security forces. The Pyric Minister of Asherta, Gulbari Fulaz, a young, recently rebirthed garda bird, lives on a precarious perch in the nearby mountains, though he maintains an embassy compound in Asherta itself. This embassy enjoys the protection of thousands of warriors of every imaginable stripe and is reputed to be impregnable, though Subrihan Wind Tiger is not especially eager to put the legend to the test.

The Deathlords: Some time ago, word of a mysterious and powerful Southern warlord named the First and Forsaken Lion (see **Exalted: The Abyssals**, pp. 85-89) reached the Orderly Flame. With a little investigation, they learned who this individual is and the great danger he poses to the South. Miso Farrah's operatives in Gem and elsewhere have reported that the First and Forsaken Lion has had dealings with the Fair Folk and that he schemes to overrun the South with an army of the dead. So far, the First and Forsaken Lion has not made any overt moves that the Orderly Flame has been able to discover, but the situation is recognized as one of the chief dangers the South now faces, invisible though it may be. Miso Farrah's agents will likely discover any course of action undertaken by the First and Forsaken Lion's agents in Gem. The Orderly Flame does not know that Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers (see **Exalted: The Abyssals**, pp. 89-90) operates agents in Gem as well and is fully aware of Miso Farrah's operatives and who their masters are.

No other Deathlords have caused much of a stir in the South, nor had they given any indication that they might have anything in common with the First and Forsaken Lion until the episode at Thorns. Lusa Seragon considers the fate of Thorns just a fraction of what can be expected from the First and Forsaken Lion, should he succeed in opening up a shadowland in Gem. Since then, the Orderly Flame has identified several other Deathlords as such, including the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water and the Mask of Winters.

Yu-Shan: Another recent goal for the Court of the Orderly Flame has been to use the information gathered concerning the Deathlords as a bargaining tool in negotiating for Celestial backing for its operations. Both Lusa Seragon and Murantru Ota now appear semi-regularly in Yu-Shan to make appeals to the Bureau of Seasons, hoping to earn its favor and gain its support. But the Bureau of Seasons always seems to be too busy preparing for the Carnival of Meetings (see **Games of Divinity**, p. 19-20), regardless of the time of year and shuffles Murantru Ota off to the Court of Seasons. The Court of Seasons consistently makes promises that it does not have the authority to keep and quickly assures the two that unfiled paperwork is on the brink of approval and that the Court of Seasons is already devising the Orderly Flame's future mastery over all fire elementals — all obvious lies. In the past few years, it has become apparent that the Bureau of Seasons is either too conservative or too lazy to decide on the issue and that

the Court of Seasons just does not care. Without Swan Dragon, no one in Yu-Shan has any reason to take the Orderly Flame seriously.

Wong Bongerok still has the Orderly Flame tightly tethered. He makes it clear that he has the power to make matters very difficult for its members, even to arrest them and disband the organization on fictional charges, but he allows them the room either to succeed under his apparent supervision and control or to fail and hang themselves once and for all.

Murantru Ota is not blind to Wong Bongerok's obvious aims. He has made it clear that he will stop all of the Orderly Flame's efforts to obtain the sponsorship of the Celestial Bureaucracy for as long as he is able. Only one option presents itself at this juncture: Wong Bongerok must either be removed as the Censor for the South, or he must die. Murantru Ota has made several attempts to disgrace Wong Bongerok's consulship, with nominal success. However, Wong Bongerok seems to recover face (or at least give off the illusion that he has) far faster than Murantru Ota can strip it away. If Murantru Ota finds no success at lethally humiliating the Censor, he will have no choice but to topple Wong Bongerok by force.

THE COURT OF THE ORDERLY FLAME

Southern superstition holds that where there is fire, the Orderly Flame may be watching and listening. Such superstitions must be qualified, however. It is true that certain members of the Orderly Flame can see and hear the goings-on near flames. Ulito Swan's underground headquarters in Chiaroscuro holds a potent First Age device called the Flamescrier. This machine, which takes up an entire room, can monitor the area around any specific flame, one flame at a time. This device is but one of several that the Orderly Flame uses to better combat its enemies. These, in combination with time-tested organization and expertise, make the Court of the Orderly Flame a difficult enemy to engage. Unless it has no choice, the Orderly Flame does not openly combat its foes without first collecting every scrap of intelligence available concerning them. And when the rare conflict occurs, the instigators are, more often than not, quickly dispatched.

Throughout the South, those who do not love the Orderly Flame fear it. Despite its leaders' reputation as proficient spymasters, the Orderly Flame is still widely esteemed for its political savvy and its skill in the negotiating chamber and endures chiefly by virtue of its various peacekeeping initiatives in Southern nations.

GOALS

In the beginning, the Court of the Orderly Flame existed to carry on Swan Dragon's legacy and honor his memory by progressively influencing Creation's fire courts



and by championing the causes of justice and truth throughout the South. These goals still have weight, but in the growing chaos following the Contagion, and especially since the Empress' disappearance, the Orderly Flame has grown more and more concerned with monitoring the state of both Creation and Heaven. It seeks to guide events through politics and subterfuge in order to remove corruption and injustice from the world. But above all, the chief concern of the Orderly Flame is to maintain its survival and increase its own power to do so.

The Court of the Orderly Flame seeks to control its environment as much as possible. Toward this goal, its members have collected libraries of information on every topic that might concern Southern security. Several buildings in the Palace of the Unseen complex are devoted to the storage of books and files, all of which the dozens of librarians on staff may access.

In addition, the Orderly Flame seeks to gain control of as yet undiscovered mineral-rich regions in order to augment its finances. At present, Lusa Seragon owns dozens of diamond, silver and jade mines throughout the South and several other mining concerns abroad, the profits from which go directly into the Orderly Flames' coffers. As a result, Pyric Ministers are always on the lookout for word of new mineral claims.

