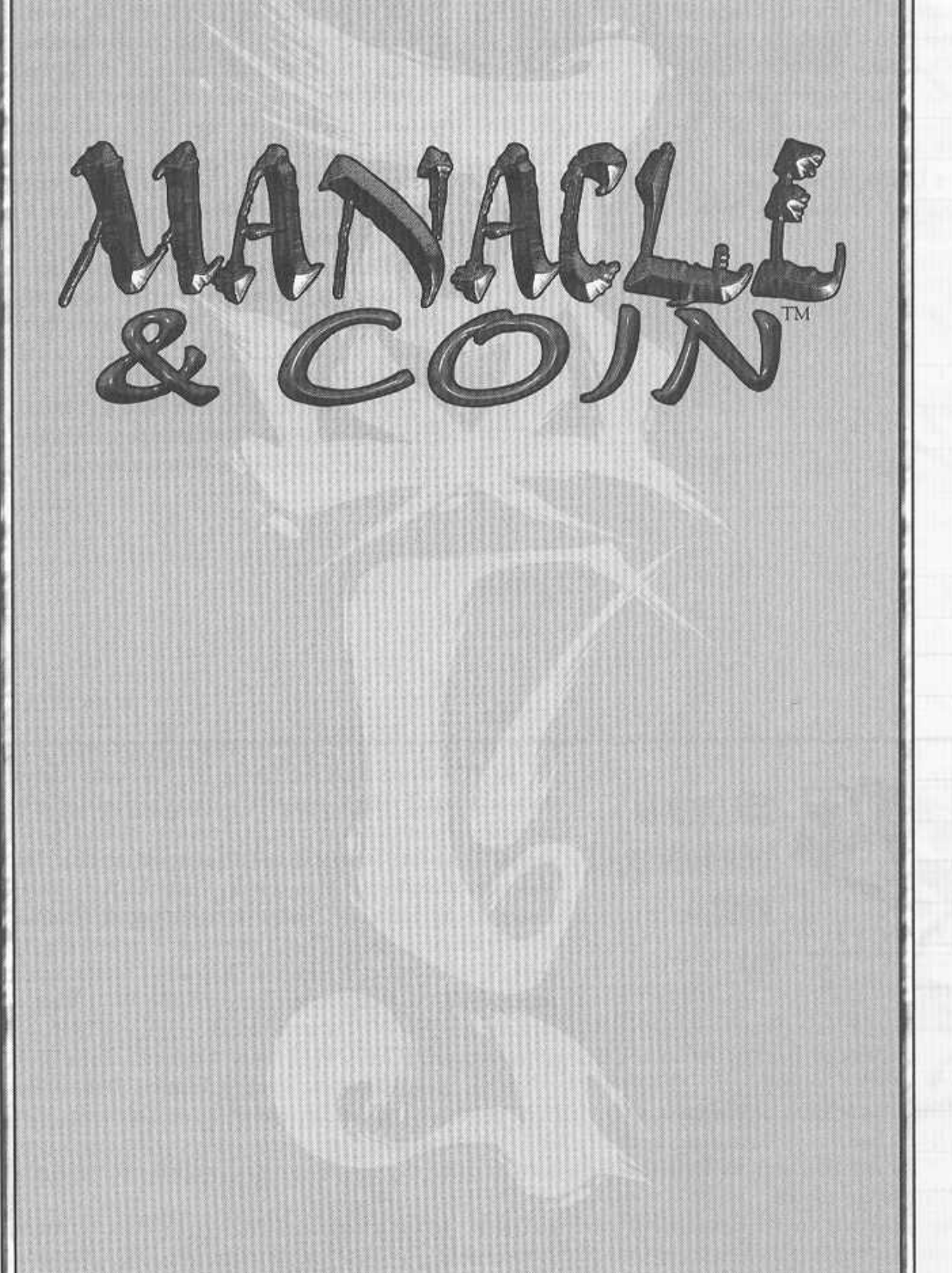


MANACLES & COIN™



A Sourcebook of Greed And Sharp Practice for

EXALTED



MANACLE & COIN™

BY IAN ELLER, MALCOLM SHEPPARD,
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SPECIAL THANKS

I'd like to start this book by thanking Ken Cliffe and the other folks in management at White Wolf for allowing so many of you to read it. As originally planned, **Manacle and Coin** was to be a Black Dog book, a part of our adults-only line, because of its unpleasant subject material. When it was decided to keep the book in the main line, I was concerned over the issue of content. I wrote to Ken asking if he felt that any of the material would need to change, and he said I should "keep it up to the high standards of the line." So that's what I've done; I did exactly the book I intended to do in the first place. Let's hear it for managers with brass nuts.

I'd also like to thank the writers. They did a bang-up job on a very hard assignment that happened to fall within the developer's own sphere of personal interest. Andrew Watt, in particular, worked tirelessly to capture the full Byzantine sweep of imperial finance.

Finally, thanks to Ken Hite and Mark Cenczyk for listening to my plans for the imperial economy at SimCon 2002 and for providing their comments.



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INTRODUCTION



It is not funny that a man should be killed, but it is sometimes funny that he should be killed for so little, and that his death should be the coin of what we call civilization.

—Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”

I don’t normally speak directly to the readers, but just this once, I’d like to talk directly to the people reading this book. **Manacle and Coin** is a special book for me, one that I’ve intended to do since I was first developing the main **Exalted** rulebook.

The goals for this book are threefold. First and foremost, I wanted to explain the business practice, macroeconomics and international vice trade of the Age of Sorrows. While none of these matters directly affect a game of kung-fu asskicking, **Exalted** achieves much of its heroic effect from the extreme contrast of the game’s over-the-top action with the grim realism of the Second Age. This book, then, is a key to establishing that grim realism. Like **Savage Seas**, there are doubtless some fans who will find the material in this book not to their tastes. It is a serious treatment of business, particularly dirty and unpleasant business, as transacted in the Second Age of Man. There is precious little graphic sex and even less graphic violence in it, and neither is especially glorified when it does appear. However, the book covers material that, until now, was only available to the developer and a few core writers. I think it is fascinating and fun, and my primary goal for this book is that much of the material find its way into your game.

Second, it was always my intention that this book illustrate the depths to which the human individual can sink. Most of the practices illustrated in this book are modeled on real-

world material: the Arabic and transatlantic slave trade, the partition of China and the subjection of its people to opium, the perversion of entire nations to serve the ends of the single individual who rules and effectively owns them. I hope that when a reader finishes **Manacle and Coin**, he will thoroughly understand that there is nothing that some person will not do to another in the quest for wealth and power. Let this book stand as a lesson to those who would say that “nobody” would “ever” do something. There is always someone willing to perform any particular wicked deed if it profits him or allows him to gain a position where others are in his power.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, this book exists to remind the inhabitants of our own age that the denizens of the Age of Sorrows are wrong. Most of the evils this book talks about are largely, blessedly extinct in our own world, so much so that I needed to publish a book specifically about them so that players and Storytellers could learn enough of these historical terrors to include them in their games.

These practices are not extinct because they are inefficient or unprofitable. Most such inhuman endeavors netted quite tidy sums. If they hadn’t been profitable, their evil would not have been such a pestilence upon mankind. Now, they are extinct, not because of any natural or historical process, but because people of all nations and all creeds together turned their faces against these forms of wickedness



and decried them as wrong and unjust. After many centuries of toil and strife, wherein men and women of character railed against these institutions despite the efforts of vested interests and apologists, good triumphed.

Today, there are no slaves, except for a few “students” in the Sudan. Today, there is no opium concession. Today, we abhor authoritarian governments without elections or the equality of law as the horrifying machines of systematic exploitation that they are. In the course of these reforms, there were many deaths and much property damage. Many slavers and opium peddlers were forced into tragic unemployment, and doubtless, the cost of some goods rose, but reform happened anyway, and apparently, they weren’t such “necessary” evils after all.

We will always live surrounded by those who claim that the evils of the day are inevitable or ineradicable or an unfortunate necessity of the era. Perhaps they are right, and perhaps they are apologists or puppets of their time’s vested interests. Certainly, I know where my opinion on the matter generally lies — that most people who speak of an odious practice as a terrible and unfortunate necessity wish to convince someone else that it is so.

I hope that this book fulfills these three goals.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The segments of this book are all relatively independent of one another. People reading it will probably want to start with Chapter One: Guild History and Structure and then continue to Appendix: Money and Finance in Creation. These two sections should serve to give the reader a good idea of the book’s general contents and of the structure of finance in Creation.

Introduction: It’s what you’re reading right now. A rare chance to see the developer mouth off in his natural voice.

Chapter One: Guild History and Structure: This chapter covers the history of the Guild from its founding in the wake of the Contagion to the present day and deals with the structure of the Guild both as an international organization and at a local level. The chapter focuses heavily on caravan operations, as they’re at the center of the public’s perception of the Guild.

Chapter Two: Drugs — The Soft Trade: This chapter details the effects of most of the common drugs in use in Creation and the Guild’s drug extraction and retailing operations.

Chapter Three: Slaves — The Hard Trade: This chapter details the trade in human flesh and lives the Guild transacts with both the Realm and the Fair Folk, from the gathering of slaves by military units or barbarian raiders to their sale and treatment.

Appendix: Money and Finance in Creation: The appendix provides details of the imperial monetary and financial system and also of financial systems in the Threshold, and it outlines the Guild’s retail, development and commercial banking operations.