However, in these riotous times, some Superintendents and Pyric Ministers have perverted such lofty and altruistic goals, invoking harsh methods and unconscio-

nable policies that sometimes rival the ignoble notions that the Orderly Flame purports to oppose. Individuals such as these are rare, but some within the Orderly Flame's leadership, including Lusa Seragon, see the emergence of this trend to be dangerous and detrimental to the cause. In the past, such mavericks were recalled and dealt with rapidly and effectively. These days, the task has proven to be more difficult.


STRUCTURE

Membership in the Court of the Orderly Flame is exclusive to fire elementals and those with such an elemental principal in their blood, usually the sons and daughters of existing members, though this is not a firm prerequisite.

Three individuals stand at the forefront of the Court of the Orderly Flame and guide its activities according to the philosophy and legacy of Swan Dragon. The most steadfast and dispassionate in pursuing justice, Murantru Ota maintains the cardinal position of Ulema. Lusa Seragon, the First Archon of the Court, oversees the formal methods and activities of the Court of the Orderly Flame while making sure that all participating courts adhere to the Orderly Flame's principles. Ulito Swan, daughter of Swan Dragon, heads the Orderly Flame's intelligence initiative.

Under the First Archon of the Court stand the four Superintendents of the Fires. These oversee the activities of the Pyric Ministers, each of them assigned as their





district either the North, the South, the East or the West. Because the Orderly Flame no longer operates in the North or the East, these Superintendents hold sinecure positions and function as advisors in times of strife, otherwise enjoying Lusa Seragon's hospitality until they are needed. The Superintendents of the Fires are: Lubaran Sake Saint (East), Hjura Karna (North), Sevrine of Embers and Lucent Smoke (South) and Gorhadra Wrapped in Spoliation (West).

The Orderly Flame has no official presence in the Realm, hence no Superintendent or Pyric Ministers have been stationed there, but Ulito Swan herself leads all operations in the Realm and, therefore, functions as a fifth Superintendent. Superintendents travel predetermined routes throughout their districts and collect reports, which they deliver semiannually to Lusa Seragon's palace. They also assist in policy disputes when two or more Pyric Ministers disagree on cases that involve more than one city or town. In Ulito Swan's case, she cannot travel extensively within the Realm's territories and not at all on the Blessed Isle. Hence, those Pyric Ministers and spies operating within the Realm have her full trust.

The Orderly Flame has 206 Pyric Ministers operating throughout the South and 27 stationed elsewhere. Pyric Ministers each preside over a single settlement, be it a metropolis or a village, and tend to both the local fire courts (assuming they are welcome) and to any who might seek their aid. As the ifrit of the Court of the Orderly Flame are famed for their sense of justice and fairness, many seek out Pyric Ministers to adjudicate disputes of many kinds. However, the degree of secrecy with which local Pyric Ministers go about their business depends on the city in which they happen to be stationed. For instance, the Pyric Minister in Gem openly maintains an embassy and are generally easy to find and communicate with. In many other cities throughout the South, Pyric Ministers must exercise greater caution. Embassies in these places may be hidden, semipublic or unacknowledged by local authorities. In some cases, no permanent embassy exists at all. Such secrecy is essential, because Pyric Ministers also oversee minor spy activity in their region, reporting all findings and news to their Superintendent. Most Pyric Ministers only act as middlemen in this regard, though some in outlying or foreign communities take it upon themselves to launch their own espionage campaigns.

The Orderly Flame has approximately 400 spies operating in Creation and exactly 28 in Yu-Shan. Spies in the field report to the local Pyric Minister, who receives instructions from Superintendents concerning particular missions.

The Court of the Orderly Flame keeps a minor security force on hand at Lusa Seragon's palace. This force consists of approximately seven ifrit commanders; 8,700 flame ducks (see below); 6,400 llamma-yu (see below); and countless need fires of many different sizes (see **Games of Divinity**, p. 68). In emergency situations, the Orderly

Flame can summon members of loyal fire courts, who number in the hundreds of thousands. In addition, in times of war, it may also call upon the communities of the South to rise up to defend their region.

Accountants, librarians, technicians, custodians and servants make up the rest of the Orderly Flame's adherents, most of whom live and work in Lusa Seragon's palace and attend to the day-to-day operation of the facilities.

PROCEDURES

Most cases brought before the Orderly Flame are handled remotely, with authorized Ministers issuing rulings themselves on minor policy matters and conferring with their superiors on more important issues. Only those with the direst of concerns, those with the potential to have an impact on entire regions, receive an invitation to an audience at Lusa Seragon's palace. In all cases, there is a great emphasis on procedure, and paperwork is the order of the day. All rulings are stamped and filed in a very efficient manner. With respect to providing diplomatic assistance to communities or individuals that ask for it, everyone does exactly what they are supposed to do when they are supposed to do it. This is because diplomacy is the Orderly Flame's smokescreen — it is what validates its presence in any community. Perhaps in the past these things were done for their own sake, and indeed, many times, they are useful for the security of the region, but in the South in the Age of Sorrows, a place and time so rife with hazards and unpredictable possibilities, control is what is most important.

Given the tenor of the times, the Court of the Orderly Flame has gradually employed less than honorable methods of combating its enemies. This is not to say that the Orderly Flame has wholly descended into corruption. There exist, however, a growing number of individuals in its company who do not balk at the occasional shortcut if it means the disadvantage of the Orderly Flame's enemies. Some might dabble in underhandedness for the sake of the greater good, while others might be at the heart of complex programs of deception. The most extreme see no moral dilemma in conspiring to murder entire enemy factions that lie in the Orderly Flame's path.

OTHER NOTABLE FIRE COURTS

The Red Volkan Ledge: Southwest of Gem, astride a live volcano, the Dawn Rhoodra of Red Volkan Ledge holds his court. The current Dawn Rhoodra, Banatokh Wol, is of Murantru Ota's mold: outwardly sedate and thoughtful, with justice his chief concern, he conceals (like all garda birds) a furious inner rage that he focuses on the unjust. Banatokh Wol has openly voiced disappointment with Murantru Ota for abandoning his own court in favor of an ifrit's pipedream, though he endures the Orderly Flame's infrequent visits and advice with dour patience.

Banatokh Wol does not hate the Realm, but he does not love it either. He claims to be perfectly neutral on the matter, claiming that far greater empires have conquered and fallen and that the Realm will be no different. He resists getting involved in matters that do not directly concern the governance of fire and has little tolerance for breaches of etiquette. More than once he has consigned troublesome guests to “Formentera’s Room,” the pool of lava that is home to Formentera of the Wincrowing Rain, a godling who likes visitors, but finds that most seem to liquefy seconds after arrival.

The Vogelhan Judges: Seven ifrit sit behind a long, high, stone bench, dressed in white linens such that only their faces are visible. These are the Vogelhan Judges, proud members of the Orderly Flame and possibly the most progressive fire court in existence. These judges are so eager for change that they often make questionable rulings simply for the sake of challenging a timeworn policy, regardless of whether the old policy was efficient or not. This tendency has been short circuited of late, due to Lusa Seragon’s gentle suggestion that they add four more judges to the circuit in order to help reduce the number of rash conclusions.

The Vogelhan Judges hold court in a white stone mansion within a great oasis in the Southern desert. Guests are invited to stay and receive an impressive degree of hospitality. Unfriendly callers receive an unexpected shock: On command, the stone mansion turns into fire, immediately doing 24L damage per turn to everyone within until the victims either exit the mansion or one of the Vogelhan Judges issues the command that turns the mansion back into stone.

The Court of the Burning Maxator: Within the Omnilac, the quiet fire burning in the tundra south of Diamond Hearth, an ancient and giant garda bird, the Burning Maxator, holds his elemental court in silence, with reverence for the dancing iridescent flames all around. Few fire elementals make the North their permanent home, and likewise the Burning Maxator’s court hosts only a small number of magistrates and welcomes petitioners only infrequently.

Burning Maxator is no revolutionary. He does not hate the idea of the Court of the Orderly Flame. He is, instead, a traditionalist whose obsession with ritual and his own preeminence has warped his mind into an alien thing. Burning Maxator has sat in silence amidst the greatest fire for long centuries and has suffered no adversity. To suggest that his court would be better off dictated to from above, after enduring centuries of abandonment and scorn since his kind first emerged out of the Great Garda’s Essence, is little better than an insult. He scoffs at the Orderly Flame’s petitioners and messengers, so much so that Murantru Ota has ruled that no further missions be dispatched to the Burning Maxator until further notice.

The Red Tables of Ragoly Aglde: West of Arjuf, at the center of an ever-burning ring of fire that may be seen

clearly for miles around the broad plain upon which it sits, Ragoly Aglde of the Wings Conjoined in Lure, the self-styled Lord of the Unrivaled Flames, sits at a long table of red volcanic glass. Ragoly Aglde has no love for the Court of the Orderly Flame, or any other fire court, convinced as he is that his rulings alone have the force of law among fire elementals. In fact, Ragoly Aglde routinely denies foreign fire elementals passage to, or even through, the Blessed Isle. He demands worship from those who seek his advice and even from those for whom he rules in favor of during arbitration. His primary concerns are the fires generated for the uses demanded by war, but he also manages annual wildfires and closely oversees the use of fire by spirits on the Blessed Isle. He also holds monthly fire festivals on the Red Table’s grounds. Fire elementals from all over the Blessed Isle attend at least a few of these per year.

Ragoly Aglde has developed quite a favorable alliance with the Immaculates in the last century, considering that fire courts unwilling to bow to the Red Tables were also problematic for the Realm and the Immaculates. The Immaculate monks have been giving Ragoly Aglde information regarding their mutual enemies, authorizing (and aiding) his forces to nullify these threats permanently. As such, he has systematically destroyed nearly every other fire court of note on the Blessed Isle, in addition to being a party to removing hundreds of political enemies of the Immaculates. In return, the Immaculates deliver what trespassing fire elementals they find to the Red Tables. Much of Ragoly Aglde’s future depends on whether he ever realizes the extent to which he is in the pocket of the Immaculate monks and, realizing this, whether or not he can accept it. Thus far, the Immaculate monks have served to validate Ragoly Aglde’s rule. Without them, he may no longer have the power to lord over his subjects.

The Court of the Wintermonat: North of Rubylak, deep under the ground in a place of ash and soot and ever-burning living embers, the Wintermonat’s elemental court unites once every moon. The Wintermonat, a young and striking ifrit, has welcomed the Court of the Orderly Flame’s guidance and advice and has pledged to make their cause his own. One of only a few true allies the Orderly Flame has in the North, the Wintermonat has helped it, with the aid of Lusa Seragon’s riches, to both set up a semi-public embassy in Rubylak and place spies in useful positions throughout the city.

The Wintermonat has come under attack of late, however, both politically and militarily. Several new, foreign factions of fire elementals have come to the region and have attempted to disrupt the Wintermonat’s rule and take his underground Manse by force. The most powerful of these factions is led by an amabosar (see pp. 124-125). This particular amabosar, a young beast called Fervid Goat, has come out of the North leading a tremendous horde of desperate men and minor spirits.



Another foreign faction, three ifrit from the South who have no love for the Court of the Orderly Flame, have put pressure on the Wintermonat to reject its overtures. Of late, their suggestions have turned more toward threats.