LEXICON

The following is a brief lexicon of Guild terminology. Only the key terms from elsewhere in the book are included here.

PLEASE READ ME

This book is about horrible things — slavery, drug addiction and the socially endorsed exploitation of the inhabitants of the Threshold and the Blessed Isle by the competing forces of the Guild and the Realm. This book does not waste time pointing out how terrible any one specific part of this arrangement is. It was our belief that the evils depicted needed no emphasis and that pointing out how ghastly these matters are would be an insult to the reader’s intelligence. Instead, the text portrays them as they are seen by inhabitants of the Second Age of Man — as terrible and unfortunate realities thrust upon everyone by the times and by practical necessity. I’m sorry if you’re one of those people who thinks that unless you include a ritual denouncement every time you describe something bad you’re somehow endorsing it. I guess if you are one of those people, you’ll just have to either get a grip on reality or just not read this book.

administration: That portion of the Guild responsible for the Guild’s own health, welfare and operations. The more practical branches of the Guild are the *merchants* and the *craftsmen*.

age-staving cordial: The most common anagathic (life-extending drug), and the only one generally available in the post-Contagion era.

bar: A form of high-value *jade currency* between the *talent* and the *mina*.

bazaar: The central Guild-owned and -operated central market of a *hub city*. These markets often approach the Little Market of Nexus in the variety of goods they offer.

beasts of resplendent liquids: Strange immortal animals created by the Exalted in the First Age to serve as living drug factories. Once, there were hundreds of these great lizards, each ingesting raw materials and pissing out concentrated drugs mixed with their urine. Today, the only beasts known to remain are two anagathic producers controlled by the Realm and seven the Guild controls that eat opium and process it into heroin.

bit: The smallest unit of *jade currency*, consisting of an *obol* cut into quarters.

caravan master: An individual retained to run the day-to-day affairs of a caravan for a *merchant prince*. Many merchant princes act as their own caravan masters.

craftsmen: The branch of the Guild whose members produce products. Other branches are the *merchants* and the *administration*.

dinar: A silver coin, minted by the Guild, popular in the Threshold because the silver does not attract supernatural attention. The dinar is the currency of the Scavenger Lands and all those who wish to show they oppose the Realm. Dinars are the only coins the Guild mints, but the *dirham* and the *silver talent* are used as *monies of account* when handling silver.

Directorate, the: The central directive organization of the Guild, controlled by the nine *hierarchs*. The Directorate is located in the city of Nexus.

dirham: A money of account equal in value to 16 pounds of pure silver. Dirhams are not actually minted.

factor: One of the senior Guild officials in a *hub city*. Other important figures include *keeps* and *master artisans*. Factors are tremendously wealthy and stake or partially stake most Guild operations in their hub city and the region it services. Factors are also always Guildsmen of long service, and wealth alone cannot buy someone a place in the Guild.

gongfang: An insurance assessor and actuary, usually working for or as an insurance agency. Gongfang operate in both the Realm and the Threshold.

Guild council: A group of *factors* who work together to manage Guild interests in a particular *hub city* and the area it services. Guild councils are the regional decision-making bodies of the Guild and answer to *the Directorate*.

Guild warden: A Guild official who supervises the good business conduct of other Guild officials. Guild wardens use bribed agents and retain outside investigators to police the ranks of the Guild.

hierarch: One of the nine supreme officials of the Guild. The highest rank possible in the Guild organization.

hub city: A city containing a *Guild council* that serves as the point of origin for major caravans. Nexus and Chiaroscuro are the largest of the hub cities.

jade currency: A standard of currency propagated by the Scarlet Empress to control the availability and ownership of the most common of the Five Magical Materials. The largest unit of jade currency is the *jade talent*, the smallest the *obol*. Jade is extremely valuable, and only the Realm's Dragon-Blooded and patricians transact business in jade with any regularity. Low-status individuals use *jade scrip* instead.

jade scrip: A form of coinage used in the Realm for transactions among those of low station.

kaja: An imperial prefectural official charged with auditing town or village financial records. Important because peasants in the Realm are legally forbidden from keeping such records themselves.

keep: A member of the Guild who buys and sells good like a merchant, but from a fixed location. Keeps provide outlets for Guild merchandise and help stake banks and trading operations. Prominent keeps in a *hub city* will sit on the *Guild council* for the city and generally buy their way to influence after long membership in the same fashion as a *factor*.

koku: A form of *jade scrip*, this paper currency is worth about half a *bit*, or 128 *yen*. The *koku* is the largest unit of *jade-scrip* currency. Below it is the *quian*.

lodge: A form of organization found inside the *craftsmen* branch. All craftsmen who make a certain product are members of the same lodge, and the lodges exercise iron control over policies of content and craftsmanship.

maiden tea: A form of herbal contraceptive and abortifacient, usable for birth control purposes by both men and women.

master artisan: A senior member of the Guild's *craftsman* branch. Master artisans are equal in rank to the *factors* and are often senior members of their craft's *lodge* as well.

merchant prince: The Guildsman who represents a given *factor* on a caravan, similar to a supercargo on a ship but with more administrative and directive control. The equivalent to ship captains are *caravan masters*, who assist the merchant princes by directly administering the day-to-day affairs of the caravan.

merchants: The branch of the Guild for those members who specialize in the buying and selling of goods and in speculative merchant ventures. Other branches are the *craftsmen* and the *administration*.

mina: A form of high-value *jade currency* between the *shekel* and *bar* in value.

money of account: A currency unit that doesn't actually exist, but that is, instead, a notional value used to provide an additional column in ledger entries. The best example is the *dirham*, which is a money of account for the Guild's silver *dinar*. Weighing in at 16 pounds of silver, there are no actual dirhams, but it is easier to keep track of how many dirhams one has than how many thousands of dinars.

Monies of account are also used for imperial coins larger than an *obol*, as the jade is more valuable uncut, making the actual coins worth about 50 percent more than their face value. Someone asked to pay a *mina* would be expected to pay with 16 *obols*. Someone who instead paid with 2 *shekels* would expect about 8 *obols* in change.

obol: The only coin-shaped form of *jade currency*. An *obol's* value is between that of a *bit* and that of a *shekel*.

quian: A form of *jade scrip*. This paper note is worth 1/16th of a *bit*, or 16 *yen*. Quian can also be halved and quartered.

shekel: A form of *jade currency* between the *obol* and the *mina* in value.

siu: A form of *jade-scrip* coin worth 1/32nd of a *bit*, or 8 *yen*.

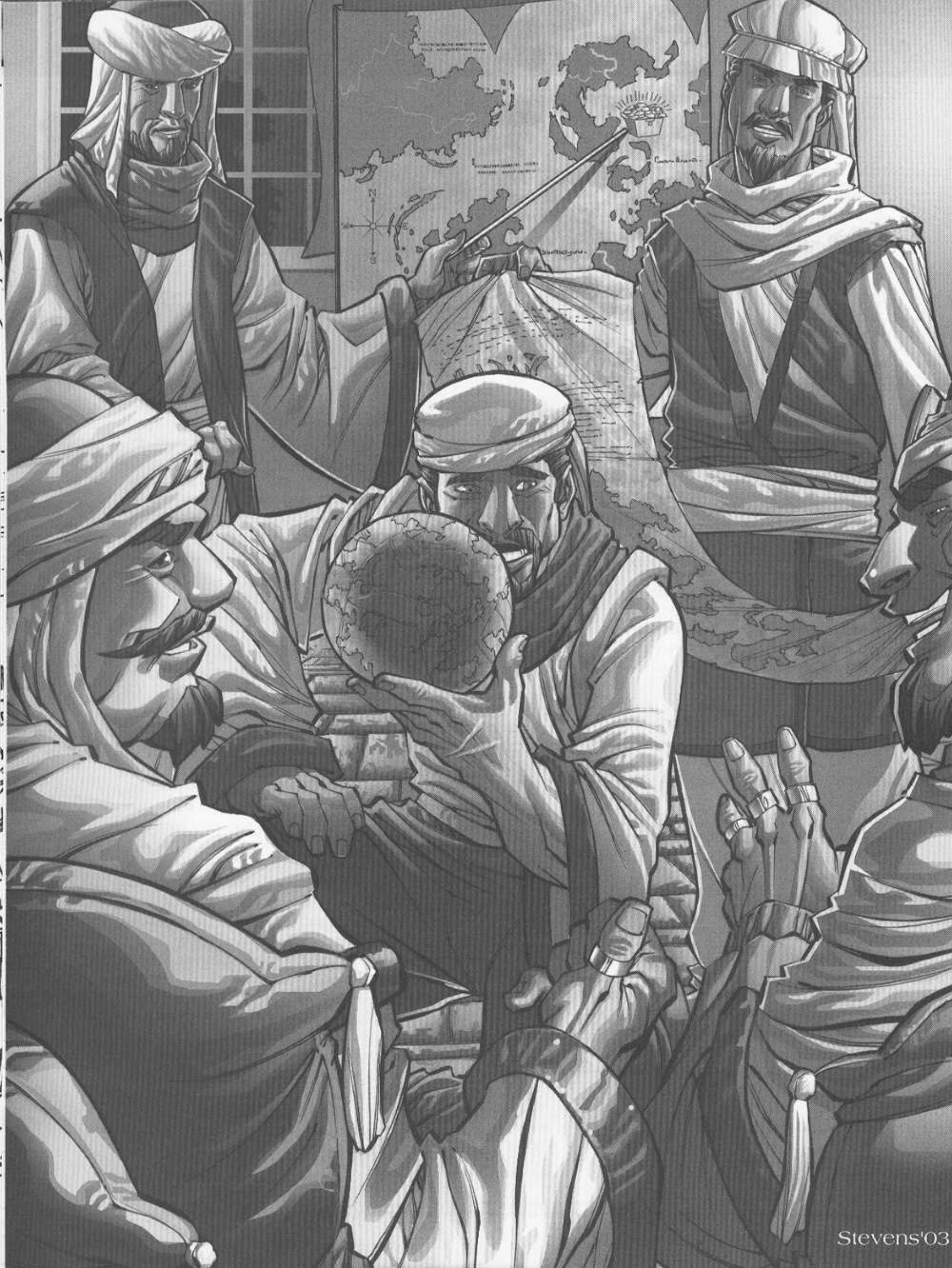
slave citadel: A regional Guild facility for collecting slaves from independent raiders and for performing preliminary sorting and training.

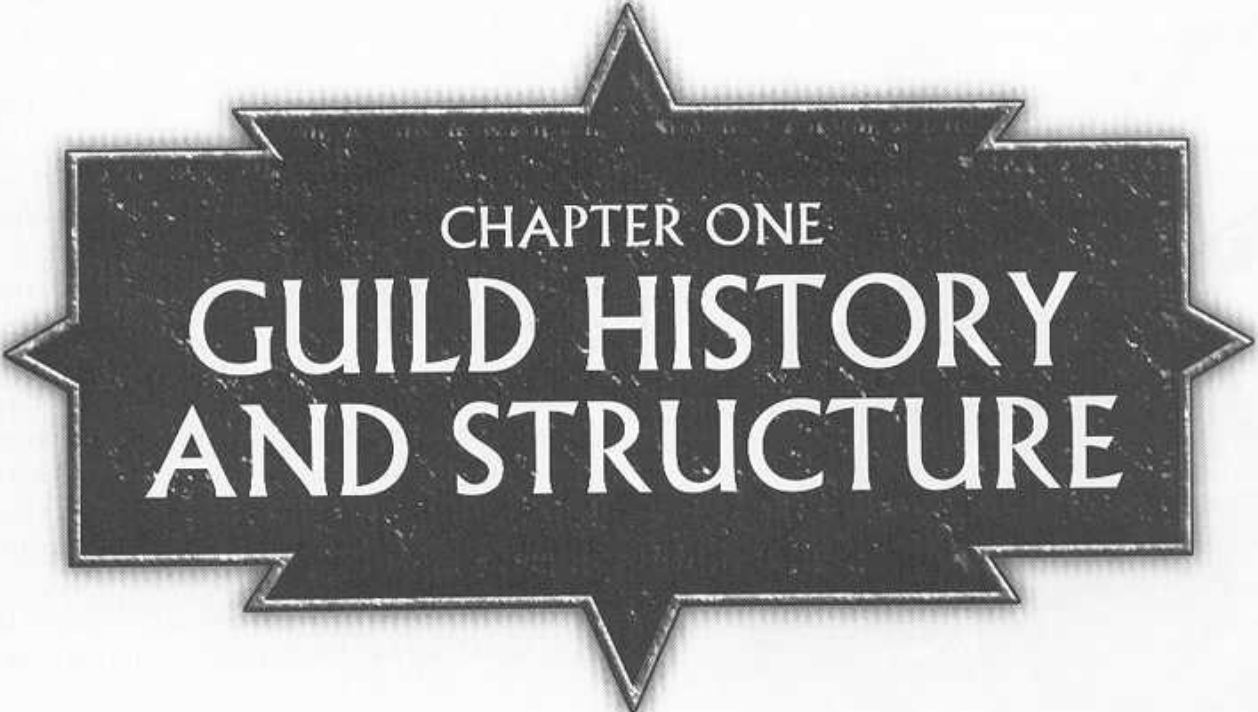
talent, jade: Uncut blocks of jade, 68 pounds in weight, marked with the Treasury seal, that represent the largest form of *jade currency* available in the Realm. A true talent is worth 12 *bars*. True talents are very rare, and the term "talent" is normally used to mean a ledger talent used to reckon the value of large masses of loose jade. Ledger talents are *monies of account* worth 8 *bars* that are used to reckon the value of large transactions. There is no such actual coin as a "ledger talent." True talents are more a way for the Treasury to audit the identity and location of large masses of uncut jade than as coinage for actual business transactions, and when a price is quoted in jade talents in this book, it is in ledger talents.

talent, silver: Another *money of account*. A silver talent is an ingot of pure silver 64 pounds in weight worth 4 silver *dirhams*, or 1,600 *dinars*. The value of a talent of silver, though great, is only a fraction of that of a *jade talent*.

yen: The lowest-valued form of *jade-scrip* coinage, worth 1/1,024th of a *bit* or 1/1,048,576th of a *ledger talent*. Yen are halved, quartered and even eighthed.







CHAPTER ONE

GUILD HISTORY AND STRUCTURE



Trade, commerce, the exchange of goods and ideas. These are the purview of the Guild in the Second Age.

The history of the Guild is a convoluted one, full of conflict and uncertainty. Throughout that history, however, a single fact has remained ever true: The Guild is a mortal organization, established by, governed by and in the service of mortal interests. Certainly, the Dragon-Blooded are concerned with wealth and influence and make use of trade and commerce as means to those ends. And, indeed, the Guild has its share of Dragon-Blooded merchant princes, master artisans and investors, as well as spirits and Fair Folk in its ranks. But the vast majority of the Guild's membership, at every level, is mortal. Moreover, the people the Guild serves daily, in the shops and on the caravan routes, are the common folk, the mortals of the Threshold and beyond. The future of the Guild is inexorably tied to the mortal people of Creation, despite the return of the Anathema, the instability of a leaderless Realm and the marching of the Deathlords.

HISTORY

The Guild was born as the Realm of the Scarlet Empress rose from the ashes of the Contagion. The Dragon-Blooded officer who would become Empress took control of the Realm's First Age weaponry and threw back the forces of the Wyld and later used that same weaponry to establish supremacy over the surviving daimyos of the

Shogunate era. While this new Empress took control of the Blessed Isle and established the Realm of the Second Age, the people of the Threshold rebuilt life, craft and commerce. Where the legions marched, roads were cleared, built or simply beat into the earth. These would form the first great trade routes of the Second Age.

THE FOUNDER

Prior to the second invasion of the Scavenger Lands by Realm forces in RY 75, trade was controlled by no single power. Individual peddlers, wealthy merchant families and even imperial traders competed more or less equally for the small but growing markets of the Threshold. In the Lap, a confederation of merchant-philosophers called the Counters wrote extensively on the art and craft of trade. During the same period, the River League, a collection of Scavenger Land merchants bolstered by the region's continued success in resisting the Realm, developed a highly reliable caravan system to run between the cities of the River Province. Due to the continued hostilities between Realm and River Province forces, trade between the East and the South was slow and unreliable. Both sides sank many merchant trawlers, and it was common for the legions, including the Seventh at Lookshy, to commandeer caravans for supplies.

In RY 76, the Seventh Legion brought First Age weapons to bear against the invading imperial forces and



pushed them out of the Scavenger Lands. Almost overnight the River League began extending its reach beyond the Scavenger Lands, sending ambassadors north to Halta and south to the pastureland of the Southeast and the kingdoms of the South.

Among the many merchants to make their fortune in the decade of relative peace and prosperity that followed was Brem Marst. Marst was born to the wealthiest merchant family in Great Forks and raised as much on caravan routes as behind walls. Each year, Marst guided his caravan from Great Forks through the Varang City-States, then south and west along the coast to Yane, Chiaroscuro and Paragon, to stop finally in the Lap for a month of rest before he made the return journey. A shrewd negotiator, a charming guest and a humble host, Marst succeeded as a merchant to his own great fortune and to the fortune of his family.

The Realm invaded the Scavenger Lands a final time in RY 88. Marst was on holiday in the Lap when his sister's jade songbird (a communication artifact still common at the time) landed on his sill and sang the story of the war. Marst would not be able to return home for over a year. During that time, he began to visit the Counters. These merchant-philosophers welcomed him, interviewing him often about the mercantile systems of the River Province, and allowed him to wander freely about their cloister. The Counters wrote extensively on the subject of trade, from both a practical and a spiritual perspective, and Marst read every book he could find. By the time the jade songbird returned with news that the Empress' Guard had been destroyed on the fields of Melevhil, Brem was already forming the Guild — in mind, if not in reality.

THE EARLY GUILD

Marst returned home and immediately began to put to practical use the philosophical teachings of the Counters. Reconstruction after the Realm's final attempt at conquest spurred business, and Marst was able to test and refine the systems and processes still in use by the Guild today. The efficiency of Marst's system impressed the other members of the River League, and within 10 years, Marst had solidified the League into a single entity. The Guild was born in RY 99. While Marst is given personal credit for the creation of the Guild, the formation of the League of Many Rivers in RY 95 and the support of merchant houses from Sijan, Nexus and Chaya allowed Marst's experiment to take root.

The early Guild, while venturing as far afield as the Lap and Whitehall, was primarily a River Province institution for the next four decades. Marst remained First Director of the Guild during this time but established the process by which the Directorate of the Guild would be chosen and elevated the first Directorate himself. The Scarlet Empress attempted to convince Marst to ally with the Realm, through both bribes and threats, but the merchant knew that his Guild would be stronger without a permanent debt to the Realm. Instead, he quietly fun-

neled money to the coastal city-states that, in RY 104, broke away from the Realm and joined the League of Many Rivers. This act would establish the long-standing pattern of Realm-Guild political relations.