NOTABLE PERSONAGES AND OTHERS

Below are details and statistics for many of the characters and creatures featured in this appendix.

MURANTRU OTA

Description: Murantru Ota, an ancient garda bird, leads the Orderly Flame and has done so for the past 600 years. He is a difficult, though principled, individual who spares little time for trivial matters. Once his interest (or ire) is raised, however, little can be done to sway his course from what he believes is the right path. Unfortunately, Murantru Ota tends to look at the world in black and white terms, ignoring what he considers incidental circumstances or consequences when confronted with difficult questions of justice and ethics and abstracting matters to fit his own dualistic worldview. Such a mind is invaluable when it comes to long-term vision and forecasting the future but of questionable appropriateness when the situation demands the choice between two or more undesirable states of affairs or when all parties in a dispute have an equally just footing. Because of this shortcoming, Murantru Ota frequently recuses himself from cases that involve much moral or political ambiguity, confining his efforts to composing policy drafts, recruiting and promoting the Orderly Flame in Yu-Shan. Most matters of leadership he leaves to Lusa Seragon, the First Archon of the Court, whom he considers his closest friend.

Murantru Ota has many minor allies and operatives in Yu-Shan that keep him up to date on most important matters. He once firmly believed that, with persistence and savvy, the Court of the Orderly Flame would receive its long-desired support from the Celestial Bureaucracy. Lately, he is feeling like a fool, as practically no one in Yu-Shan will hear his pleas any longer. Murantru Ota knows that it would be folly for him to escalate the matter, but his sense of justice guides his actions more than utilitarian concerns. In consequence, he and Wong Bongerok, whom he believes is the chief architect of his failure to attract any kind of support in Yu-Shan, have nearly come to blows on several occasions. If Wong Bongerok were to finally spoil the Orderly Flame's chances of gaining Celestial sponsorship, there is no telling what Murantru Ota might do.

Nature: Paragon

Attributes: Strength 4 (*Phoenix* 6), Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3 (*Phoenix* 2), Appearance 5, Perception 4, Intelligence 4 (*Phoenix* 2), Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 6, Valor 4

Abilities: Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 5, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Flametongue, High Holy Speech, High Realm, Orderly Flame Cant, Riverspeak) 5, Lore 4, (*Phoenix* — Melee 4), Occult 5, Presence 6

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Backing 5, Contacts 3, Influence 4

Charms: Affinity Element Control, DreamSpeak, Geas, Hurry Home, Ignite, Instill Obedience, Landscape Travel, Lend Authority, Memory Mirror, Memory Sponge, Paralyze (*Phoenix only*), Portal, Sense Domain, Stoke the Flame, Terrible Visage (*Phoenix only*), Tracking, Will-O-Wisp, Words of Power

Elemental Powers: Coarse Skin, Dragon's Suspire, Enshroud, Immolation

Cost To Dematerialize: 75

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Claw Swoop: Speed 9 Accuracy 14 Damage 13L Defense 18

Arc of Flame: Speed 16 Accuracy 12 Damage 19L

Sword (*Phoenix*): Speed 15 Accuracy 14 Damage 17L Defense 22

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 5L/4B

Willpower: 11 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 127

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Claw Swoop: Speed 9 Accuracy 14 Damage 13L Defense 18 Rate 1

Arc of Flame: Speed 16 Accuracy 12 Damage 19L Rate 1

Sword (*Phoenix*): Speed 15 Accuracy 14 Damage 17L Defense 22 Rate 2



LUSA SERAGON

Description: Lusa Seragon is a towering ifrit with a firm mouth and elegantly preened blue-black hair. His skin is the color of bronze, and his voice is pacific, yet stern. He wears stately robes tied with a simple chain, on which hangs the Lambent Fire Gourd, a rather plain item that fits in the palm of his enormous hand.

Many centuries ago, before the Contagion, Lusa Seragon wrote in a letter to the Court of Seasons, “I am convinced that the lamentable state of the natural world can be directly attributed to the failure of the elemental spirit courts.” Many believe that this sentence is still the best justification for consolidating the elemental spirit courts.

Lusa Seragon is the First Archon, host and primary financier of the Orderly Flame. He was a personal friend of Swan Dragon and is an uncompromising idealist. Second in rank to Murantru Ota, Seragon has been a loyal friend to the Orderly Flame and a sympathizer to its cause since Swan Dragon’s disappearance.

Early in life, before the Great Contagion, Lusa Seragon made his fortune in jade mining in the mountains north of Gem. Before long, he had accumulated hundreds of thousands of talents in profits. Today, none can say how much Lusa Seragon is worth. Those who have visited his palace, however, can attest to the princely air of his home.

Lusa Seragon carries no blade. He is, however, a matchless martial artist and possesses many offensive Charms and elemental powers that tend to dissuade even heavily armed assailants. He also possesses the Lambent Fire Gourd, an ancient, First Age artifact that protects its bearer from harm and commands a multitude of chaotic, elemental powers. Lusa Seragon cannot fully control the results once the Lambent Fire Gourd is opened, and closing it is a difficult task in itself. Because of this, Seragon makes use of the Gourd only when the situation is dire.

Lusa Seragon’s Palace of the Unseen is a tremendous and opulent diathermic structure. When visible, it is a scintillating palace of flame-tipped scoria with golden doors surrounded by a lake of phlogiston. Most of the ranking members of the Court of the Orderly Flame permanently reside here. Several other buildings can be found on the palace grounds: libraries, storage facilities, two fire galleon hangers and several structures devoted to training and operations.