In RY 117, Marst treated with the enigmatic Council of Entities of Nexus and established that city as the permanent headquarters of the Guild. At the same time, he formalized the first Directorate, and though he remained the First Director, he relinquished his autocratic control over Guild policy. The move was surprising to many high-ranking Guildsmen, but Marst understood the importance of discourse — after all, he had only managed to create the Guild in the first place by accepting the ideas of the Counters.

For the next three decades, the Guild grew. Guild caravans cut inroads through the vast expanses between settled regions, discovering old kingdoms thought destroyed in the Contagion and new ones risen since. Local merchant families and leagues were subsumed into the Guild, and nations and city-states became dependent upon Guild delivered goods and news. In RY 146, Bagrash Köl used the Eye of Autochthon to forge his nation in the North. Its power rivaled that of the Realm, and the Guild quickly worked to establish ties with this new power. The years during which Köl ruled were profitable for the Guild, and Marst himself made a journey to visit Köl in RY 174. Still a shrewd diplomat despite his age, Brem saw the instability of the sorcerer king's rule, his realm and his mind. Marst withdrew Guild interests from Bagrash Köl's kingdom only two years before the Eye destroyed it all.

Concurrently, Guild interests were supporting the Nine Duchies Banner on the northwest edge of the Great Inland Sea. The Duchies were crushed, and the Empress herself heard of the Guild's support of the rebellion. Her eye was on the Guild then, and despite the occasional distraction of war and rebellion elsewhere, the Empress kept the Guild's doings near the top of her list of interests.

Brem Marst died of old age in RY 179. The system he put in place, including the Guild's internal structure and guidelines for future growth, provide the Directorate with a clear path to continued success for the Guild and themselves. Brem Marst was buried in his family tomb in Great Forks, and his extensive writings were sent to the Counter cloister in the Lap.

GROWTH

Throughout the next 300 years, the Guild grew in both size and influence. There were major setbacks, such as when the Delzahn horde conquered Chiaroscuro in RY 211 and when the River Province districts of Laris and Velen went to war in RY 265, nearly dragging the whole region into internal war, and when an imperial expedition, thought to be a test by the Empress to see if the recent internal strife had weakened the Province, was crushed in RY 301. The Guild turned these incidents into profitable

ventures, moving weapons, food, slaves and refugees between the various sides.

The constant battles impressed upon the Guild the need for military might of its own, and in response, the first affiliated mercenary companies were formed. Before this, the Guild purchased the services of mercenaries (as caravan guards for the most part) on an as-needed basis. After the war between Laris and Velen turned general, the Guild established functionally permanent contracts with large standing mercenary armies and became a military power in its own right.

During this period the Guild managed to establish a foothold on the Blessed Isle. The Empress allowed the presence of Guild merchants and craftsmen, though they were restricted in the areas in which they could work: The Guild was disallowed trade in jade, weapons and armor and rice, leaving the Empress in charge of the wealth, the defense and the feeding of the Realm. In other areas of trade, however, the Guild competed directly with imperial merchants. Competition extended into the Threshold as members of the nascent Great Houses sought the Empress' favor through trade and economic power.

THE ARCZECKH WAR


In RY 364, the Arczeckh horde invaded the River Province. Guild-sponsored mercenary forces, along with the Seventh Legion and the Hundred Kingdoms coalition, were instrumental in throwing back the barbarians. Because of this, the Guild formalized its relationship with permanent mercenary forces, and the League underwrote the Guild on much of the cost of such mercenary units; it was less expensive than having a large standing army, and the unit's underlying commercial premise made them more easily lent or rented to allies.

THE TRADE WAR

By RY 400, competition with the Realm became more akin to war. The Empress continued to push for more economic control over the Threshold and, by extension, the Guild. Conducting business on the Blessed Isle became more difficult as well, with members of the Great Houses including trade and craft in their incessant games of intrigue. Over the next decade and a half, the Empress used the Deliberative to restrict Guild activities both on the Blessed Isle and in the Realm's tributary states: Tariffs were increased, customs inspections were constant, and certain goods and services were chosen, seemingly at random, for restriction. It was clear that the Empress was testing the resolve of what she referred to as "the little league that had grown out of its hat." In RY 416, the "little league" responded by imposing a boycott on all trade with the Blessed Isle, a move that stunned even the Empress.

The Trade War lasted for two years. The majority of battles took place at sea and in the mouths of ports as Realm and Guild vessels fought over maritime trade.





Land battles were rare and involved Guild mercenaries accompanying caravans that Realm legions or tributary armies attempted to seize. Guild agents drummed up support and removed opposition in the Threshold states not yet committed to either side. In the end, the Trade War did more damage to those same Threshold states and Realm tributaries than it did to either the Realm or the Guild. Realizing this, and its implications for future trade, the Guild brokered peace with the Realm.

The Guild was ejected from all trade on the Blessed Isle, and high tariffs were placed on all trade between the Guild and the Realm or its vassal states. The Realm did not, however, attempt to disarm the Guild or exert control over the Guild's holdings anywhere but on the Isle. Victory belonged to the Realm, but it was, in reality, a small victory.

The Arzechki invasion and the Trade War inadvertently ensured the continued existence of the Guild and perhaps the River Province as a whole. During these conflicts, the Guild was instrumental in the formation of a great number of mercenary companies, many of which were first blooded fighting for the Guild.

This relationship between the Guild, the River Province and the mercenaries proved its worth in RY 547. The Fair Folk, with whom the Guild traded, attacked en masse, flowing out of the Eastern Wyld. A century of relative peace had allowed the Guild and the River Province to build up their strength, and with the help of many local gods and the First Age weaponry in the hands of the Seventh Legion, the Fair Folk were driven back. The Guild suffered politically following the invasion, however: Guild merchants continued to trade with individual Fair Folk for slaves and gossamer, despite the fact that many believed they had narrowly avoided another assault on Creation on par with the one that followed the Contagion. In response, the Guild Directorate put a two-year moratorium on trade with the fey. It was a token gesture and did little to reverse the opinion that Guild merchants lacked even the most basic morals, an opinion that persists among many inhabitants of the Threshold.

RECENT HISTORY

The Guild prospered during the centuries following the Trade War, despite the invasions. The punitive tariffs on Guild goods were lifted in RY 618, and trade with the Realm resumed. The various powers of the Threshold, Realm aligned or not, found alliance with the Guild necessary, and trade increased, distributing goods and ideas between places separated by vast stretches of time and distance. The Guild established hub cities throughout the Threshold, out from which the caravans made their runs.

Business continued as usual until RY 752. In that year, the city of Thorns and the Confederation of Rivers went to war, largely instigated by the Realm. The Guild countered Realm subterfuge with agents of its own and provided supplies and economic support to the Confederation. Then, in RY 763, the Scarlet Empress disappeared. While some cheered this event as divine providence, the wise among the

Guild shuddered. They knew their influence and prosperity was based largely upon stability. While there might be short-term profit in dozens of petty kings throwing off their shackles and arming hundreds of thousands of soldiers, in the long run, the disappearance of the Empress would weaken the Threshold and the Scavenger Lands. The fears of the Directorate were confirmed soon after, when the city of Thorns was crushed by the army of the Mask of Winters and all the surrounding lands passed into shadow.

More disconcerting news concerns the return of the Anathema. With the Empress went the Wyld Hunt, and the appearance of beings capable of leveling entire towns on their own or destroying entire cities in small groups is of great concern to the Guild. More and more of the Guild's resources must be directed toward defense, making it more difficult to expand and reducing profits. In the five years since the disappearance of the Empress, the Guild has been forced to balance profit with protection and to trade in favors as well as in silver, and it looks as if such will be the case for the foreseeable future.

THE GUILD TODAY

The modern Guild is at once an enterprise, an organization and an institution. As a business enterprise, the Guild is a collaborative effort between the most wealthy and influential merchants and artisans in Creation, dedicated to the increase of that wealth and influence. As a trade organization, it is the originator and overseer of the standards by which trade is able to occur: weights, measures, value, supply and demand. As a social institution, the Guild links distant lands, employs thousands and creates a sense of community in a world that is both vast and hostile. These roles and others place the Guild in a unique position in the world of *Exalted*, filling niches that the governments of the Threshold cannot or will not.

Despite its reputation as a massive bureaucracy along the lines of the Thousand Scales, the Guild is, in reality, an affiliation of powerful individuals who share like goals, with just enough structure to support it. Guild members are partners in a mercantile endeavor, each one making an investment of time, energy, skill and/or money and reaping rewards commensurate with that investment. This holds true for all Guild members, from the lowest levels to the highest.

ORGANIZATION

The Guild is structured like a pyramid. A broad base of craft and labor supports a pinnacle of wealth and power. At the top are the most affluent and influential of the factors, men and women whose investments drive all Guild shipping and caravans. Factors put their considerable resources behind major business operations and, as a result, reap the vast majority of the profits from such ventures. The money of the factors pays for the caravans, trading fleets, grand bazaars and urban mercantile districts, all of which are mechanisms through which profit is earned.