Nature: Architect

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 6, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 6

Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 6, Temperance 5, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 5, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 5, Dodge 4, Endurance 5, Investigation 5, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Flametongue, High Holy Speech, High Realm, Orderly Flame Cant, Riverspeak) 5, Lore 4, Martial Arts 5,



Medicine 2, Occult 3, Performance (Oration) 5, Presence 5, Ride 3, Socialize 4, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Artifact 5, Backing 5, Followers 4, Influence 4, Manse 4, Resources 5

Charms: Affinity Element Control, Benefaction, Element Kiss, Element Touch, Geas, Harrow the Mind, Ignite, Instill Obedience, Landscape Sustenance, Landscape Travel, Largess, Stoke the Flame, Tiny Gift, Tracking, Worldly Illusion, Words of Power

Elemental Powers: Elemental Unction, Mobility, Rejuvenation (when in contact with flame)

Cost To Dematerialize: 65

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 8 Damage 4B Defense 8

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 6B Defense 7

Lambent Fire Gourd: Speed 10 Accuracy 20 Damage 25L* (Rate 1, Range 1,250)

* See “Other Notes” below.

Dodge Pool: 7
Gourd soaks 15L/25B)

Soak: 18L/30B (Lambent Fire

Willpower: 11
-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/

Essence: 5

Essence Pool: 115

Other Notes: The Lambent Fire Gourd requires a Willpower of 10 to open. Once opened, the initial blast of flaming swords and phlogiston causes 25L damage to all fae or Wyld-afflicted creatures in the range. In addition, the gourd releases thousands of need fires that will run amok for a number of minutes equal to the wielder’s Willpower plus permanent Essence. Each additional minute requires the expense of 20 motes from the wielder’s Essence pool. When the allotted time has passed, the need fires return to the gourd, which cannot be opened again until the next moon.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 9 Damage 4B Defense 10 Rate 5
 Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 7B Defense 5 Rate 3

ULITO SWAN, DAUGHTER OF SWAN DRAGON

Description: In her natural state, Ulito Swan possesses a snow-white feathered face and head, two short golden horns and two diminutive fangs. She has mastered shapeshifting Charms, however, and usually takes the shape of a tall, dusky, impossibly thin woman with large, round, inviting eyes and straight, fiery-red hair reaching down to her ankles.

The youngest daughter of the South's celebrated censor, Ulito Swan was born to Ofara Santalar, a mortal woman of great beauty and intelligence, in the tiny village of Potara in the mountains South of Harborhead 31 years before the Contagion. Raised almost exclusively by her mother for the first few years of her life, Ulito Swan, like her elder sisters, told and listened to tales of her father, building up his legend in her heart before actually knowing him. During those years, Swan Dragon's eldest daughter, Mariko Swan, would frequently visit from the neighboring town of Odust to teach Ulito Charms and to drill her in martial arts and swordplay. By the age of eight, Ulito was already formidable, possessing many battle instincts similar to those of Swan Dragon.

When Ulito Swan was nine, Mariko brought with her their two remaining sisters, twins named Ashre and Girte, whose mother has recently died. They lived under one roof, continuing their education together, for several more years, until the time of the Ahtoline Conspiracy, when Ulito's three sisters were slaughtered before her eyes in ways she cannot even begin to describe. With a rage heretofore unknown to her, she slew all four of their captors, using every Charm and every technique she knew. To this day, Ulito Swan has a deep and abiding hatred for Fair Folk and will never trust any of them for any reason. She blames the Fair Folk for the loss of her father and mother and her beloved sisters, for the rise of the Realm and for all of the subsequent misery the South has been subject to because of it.

Seven years after the Contagion, Ulito Swan awoke one morning to a shower of red and gold accompanied by a feeling of warmth and emotional peace. At first, she thought that she had died and that her spirit was in the process of moving on. She heard a voice in her mind, grieving for the loss of Swan Dragon with such sadness that Ulito Swan was brought to tears herself as she relived the pain she felt years before. When the feeling passed, she found herself still in her bed, still alive and now possessing the certain knowledge of her



own immortality. Whatever had touched her, she knew, had made her like unto her father. Without a known patron, however, Ulito Swan had little idea how to proceed. She had been given no particular instructions and was unfamiliar with her new powers. Her life took a downward turn when Wong Bongerok was named Censor of the South.

Ulito Swan has no particular love for Wong Bongerok, who, soon after his appointment as censor, managed to strip Ulito of her father's Manse in Yu-Shan and petitioned to have Ulito's endowment revoked. Ulito retains her endowment, but she has had to endure Wong Bongerok dwelling in her father's house. It has been a long time since Swan Dragon graced the halls of Yu-Shan, and many gods have forgotten or, worse, come to disregard his valor and eloquence. Thanks to Wong Bongerok, who has tried his best to exacerbate these attitudes and to convince many fellow gods that Ulito Swan's endowment was granted recklessly, Ulito Swan is only nominally welcome in Yu-Shan. Although she is permitted to enter on official business, she does not have permission to enter at her leisure. When she does appear in Yu-Shan, she is commonly the recipient of scorn and airs.

Ulito Swan is the Court of the Orderly Flame's secret Superintendent of the Fire for the Blessed Isle, though she is stationed in Chiaroscuro. She has few friends beyond Lusa Seragon, whom she looks up to as a surrogate father, and Dozima Wokish, her confidant and ally. Ulito Swan has grown into a stern and directed operative, completely devoted to the success of the Orderly Flame.

She possesses a number of interesting objects and artifacts, including the Five Fire Stone, the famed rapier Subtle Pin of Jade and Fury and the Widow's Shawl. She

also possesses a soulsteel blade, which she recently acquired from the Ledaal depositories. At the first opportunity, she will try to deliver it to Lusa Seragon.

Nature: Explorer

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 5, Temperance 4, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 4, Dodge 3, Investigation 5, Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; High Realm, Old Realm, Orderly Flame Cant) 5, Larceny 4, Lore 4, Martial Arts 4, Melee 5, Occult 4, Presence 4, Ride 3, Socialize 3, Stealth 4, Survival 4, Thrown 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Artifact 4, Backing 3, Contacts 3, Influence 3, Manse 5*, Mentor 3, Resources 4

* Ulito Swan is attuned to Lusa Seragon's level 5 Manse, located in his palace.

Charms: All available spirit Charms

Elemental Powers: All elemental powers

Cost To Dematerialize: 65

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Daiklave (Subtle Pin of Jade and Fury): Speed 18 Accuracy 17 Damage 14L Defense 15

Five Fire Stone: Damage 30L

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 15L/25B

Willpower: 10 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 90

Other Notes: By spending 3 motes of Essence, Ulita Swan can perceive all immaterial spirits for one scene.

The Five Fire Stone is a First Age assassination device. Placed on the person of a potential mark — in a pocket or some similar place — it may be activated at any time with a command word, at which time it emits unearthly fires. Mortal victims of this brutal device are reduced to ashes. Spirits and Exalted take the damage indicated above.

The Widow's Shawl is a potent artifact that soaks an additional 6L/8B of damage in combat. It is especially potent against fae weapons and sorcery, against which it soaks 10L/16B. Once per day, the owner may cast the Widow's Shawl, keeping a hold on a single thread. The Shawl spreads out over the sky, affecting a range equal to one mile for every 10 motes of Essence spent. All Fair Folk suffer a -2 to all dice pools for the next combat turn, and all Fair Folk powers fizzle until the end of the scene.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Daiklave (Subtle Pin of Jade and Fury): Speed 22 Accuracy 18 Damage 15L Defense 15 Rate 5

WONG BONGEROK, LESSER ELEMENTAL DRAGON OF FIRE

Description: The current Censor of the South, Wong Bongerok, maintains tight control over many of the little gods in the region, while mainly either paying lip service to or conspiring with the more powerful Celestial beings associated with his post. In Creation, he is known widely as a scandalmonger and meddler, though he has managed to develop a wide circle of supporters and hangers-on in the South through blackmail, political favors and intimidation. His only saving grace is that barely anyone in the Celestial Bureaucracy seems to be paying any attention to him anymore. The South has not been a particular hotbed of Celestial controversy recently, and the number of official high-profile audits has decreased sharply over the years.

Wong Bongerok is not a member of or participant in the Court of the Orderly Flame, though he does attempt to keep a close eye on its proceedings in between his obligations to the Bureau of Heaven and his own personal undertakings. When he does appear at Lusa Seragon's palace, it is certainly not without reason. More often than not, Wong Bongerok appears in order to impose his will on the proceedings when matters concern Wong Bongerok's private agenda. When he does appear before the Court of



the Orderly Flame, he always attempts to dominate the proceedings, making it quite clear that he has the power to make life difficult for the members of the Orderly Flame if matters are not settled to his satisfaction.

Wong Bongerok knows that the Orderly Flame has spies placed throughout the South and perhaps beyond. He does not know who these spies are, however, or precisely how they communicate. He fears that they may have recently penetrated his own circle, and he has been constantly questioning and threatening his aides in an attempt to find any moles.

In Yu-Shan, Wong Bongerok is a cruel and provocative critic, painting his enemies in lurid colors and elevating his own image to that of a potential luminary and idealist deserving of greater recognition. He tends to take credit for the ideas and accomplishments of others, usually those who do not have the power to complain about it, though few of his superiors have taken enough notice of him to see through his self-serving oration.

Wong Bongerok regularly takes bribes from the Bureau of Humanity's Sub-Director of Bribery and Finance, Amoth City-Smiter. In return, Wong Bongerok attempts to cover up any irregularities in the conduct of both the minor gods who work to further Amoth's destructive agenda and his own involvement in other Celestial violations (see **Exalted: The Sidereals**, pp. 47-48). Such a potentially scandalous inter-bureau alliance has its risks, but neither have much fear of discovery.

Wong Bongerok's everyday form is that of a corpulent, hairless, red-robed man with eyes in his palms and a light patina of blue fire emanating from his skin. In battle, Wong Bongerok always takes on his dragon form: a brilliant orange lizard with a long green fin running from the crest of his head and down the length of his back and tail, ending with a fierce poisonous stinger. He can either use his razor sharp claws and teeth to rend his enemies' flesh or spit gobs of liquid phlogiston, burning them to ashes.

Nature: Conniver

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Stamina 7, Charisma 5, Manipulation 6, Appearance 5, Perception 4, Intelligence 7, Wits 6

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 3, Temperance 3, Valor 5

Abilities: Awareness 6, Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 4, Investigation 4, Larceny 7, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Flametongue, High Realm, Riverspeak, Seatongue, Skytongue) 5, Lore 3 (Celestial Law +1), Melee 5, Occult 4, Performance 6 (Irritating Harangue +1), Presence 6, Resistance 2, Socialize 4, Stealth 5

Backgrounds: Backing 5, Cult 3, Followers 5, Manse 5

Charms: All available spirit Charms

Elemental Powers: All available elemental powers

Cost To Dematerialize: 85

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Bite: Speed 13 Accuracy 12 Damage 16L Defense 10*

Claw: Speed 17 Accuracy 11 Damage 12L Defense 11*

Poisonous Stinger: Speed 17 Accuracy 19 Damage 22L** Defense 18

Breath of Liquid Phlogiston: Speed 20 Accuracy 13 Damage 16L (Rate 1/10, Range 30)***

* Wong Bongerok may make two claw attacks and one bite attack every turn without splitting his dice pool.