REALM YEAR	EVENT
69	Brem Marst is born in Great Forks.
88	While Marst is visiting the Lap, war erupts in the River Province as the Realm invades for a third and final time. Marst is unable to return home and spends his time with the Counters.
89	Marst returns to Great Forks with a new system by which to govern large scale trading operations, borrowed largely from the philosophical writings of the Counters.
95	The League of Many Rivers is founded, allowing for easier trade between the cities of the Scavenger Lands and beyond. Marst takes advantage of the event and expands his trading operations.
99	Marst gathers merchants from North, South and East and forms the Guild. Initially, the Guild operates out of Marst's family headquarters in Great Forks.
104	The coastal states of the River Province break with the Realm, thanks to the support of Marst and the Guild. This event marks the Guild's first foray into international politics.
117	The Guild allies with the Council of Entities of Nexus and moves its base of operations to that city. Marst codifies the system by which a Directorate will be named and establishes the first Directorate.
146	Bagrash K�l uses the Eye of Autochthon to forge a kingdom in the North. The Guild allies with this new kingdom.
174	The Nine Duchies, located on the northern coast of the Great Inland Sea, rebel against the Realm. Once again, the Guild supplies intelligence and supplies, as well as propaganda, to the rebels. The rebellion is crushed, however, and the Empress learns of the Guild's involvement and determines to watch the organization more closely. At the same time, an aged Marst visits K�l's kingdom and foresees its downfall. He quietly withdraws Guild personnel and interests.
176	The Eye of Autochthon destroys the kingdom of Bagrash K�l.
179	Marst dies at age 110. His legacy is a system for the Guild's continued existence without his guidance, and it is successful.
211	The Delzahn horde conquers Chiaroscuro, disrupting trade in the region and providing the Realm with a powerful ally.
265	War erupts between Laris and Velen in the River Province.
301	Testing the resolve of the River Province, the Empress sends an expedition into the Scavenger Lands. Local forces crush it.
335	The first Guild office on the Blessed Isle is established at the port of Chanos. There is tension between the Guild members and the Realm bureaucrats, but it does not disrupt business.
364	The Arczeckh horde invades the River Province. The Guild provides substantial military support to Lookshy and the Hundred Kingdoms, proving itself a powerful force even outside of trade.
371	Lord's Crossing becomes the Blessed Isle hub city.
393	The first of what would be a long string of Dynastic tariffs is applied to Guild caravans traveling the Blessed Isle: Newly made House Tepet places a tax on each wagon wheel entering or exiting its lands anywhere on the isle, even if actually used on working wagons.
416	Infuriated by constantly growing and changing tariffs, taxes and laws, the Guild pulls its interests out of the Blessed Isle and announces a boycott. This signals the beginning of the Trade War.
418	The Trade War ends with the Guild accepting punitive tariffs and taxes. A hub city or Guild office is never re-established on the Blessed Isle, and afterward, all trade between the Guild and the Realm occurs in Cherak.
547	The Guild proves itself again fighting when the Fair Folk invade. By this time, the Guild has extensive ties to spirits, outcaste Terrestrials and the Fair Folk themselves, allowing it to provide magical support to the battle, as well as mundane.
554	The Fair Folk are driven back, but many Guild members maintain trade relationships with individual Fair Folk. It is a scandal from which the Guild has not yet recovered.
752	The Guild uses its own agents to counter Realm agents instigating a war between Thorns and the Confederation of Rivers. Outclassed by Dragon-Blooded spies, Guild agents fail, and war breaks out. Thorns is defeated, however.
763	The Empress disappears. Guild spies in the Imperial Manse learn of the disappearance immediately, and the Guild works to counter the Realm's attempts to keep it a secret.
764	Thorns is lost to the forces of the Deathlord known as the Mask of Winters.
768	Present day.

THE DIRECTORATE

The factors sitting head and shoulder above all others are known as the Guild's Directorate. From the organization's headquarters in Nexus, the nine members of the Directorate oversee the systems and standard of trade throughout the Threshold. Each one is, in his or her own right, a person of vast wealth and influence. When taken as a whole, the Directorate is as powerful as any government, even that of the Realm. Far more than policymakers and administrators, each member of the Directorate engages in commerce the same as any other member of the Guild. Even the Directorate must pay its seasonal dues.

THE ADMINISTRATION

The Directorate is immediately supported by what is referred to as the administrative branch of the Guild. Not every member of the Guild is a craftsman or merchant. A great many are reeves, clerks, aides and chars. It is they who bear the unenviable task of balancing books, taking stock, filing papers, arranging meetings and performing all manner of mundane tasks that keep the Guild running smoothly.

Unlike factors, merchants and craftsmen, the Guild administrators are never likely to gain great wealth or prestige. However, a skilled and respected clerk will be well loved and taken care of by those who rely upon her abilities. Lesser members of this branch, ranging from messengers to scribes, may be rewarded meagerly, but those rewards are always as consistent and reliable as they themselves are. While the Guild as an organization does not own slaves, in cities where slavery is legal, many factors use their own slaves as administrative staff. Elsewhere, clerks and scribes are taken from the marginally educated middle class, if there is one, or apprenticed in a way similar to craftsmen.

THE MERCHANTS

The merchants branch of the Guild is the most visible one. Merchants sell wares in the streets and on the road. They drive pack yeddim through the forests of the East and drive dogsleds through the icy North. The title of merchant is worn by Guildsmen ranging from the barker at the lowliest apple stand in the bowels of Nexus to the most affluent merchant prince riding in her gilded Conestoga with a train of opium-laden slaves in tow. The merchants of the Guild make their living through the sale of goods or services. In many cases, the merchant is linked very closely with the source of the goods, such as when a silk trader buys the precious cloth in Paragon and sells it in Cherak. Other times, merchants are farther removed from their wares: Shopkeepers in cities and towns often purchase goods in bulk from various traveling merchants and resell them for an increased cost.

Becoming a merchant is fairly easy, in theory. One needs only the capital necessary to purchase goods to trade or to hire services and a place or system through which to sell them. Many merchants are born to their

work, inheriting their businesses from their parents who themselves are merchants and likely inherited the businesses. Other would-be merchants must borrow large sums of money, often from the factors, in order to establish themselves. In addition to the costs associated with running a business and repaying their loans, these merchants must pay the Guild, in the form of dues, for the right to trade in a given city or along a given route. Moreover, the merchants must abide by Guild standards, including pricing, when engaging in trade. So, while simple in theory, becoming a successful Guild merchant presents a great number of challenges.

Among the merchants branch, the most successful and most highly regarded Guildsmen are the merchant princes. Often, they are also the most decadent and most jaded. A merchant becomes a merchant prince through a combination of business savvy, blind luck and generous bribes. Merchant princes are considered the top of the merchant food chain and are the agents through which the factors operate away from their headquarters. Merchant princes command the caravans that carry Guild goods and services to the far corners of Creation. Factors rise from among the ranks of the merchant princes. Often, however, mercantile skill and financial success are not enough to elevate one to that status, and most merchant princes merely retire from life on the road. They set up shop in many of the innumerable cities and towns of the Threshold, becoming shopkeepers, moneylenders and consultants.

THE CRAFTSMEN

Usually considered the bottom branch of the Guild, the craftsmen are those who produce the goods that are sold by the merchants, counted by the administration and financed by the factors. While less glamorous than merchants, craftsmen are the Guild's foundation, and the copper pots and hemp rope they produce eventually filter up to the most powerful factors in the form of silver and jade. Master artisans, the highest rank among the craftsmen, set the standard for their craft, determining which journeymen can advance to the level of master and open their own workshops. The master artisans of each craft form lodges, groups designed to oversee and standardize the craft. Lodges are Guild-wide in theory (meaning that all master smiths in the Guild are theoretically members of the Lodge of Red Iron), but their true power lies on the local level. Wherever artisans gather in numbers, the most senior members of the lodge control much of the production and sales related to their craft in the area. Lodge leadership is influential, and master artisans are as likely to find seats on the Directorate as members of the merchant class, though often with less fanfare.

LABOR

The Guild, despite its intricate workings and massive scale, is not entirely self-reliant. Besides customers to

whom goods and services can be sold, the Guild needs a resource that is at once cheap and problematic: labor. The Guild does not have a branch that fills this void and, officially, does not employ laborers. Rather, the Guild has developed a system of temporary employment, whether for a day or for a year, for unskilled laborers such as teamsters, rowers, porters and sailors. Often, the call for laborers is answered by Guild affiliated agencies known as whip legions, which provide great numbers of workers for whatever projects the Guild undertakes.

Despite the name, not all whip legions are composed of slaves. Some hire cheap labor in depressed areas, while others use the unfortunate husks that had once been slaves of the Fair Folk. A rare few are aligned with or even operated by spirits of various sorts and use elementals and other lesser spirits to perform the necessary work. These god-laborers tend to be very expensive, however, and are only used where mortal laborers would be ineffectual or would not likely survive. Whip legions are not the sole source of Guild labor, and often, any number of bodies can be gathered in short order with the promise of a few silver coins. This is particularly true in the Threshold, where the Guild is an influential institution. Whip legion or not, these temporary laborers are not members of the Guild and, therefore, do not pay dues, nor do they enjoy protections. Working as temporary labor for the Guild does occasionally present an individual with contacts and experience that, when coupled with sufficient silver, might allow him to become a full member of the Guild, but this is by no means normal.

FACTORS

Factors are undoubtedly the lynchpin of the entire Guild structure. Former merchant princes who have elevated themselves to their positions through equal parts political and economic strength, the factors represent the penultimate goal of all Guild members. Factors, always exceptionally wealthy, are the investors of the Guild. It is their silver that buys yeddim and stocks iron, their silver that hires mercenaries and provides wagons and their silver that brings sorcerers and artifacts to bear in the defense of the caravans as they skirt the edge of the Wyld.

Becoming a factor is no easy feat. Most outsiders believe that all factors buy their positions. While this is technically true, the position of factor is not up for general auction. Factors come from the ranks of the merchant princes. Only by proving himself on the road by turning twigs into jade (as the saying goes) can a merchant prince prove himself canny enough to take on the position of factor. Factors are not individual investors, though each makes a hefty profit from the endeavors he backs. The factors invest in the name of the Guild as a whole, and a poor investment reflects poorly upon the Guild. Too many rich young fops believe themselves to possess great minds and end up watching their fortunes run down the gutters like so much piss and offal. The Guild is not interested in

such experiments: Business is hard enough as it is. Therefore, factors are elevated from those that not only have the silver to pay for the cart, but also the ability to drive it.

Factors have offices in hub cities, usually employing at least a dozen clerks, reeves and chars. The larger hub cities house a half dozen or more such offices, and each factor employs dozens of lesser Guildsmen. Factors, regardless of however many support staff they might have on hand, are extremely busy people: While one can have a trusted assistant tabulate expenditures and capital, meeting with clients, inspecting the wares and keeping the merchant princes under heel all require personal attention. Once a caravan has actually left the hub city, factors do tend to have more free time. As with most wealthy individuals who fancy themselves a sort of aristocracy, many factors engage in recreation that would make the most debased Realm noble blush.

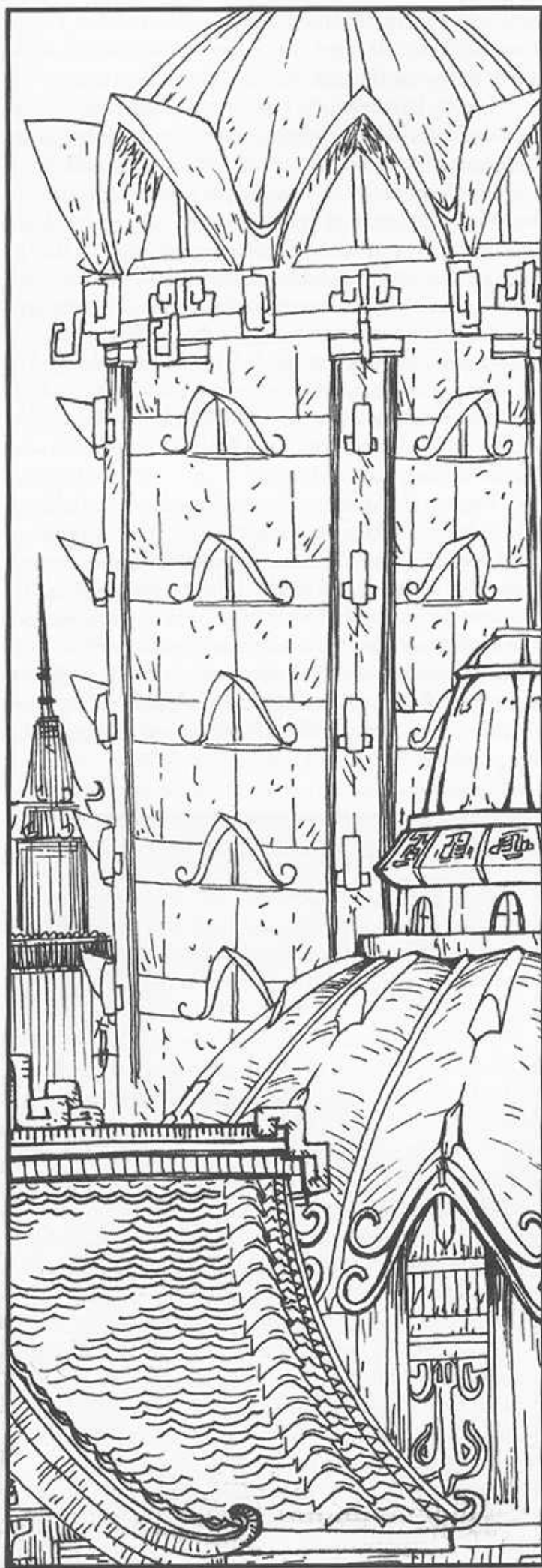
Factors also make up the seats on the Guild council of a hub city, making decisions that affect the business of the Guild as a whole in that city and the region it serves. This, of course, leads to the kind of politicking that includes bribes and favors. Factors hold the well being of the Guild and the trade in their region close to their hearts, however, and if a factor ends up on the unfortunate end of an accident due to such politicking, it is usually due to an overinflated sense of self worth putting his profits ahead of the Guild's.

BECOMING A FACTOR

A character who wishes to become a factor must meet a number of criteria. Most obviously, the character must be a successful merchant prince and must be mortal — the Guild respects the Exalted and gives them all deference, but it does not intend to be the agent of an Exalted agenda. In addition, the character must be both wealthy and powerful, at least within the Guild. This translates in game terms to a minimum of Resources ••••, a combination of Allies, Influence and Backing (Guild) amounting of 12 or more dots and no dots in Backing or other ongoing obligations to an outside power.

The actual process through which the character acquires support from other factors should be played out, but if circumstances prevent doing so, the following method is suggested; gaining the necessary support requires an extended Bureaucracy + Manipulation roll with a difficulty of 7, with each roll representing a month of bending ears and fattening purses. Regardless of the method by which the character gains acceptance, the cost to purchase the position is Resources •••••, and each month of lobbying costs about Resources •••••.





THE LEADERS OF THE GUILD

Headquartered in a 12-story edifice in the city of Nexus' eponymous district, the Guild Directorate is the most powerful collection of mortals in Creation. Nine individuals compose the Directorate, and all nine have methods and ideologies distinct to their particular goals. Taken separately, each member of the Directorate is a powerful ally or a dangerous enemy. Taken collectively, the Directorate has the political and economic influence to raise a slave to majesty or to reduce a prince to chains.

Times at which the Directorate acts with one voice are rare, however. The interests of the individual hierarchs intersect only where the Guild as an organization and trade as an institution are concerned, and even then, opinions will clash. Hierarchs cooperate when necessary to promote their own personal goals, feign friendship and take sides as needed and otherwise conduct business in the manner that led them to the seats of the Directorate in the first place.

No personage as powerful and complex as a member of the Directorate can be reduced to a single paragraph. The following capsule presentations of the Directorate are intended to provide the Storyteller with starting point. Storytellers are encouraged to make these characters what best serves the needs of the chronicle or create members out of whole cloth that serve the needs of the story.



HIERARCH ARYS SHEN

Hierarch Shen is a native of Nexus and considers himself the city's true master. Born an orphan and raised a thief, Shen came to power in the Guild by way of the black market. As a fence for the notorious Obsidian Monkey Band, he came into contact with a great number of master artisans, both as customers and as enemies, over the years. He grew rich and feared as a result of his deeds but discovered the Guild offered something his life of crime could not: legitimate influence. Through a chain of owed favors and bribes, Shen was allowed to legitimize his business as a Guild merchant. Within two decades, he was

the undisputed master of Nexus' "oddties" market: There was not an artifact or treasure Shen could not acquire or unload. Shen is growing old these days and spends less and less of his time in Nexus' seedy underbelly. He has a scoundrel's blood flowing through his veins, however, and the right score might pull him out of his "retirement."



HIERARCH HENDRIKA NIESINK

Hendrika Niesink came to prominence four decades ago as a slaver — she was called the Lady of Salt because none of the flesh she carried with her ever seemed to spoil on the trip — and unofficially presides over all of the Guild's slave trading. Her main interests are with House Cynis of the Realm. Any characters that deal with the slave trade or with House Cynis on a regular basis will eventually come to the attention of Hierarch Niesink. An experienced merchant and factor, Hierarch Niesink is not easily moved by tales of hardship on the road or other excuses and has a reputation for calling debts in on time, regardless of circumstances.



HIERARCH BLOSSOMS ON THE NIGHT BREEZE

While not the only spirit ever to sit on the Directorate, Blossoms on the Night Breeze is currently the lone

small god on the panel. A minor figure in the Court of Seasons, Blossoms on the Night Breeze materializes as an extremely attractive androgynous figure with the down-covered antlers of a young stag and a constant, pleasant-smelling breeze surrounding it. Blossoms on the Night Breeze is a consummate seller of seeds, breeding livestock and other spring-related commodities. The spirit's flowers have adorned the marriage halls of kings and emperors, and its brood mares have filled the Empress' own stables. Blossoms on the Night Breeze cares only for the continued coming of Spring, both literally and metaphorically, and it is rumored that the spirit sits on the Directorate only while awaiting a more prominent position in the Court of Seasons.



HIERARCH CHORMUND

This vast glutton is the self-proclaimed master of the Guild's sea trade. He is rarely found in Nexus, but most other members of the Directorate consider this a boon. When Chormund does deign to walk on the solid ground of the Guild headquarters, it is invariably more on the lower three levels than the top nine. Nonetheless, Chormund is immensely knowledgeable and deftly manages the vast network of Guild vessels and affiliated ships.