** Wong Bongerok's poison stinger delivers a difficulty 4 poison. Success 3L Failure 8L Duration/Penalty 10 hours/-5.

*** Wong Bongerok's breath of liquid phlogiston cannot be blocked, only dodged. He can use this breath every 10 turns.

Dodge Pool: 8
18L/18B)

Soak: 23L/28B (Dragon hide,

Willpower: 8

Health Levels: -0/-0/-0/-0/-1/

-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/-4/-4/-4/Incap

Essence: 7

Essence Pool: 132

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Bite: Speed 13 Accuracy 12 Damage 16L Defense 10 Rate 3

Claw: Speed 17 Accuracy 11 Damage 12L Defense 11 Rate 3

Poisonous Stinger: Speed 17 Accuracy 19 Damage 22L* Defense 18 Rate 1

* Wong Bongerok's poison stinger delivers a difficulty 4 poison. Success 3L Failure 8L Duration/Penalty 10 hours/-5.

DOZIMA WOKISH

Description: Dozima Wokish, a Gold Faction Sidereal Exalted, saw himself in the Loom of Fate and had a very clear insight into his own future. He saw himself fighting side by side with Swan Dragon against a dark, formidable foe. The vision itself was brief, for the Tapestry of Fate folded before his eyes, hiding any further visions of his own future from his sight. But he came away from the experience convinced that Swan Dragon was alive somewhere and that their fates would intertwine before long. Wokish soon presented himself before Wun Ja, who sent him in search of Swan Dragon's trail.

Dozima Wokish is a slender, gentle-faced man of middling stature. He wears thin, deep blue robes and carries a starmetal serpent-sting staff. He sometimes travels with his Night Caste Solar protégé and lover, Blue Pure One. A member of the Convention of Fire, he has frequent contact with the Court of the Orderly Flame and has been known to work with it at times when their purposes intersect. He maintains a friendship with Ulito Swan, though he has not revealed his vision of Swan Dragon to her.

Caste: Chosen of Jupiter

Nature: Explorer



Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 2, *Craft (Fate) 2, Dodge 3, Endurance 1, *Investigation 4, *Larceny 3, Linguistics (Native: Firetongue; High Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 3 (Calligraphy +1), *Lore 3, *Martial Arts 5 (Serpent-Sting Staff +1), Melee 3, *Occult 2, Presence 1, Ride 1, Socialize 2, *Stealth 4

* Auspicious or Favored Ability

Backgrounds: Acquaintances 2, Allies 4, Artifact 2, Backing 2, Salary 2, Savant 3, Sifu 2

Charms: Auspicious Prospects for Fate, Creation Smuggling Procedures, Dream Confiscation Approach, Harmony of Blows, Impeding the Flow, Marvelous Inclusion of Details, Ox-Body Technique, Secrets of Future Strife, Sidereal Shell Games, Soft Presence Practice, Systematic Understanding of Everything, Walking Outside Fate

Colleges: The Key 1, The Mask 2, The Shield 2, The Treasure Trove 1

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 2B Defense 9

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 4B Defense 8

Serpent-Sting Staff (Woeful Reckoning): Speed 11 Accuracy 11 Damage 7L Defense 13

Dodge Pool: 7 **Soak:** 1L/3B

Willpower: 6 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/
Incap

Essence: 2

Personal Essence: 10 **Peripheral Essence:** 19 (24)

Committed Essence: 5

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 10 Damage 2B Defense 11 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 10 Damage 5B Defense 6 Rate 3

Serpent-Sting Staff (Woeful Reckoning): Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 9L Defense 13 Rate 4

FLAME DUCK

Description: Flame ducks appear exclusively as dark green- to black-skinned women with feathery wings attached to their arms and fiery red tresses hot to the touch. Creatures of leisure in times of relative peace, flame ducks frequently find their way as gamblers, prostitutes and merchants. In times of great strife, however, or if of a particularly severe bent, flame ducks can hold their own as effective soldiers, possessing an incredible natural puissance in matters of soldiery. They fight best as a group and enjoy practicing flights in formation and other military exercises where they can show off their talents.

Lakes of molten lava and active volcanoes are the natural habitat for flame ducks, though few stay in these places beyond the term of their youth (five years). Because they migrate semiannually, flame ducks see many places around Creation and eventually become very cosmopolitan creatures. Not many flame ducks can be found very far North, however, as they do not appreciate the colder climes.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3



Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 2, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Endurance 4, Linguistics 3, Melee 4, Performance 3, Socialize 4, Survival 2, Thrown 4

Backgrounds: Resources 2

Suggested Charms: Affinity Element Control, Cunning Thief, Harrow the Mind, Measure the Wind

Elemental Powers: Aegis, Coarse Skin, Element's Domain, Mobility

Cost To Dematerialize: 40

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 3B Defense 8

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 7 Damage 5B Defense 7

Javelin (hand-to-hand): Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 5L Defense 8

Javelin (thrown): Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 6L (Rate 2, Range 30)

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 12L/22B (Fiery plumage, 10L, 18B)

Willpower: 6 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 68

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 3B Defense 10 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 9 Damage 6B Defense 5 Rate 3

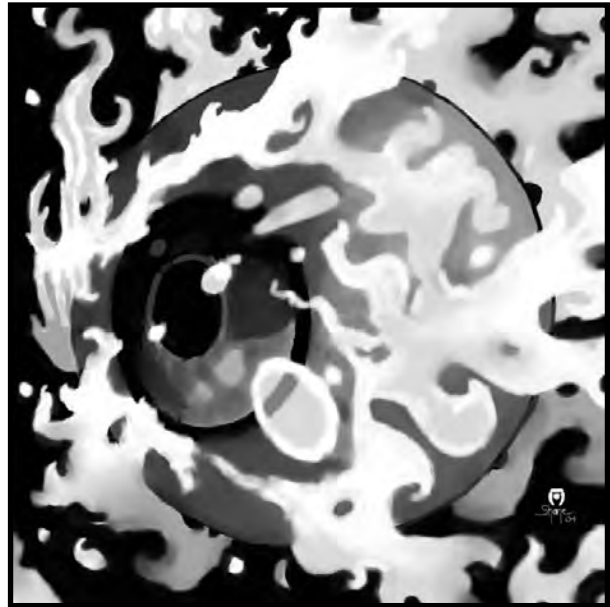
Javelin: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 6L Defense 9 Rate 3

LLAMMA-YU

Description: Llama-yu are great flaming balls of destruction. They appear as flaming eyes that flare and belch and roar and they float, hover or bounce along the sand. Relatively unintelligent, they are trainable in the same way that dogs may be trained. Llama-yu love to consume flammable material. If not trained to behave at an early age, they will certainly run wild and be very difficult for trainers and owners alike to handle. Wild adult llama-yu and cities obviously do not mix. Therefore, many cities require special licenses guaranteeing their training.

The llama-yu are excellent, enthusiastic fighters eager to please their masters. The Orderly Flame employs several llama-yu trainers and keeps thousands of the creatures on hand, amounting to one of the largest (and only) llama-yu domestication farms in the South.

Wild llama-yu trek across the South yearly in the thousands, burning villages and destroying crops with innocent glee. Many towns will pay handsomely for a permanent solution to the problem, as every village in the Southern desert is ravaged at least every 15 years.



Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 1, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 5, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Endurance 5, Survival 2

Backgrounds: None

Suggested Charms: Landscape Travel

Elemental Powers: Coarse Skin, Enshroud, Mobility

Cost To Dematerialize: 35

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Firebite: Speed 12 Accuracy 14 Damage 8L

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 10L/18B (Fiery aura, 8L/14B)

Willpower: 4 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 46

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Firebite: Speed 12 Accuracy 14 Damage 8L Rate 3

AMABOSAR

Description: Amabosars are a particularly rare, ill-tempered sort of fire elemental who tend to cause minor strife and havoc wherever they find themselves. Stupid and tiresome, amabosars usually fashion themselves as small-time godlings in search of a flock. These spirits are attracted to warm places permeated with Essence. They occupy these places by force and then abandon them when driven forth or when their cult collapses due to careless management.



Amabosars appear as portly, unsightly men and women of short stature. With effort (expending 10 motes of Essence), they can grow significantly taller for one scene. They are too lazy to learn to use weapons, instead relying on their ability to discharge streams of fire from their skin at will.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 1, Brawl 5, Dodge 4, Endurance 4, Larceny 4, Presence 2, Socialize 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Followers 2-4

Suggested Charms: Affinity Element Control, Landscape Travel, Stoke the Flame

Elemental Powers: Aegis, Coarse Skin, Dragon's Suspire, Mobility

Cost To Dematerialize: 30

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Dragon's Suspire (fireskin): Speed 4 Accuracy 5 Damage 4L (Rate 1, Range 4)

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 12L/22B (Burning aura, 11L/19B)

Willpower: 6 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 3 **Essence Pool:** 68

Other Notes: None



EXALTED

For More Information on Reaper's Exalted miniatures, visit www.reapermini.com.com



Future Releases

61006 Roseblack
61013 Lady of Darkness
61014 Lunar Exalted Bull
61015 Legionnaire Captain
61016 Ocean Pearl
61017 Karal Fire Orchid
61018 Witch of the Windward Isle

61019 Sayn
61021 Armattan and Sirah
61022 Jiunan, Hunter of the Dead
61023 Master of Battle
61024 Water Aspect Dragon Blooded
61025 Horakinis, Scholar



A New Fantasy Epic

Hop aboard an all new series of anime-inspired novels set in the fantasy world of White Wolf's hit game Exalted. Each novel stands on its own, but together they tell an epic saga of clashing demons and heroes chosen by the Unconquered Sun. Covers by UDON.



www.white-wolf.com/exalted



Exalted: A Day Dark As Night
by Carl Bowen
(ISBN 1-58846-859-3; WW10065)



Exalted: Relic of the Dawn
by David Niall Wilson
(ISBN 1-58846-860-7; WW10066)



Exalted: In Northern Twilight
by Jess Hartley
(ISBN 1-58846-861-5; WW10067)



White Wolf and Exalted are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. A Day Dark As Night, Relic of the Dawn and In Northern Twilight are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved.

coming next...

THE FAIR FOLK



EXALTED

HOUSES OF THE BULL GOD™



Driven by the War God

Created by the machinations of Ahlat, the Southern God of War, Harborhead is a nation in turmoil. A state built on conquest and blood sacrifice, it has had its warlike, expansionist tendencies and intertribal violence curtailed by the Realm's force of arms. Its armies conquered, its people enslaved and its resources stolen to enrich the Empress' coffers, Harborhead has suffered under the Realm's yoke for hundreds of years.

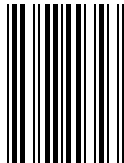
Exploited by the Realm

Houses of the Bull God details the nation of Harborhead, a long-time satrapy of the Realm. Though subjugated by the Scarlet Empire, its Five Peoples yet harbor dreams of freedom — and of conquest. Now, with the Empress gone and the Great Houses busy preparing for civil war on the Blessed Isle, the opportunity to realize those dreams seems to be at hand. But the Realm isn't likely to give up such a rich territory without a fight. Inside are presented the important players on both sides of this coming conflict and the War God Ahlat and his retinue, the only ones who will profit from the impending struggle regardless of its outcome.



ISBN 1-58846-677-9 WW8828 US \$21.99

5 2 1 9 9



9 781588 466778



www.white-wolf.com