HIERARCH MAZIAR SABAR

The youngest member of the Directorate, Hierarch Maziar Sabar achieved a vast fortune before reaching his twentieth year. As a merchant prince in the South, Hierarch Sabar traded spices, perfumes, silks and gemstones so constantly and among so many customers that it was said that one might sell to him only to buy the goods back a week later at twice the price. Good natured, charming, handsome and polite, Hierarch Sabar is the most beloved member of the Directorate and often finds himself courted by powerful mortals and spirits alike. It has been rumored, in fact, that he was offered a marriage to an unExalted member of House Ragara, only to turn to offer down after finding the contract stipulated that he leave the Guild to advise that Great House on its trading operations. Hierarch Sabar is well known for his almost whimsical investments, choosing merchant princes to back seemingly at random, yet always coming away with a tidy profit.



HIERARCH ARTEMISIA SAPPHIRE

The most recent member admitted to the Directorate, Artemisia Sapphire is a factor who made her career in the exotic trade of glamour. Artemisia rarely deals with the Fair Folk directly (and, in fact, is rumored to despise the creatures) but has managed to buy, barter or steal some of the most magnificent pieces of glamour artifice known. Most of what she has purchased has been sold either back to the Fair Folk or to mortal and Dragon-Blooded collectors. Other pieces, some of which are rumored to be quite potent, she keeps for her own collection. Artemisia is still settling into her seat on the Directorate and has not yet proven what sort of force she will be for the Guild. Among the rumors surrounding her are that she is a tool for the Fair Folk to use the Guild to weaken the Threshold for attack. Others say she suffered some great loss at the hands of the Fair Folk and wishes to use the Guild to destroy them or drive them back beyond the edges of Creation. Neither rumor is likely to be the truth, but Artemisia is not interested in dispelling her aura of mystery.



HIERARCH GOL DURGO

Gol Durgo achieved his position on the Directorate through bribes. This in itself is not unusual, but it is generally common knowledge that Hierarch Durgo has purchased every position, every promotion, he has ever received. What is more is that, while Durgo is certainly successful, by the standards of the richest factors, he is not particularly wealthy. And while he is shrewd, he has never been accused of being overly so. Exactly how Durgo managed to buy his way all the way to the Directorate, or what ambitions led him there, are subject to much debate among both his underlings and his colleagues. What is known for certain is that Durgo accepts bribes as easily as he once paid them and is the one to go to for the Directorate's approval of activities otherwise frowned upon.



HIERARCH GAVIN BAST

The only Exalt on the Directorate, Gavin Bast is an Earth-aspected Dragon-Blooded from Lookshy. Like most of his brethren, Bast views the art of trade with suspicion and believes it should be left to the Guild, not the government of his land, to deal with. Hierarch Bast is an

unsurpassed weaponsmith, however, and believes craft to be the highest calling one may follow aside from that of a professional soldier. Indeed, Hierarch Bast served as a dragonlord in the Seventh Legion but left after 30 years to raise a family and to manage his forge. Over the next three decades, Bast expanded his workshop into a full-fledged foundry and attracted the attention of a number of Guild master artisans. It took a number of years and a great deal of convincing, but eventually, Gavin Bast found himself on the Directorate. He not only oversees much of the craft done by Guild artisans, but serves as a sort of de facto military advisor as well. It is rumored among many factors and master artisans that Bast is on the Directorate only to strengthen ties between the Guild and Lookshy.



HIERARCH DVORA ODOM

Dvora Odom is one of the rare master artisans that rose through the ranks having never stepped foot on a caravan route or opened a shop of her own. Hierarch Dvora is the head of all of the Guild's banking and money-lending operations. She began her career as a lowly clerk to the Directorate some 50 years ago. Every day since then has been, to her mind, a step toward her present position. She is a stern woman, with little patience for foolishness, who is utterly dedicated to her job of making certain the Guild's financial systems are the most efficient in all of Creation. She constantly monitors the goings on of the Realm and the jade standard, in an effort to better undermine it with the use of silver. Because of her previous position as a clerk of the Directorate, Dvora is not merely a member but an institution in her own right. Some of the older members of the Directorate cannot imagine the place without her, while to some of the young members, she represents a burden of the past.

GUILD LIFE

The Guild is a vast, cosmopolitan entity with branches in every corner of Creation. Its membership consists of

CHANGING THE DIRECTORATE

There are no Solar, Sidereal, Lunar or Abyssal Exalted on the Directorate as written: The Guild is, by and large, a mortal organization, with mortal aims and interests. However, individual Storytellers should feel free to make changes. If the Storyteller supposes that the Guild is really a tool that the Bronze faction uses to maintain order in Creation, then a number — or perhaps all — of the hierarchs should be Sidereal Exalted. On the other hand, if the Storyteller decides that the Guild is a weapon against the tyranny of the Dragon-Blooded, a Directorate composed of representatives from all types of Exalted, plus mortals and spirits, might be in order.

every nationality, creed and ethnicity of mortal, plus an uncommon number of Exalted, spirits and fae besides. This diversity, combined with the Guild's long history and its members' shared trade, has created within its membership a culture unique to the Guild.


JOINING THE GUILD

Guild membership is open to anyone whose trade or skills fits within any one of the Guild's branches. The Guild does not discriminate based upon gender, nationality or even species.

Anyone wishing to join the Guild must apply through one of the branches: the administration, the merchants or the craftsmen. In addition, the applicant must petition with the support of a sponsor: a Guild member in good standing who is also a member of the branch for which the applicant is applying. A sponsor may not have sponsored another applicant within the previous year and a day and must house the would-be Guildsman for the entire process of application and review. This is done to prove the trustworthiness of the applicant, at least in relation to his fellow Guildsmen.

The process usually takes a total of a month and consists of four steps. In the initial phase, the sponsor applies for, and a week later receives, an audience with the local hierarchy of his branch and requests membership for the applicant. After a week's deliberation, the branch leaders give the petitioner the right to apply for membership. During this phase, the applicant must prove his usefulness to the Guild by presenting evidence, often in the form of craft or letters of confirmation from important individuals whose opinions would have relevance. Applicants rarely see the branch leaders, relying on their sponsors to present the proof of skill instead. Following another week of deliberation, the applicant is moved onto the final phase. The branch leadership determines the applicant's branch and Guild rank, places the applicant in the local

Box 5.



Guild structure when appropriate (this occurs most commonly with the administration and craftsmen) and records all the necessary documentation regarding the sponsor and applicant. Once the “initial dues” are paid, the applicant is a full-fledged Guild member.

In many cases, the sponsor pays the applicant’s fees and any incidentals — including bribes — necessary to get the application approved. The new Guildsmen is then beholden to the sponsor until the debt is repaid. Money, loyalty and favors are all considered appropriate methods of repayment, repeatedly and in large quantities. The “year and a day” policy was put in place to curb the tendency of some Guild members to sponsor large numbers of applicants as a method of producing numerous indebted followers. Individuals who can pay their own fees are not free from debt, however: The sponsor can retract his petition for the applicant at any time, without cause or reason.

THE COST OF JOINING

Characters who wish to join the Guild must be able to pay the entry fees, or “initial dues.” In most circumstances, it is a Resources •• purchase. However, if bribes are necessary to move the character’s application along, it can become a Resources ••• or, in extreme cases, a Resources •••• purchase.

Bribes are necessary when the character is known and disliked by the local Guild leadership, when the character’s capabilities are questionable or when political maneuvering between the character’s sponsor and other Guild members of rank comes into play. The Storyteller should adjudicate the cost as it fits the needs of the story but should take care if it would require the character to become indebted to her sponsor: Players do not like to give up control over their characters.

RANK AND PROMOTION

Rank in the Guild is twofold: Every Guildsman has a branch rank and a Guild rank. Branch rank places the individual in the hierarchy of the administrative, merchant or craftsman branch, as appropriate. Branch rank determines to whom a Guildsmen is subordinate, how much influence he possesses among his peers and the sort of work the Guildsman engages in.

In the administrative branch, the lowest ranks are composed of the pages and messengers, new Guild members trusted with little more than the delivery of missives. Mid-ranking members of the branch are clerks and scribes, those that tabulate and record the infinite variety of data necessary for the Guild’s continued existence. The most powerful members of the administrative branch, titled administrators, are the ultimate jugglers of bureaucracy; they not only keep the records for the Guild, they also

create and enforce Guild policy in regards to daily operations and administrative issues. Promotion through the ranks in the administrative branch is most often based upon seniority. Unlike the other branches of the Guild, the administrative branch offers few opportunities for fame or riches, so diligence and competence are the benchmarks by which members are measured. Administrative duties are also relatively safe, however, enabling powerful administrators to stay in their positions for very long terms and inspiring the occasional act of assassination, of the literal or character variety, by ambitious clerks and scribes.

Branch rank among the merchants branch is less rigid in nature than that of the administrative branch. While ostensibly based also upon seniority, the fact is that more successful merchants, financially speaking, rank higher than less successful ones. Low-ranking merchants are shopkeepers and peddlers who trade in the most basic of goods and services among the most base of citizens of the Threshold. As the customer base and profit margin of a merchant increases, so does her rank in the branch. Mid-ranking merchants have wider ranging operations and trade either in large quantities of common goods or in more expensive or exotic goods and services. The merchant princes are the highest ranking members of the merchants branch, due almost exclusively to their financial success. However, the power of politics cannot be overstated, and many merchant princes, as powerful as they are among their peers, are beholden to the factors. Due to the method of advancement in the merchants branch, ambition and greed are often seen as synonymous. Rank privileges among the merchants center around continued financial success: the right to control prices, to monopoly rights in a given area or over a given trade and to first choice over markets, trade routes and subordinates. For low-ranking members, this means that higher-ranking merchants determine what they can sell, where they can sell it and for what price.

The craftsmen branch of the Guild employs a rigid structure of rank centered around the master-journeyman-apprentice relationship. The lowest ranking members of the craftsmen branch are the apprentices, who pay for, through money or labor, the right to learn a craft from a master artisan. Journeymen, who make up the middle ranks of the branch, are fully trained apprentices and have been released from their masters. However, journeymen do not have the right to open their own workshops or sell their own wares. Instead, journeymen must find employment with masters, doing much of the routine work until they can advance to the rank of master. Master artisans are the highest-ranking members of the branch. Each craft has its own collections of masters, called lodges, with some crafts creating more formal systems of governance than others. Masters determine the standards of their craft, as well as name new masters. Rising through the ranks of the craftsmen branch is equal parts skill, seniority and politics.

Apprentices are expected to serve for a minimum number of years (how many depending on the particular craft) and to produce an acceptable quality of work before being elevated to journeyman status by a master. Journeymen, likewise, work in their craft for years before they will even be considered for the rank of master. In addition, a journeyman must consistently produce work in his craft of sufficient quality. Such a judgment of quality is subjective, and journeymen are expected to pay for the support of a master. Even so, promotion to the rank of master can be difficult, as a single dissenting voice among the master artisans of the journeyman's craft can send the journeyman back to the workshop.

The craftsmen branch is a broad one, filled with apprentices, journeymen and masters of innumerable individual crafts. Rank in the branch crosses the lines between crafts, so all apprentices, all journeymen and all master artisans are equal in the eyes of the craftsmen branch. In reality, few masters of one craft consider the masters of another equals, unless the crafts are complimentary (such as wainwrights and lumber millers).

Guild rank is a reflection of branch rank, but one covering a broader collection of rights and responsibilities. While the branches are a convenient method by which to organize the Guild, the Directorate knows that the lines blur between branches. When a question or conflict arises between Guild members of different branches, Guild rank, while not likely to resolve the issue, puts the conflict in perspective. For the most part, craftsmen are considered to be of lower rank than merchants, with the administration subject only to the commands of the Directorate. This is not to say that a small-time peddler in Great Forks can order around a master blacksmith from Gethamane. Rather, when a merchant prince desires to flood the local market with raw timber, for example, the master millers and carpenters of the area must consent and find a way to manage.

GUILD LAW

Since its beginning, the Guild has held a policy of self-regulation and has managed to police its own membership with a great deal of success. As a transnational organization, the Guild cannot afford to conduct its internal business in accordance with local business custom and tradition in every one of Creation's hundreds of petty kingdoms. Instead, a concrete system of governance based upon both traditional Guild philosophy and precedence-setting decisions within the Guild has emerged, known collectively as Guild Law.

The justice system within the Guild is generally reactive, meaning that, in order for any investigation to begin or dispute to be resolved, the offended party must present a complaint. Guild Law is the purview of the administrative branch, and there are a number of offices within the branch that deal with particular types of complaints. The most

GUILD RANK AND BRANCH RANK

A character's Guild rank and branch rank are functions of the character's Backing Background.

BRANCH RANK

Backing	Craftsmen/Merchants/Administration
•	Apprentice/Peddler/Page
••	Journeyman/Merchant/Scribe
•••	Journeyman/Merchant/Clerk
••••	Master/Merchant Prince/Administrator's Assistant
•••••	Master Artisan/Factor/Administrator

It may be necessary to determine comparative ranking between two Guild members with Backing scores that are members of different branches. In such a case, consider craftsmen to have a Backing one lower than is actually the case, and consider merchants to have a Backing at one higher. Administrative branch characters' Backing remains unchanged. Members of the Directorate always have Backing •••••.


common types of complaints are allegations of unfair business practices (such as price fixing) between Guild members and accusations of fraud and shoddy work by customers. Once a complaint has been registered with the appropriate office, however, the process is nearly identical regardless of the nature of the grievance.

THE GUILD WARDEN

The Guild warden performs what may be the most important function in the Guild: The Guild warden enforces Guild rules, laws and standards on Guild members. The Guild warden is responsible for ensuring that all Guild craftsmen and merchants in a Guild-affiliated city follow Guild regulations and guidelines. Where the Guild investigator responds to complaints of abuse, fraud and other crimes, the Guild warden conducts a perpetual investigation aimed at uncovering the types of transgressions that are rarely reported. Those merchants and craftsmen who attempt to undercut their Guild competitors, produce inferior goods or manipulate their records in order to reduce their quarterly dues are all the targets of the Guild warden.

The resources and personnel at the warden's disposal are dependant upon the size of the city in which the warden operates and the diversity of the Guild businesses operated therein. Larger cities need more active wardens to ensure compliance; in the various hub cities, for example, the wardens have access to dozens of clerks and assistants, as well as the latitude to hire outside agents, just as investigators have. In addition, wardens make extensive use of snitches and spies, particularly among the lowest-ranking members of the Guild and those that cater to the vices of wealthy craftsmen and merchants.

Without the wardens, the greed and ambition of individual Guildsmen would have destroyed the organization



while it was still in its infancy. Traditionally, the Directorate has recognized this fact and has supported provisions maintaining the power of the wardens. The Guild councils that manage the affairs of each of the hub cities follow suit. Many individual factors, merchant princes and master artisans do not share the Directorate's enthusiasm for Guild wardens—or rather, they support the stabilizing power of the wardens so long as their own operations are not under investigation and their own employees are not spies. Bribing a Guild warden is dangerous business, however: Few Guild crimes will have a Guildsman's assets seized and his cheek branded faster than attempting to bribe a Guild warden who remains true to his post.

Guild wardens have a level of authority far surpassing what their Guild rank would suggest. Despite the fact that they are merely middle-ranking members of the administrative branch, they possess the right to conduct an investigation on any member of the Guild short of a hierarch and are even able to suspend the operations of the accused for up to 30 days. Wardens rarely abuse this power, as they fall under the direct control of the local Guild council and can be transferred, fired or even placed under arrest by another warden.

The Guild does not provide its members with the right to a speedy or open trial. Guild members may elect to petition for a public case, in which case, other Guild members may witness the proceedings and speak on behalf of the accused, but magistrates are under no requirement to fulfill the request. Open or not, Guild cases are recorded meticulously for the purpose of providing precedent. Magistrates and investigators often examine the records of previous cases, but other Guild members must gain special permission from the administration to access the records.

HUB CITIES

The Guild operates in nearly every city and sizeable town in the Threshold. Guild members own stores and workshops, run taverns and brothels. The caravan routes crisscrossing the Threshold are composed of many such towns and cities, brief stops where goods and news are delivered and more of the same are picked up. Though important to the Guild's regular system of business, these town and cities are merely spokes on the wheel of caravan trade.

Other cities are different. Called hub cities, these are the points out from which caravans embark and are the points at which goods and information converge. Hub cities are chosen not only because of their advantageous locales along existing trade routes or as a central point to a new route, but because the political and economic climate is right for the Guild. The Guild thrives on small governments that do not rely on commerce-stifling autocracies to maintain order. As a result, hub cities tend to be free cities, such as Nexus and Chiaroscuro, and cities that serve as the capitals of relatively liberal nations, such as

Gethamane. Even cities with close ties to the Realm can serve as hub cities; the position of Cherak on the northern coast makes it too advantageous to ignore. While the Guild is loath to do business under the jackbooted heel of the Realm, it is even more loath not to do business at all.

THE GUILD COUNCIL

In each hub city, the most powerful factors, keeps (see below) and master artisans form the Guild council. This body exists to provide oversight and direction for the Guild businesses that operates within and out from the hub city. In most cases, the Guild council is simply a round table of the richest factors in the city that meets once a month to discuss profit and politics. In other hub cities, the Guild council takes an active hand in the economic and political development of not just the Guild powers within the city, but the city itself.

As with the Directorate of the Guild, a Guild council consists of nine members. All members of the council are based out of the hub city, though they may have interests, homes and even offices in any number of other locations. Factors, the most influential members of the merchant class, fill the vast majority of council seats in any hub city, but occasionally, master artisans will manage seats, particularly in cities where the production of goods is as important as the constant flow of caravans.

It is the duty of the Guild council to maintain Guild Law in the hub cities. The Guild council is responsible for dealing with disputes, both internal and external, for organizing and paying the administration within the city, for managing affairs between the Guild and the local government and for ensuring the continued profitability of the hub city. Most importantly, the Guild council is responsible for collecting dues from all the Guildsmen in the city. Approximately half of the dues go toward paying the council, various taxes and tariffs and other members of the administration. The rest of the money belongs to the Directorate.

Despite the heavy responsibilities of council membership, there are perks as well. Members of the Guild council are always very wealthy and nearly always very powerful politically. Hub cities, as a rule, are places of profitable venture, and members of the council have first choice among the caravans coming and going. In addition, all merchants and artisans looking to open shops (see "Keeps," below) must gain the approval of the Guild council, which costs both silver and favors. Influence extends beyond the Guild itself, as local powers are usually quite married to the Guild: The tax and tariff revenues the caravans and other Guild ventures bring in are generally considerable portions of hub cities' coffers.

Becoming a council member is an exercise in political maneuvering. Like all promotion in the Guild, there is a monetary price for the position as well as a political one. Only the Guild Directorate can name members of a Guild council, so all council members are beholden to one or



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more members of the Directorate. Rivalries run deep, and neither favors nor slights are easily forgotten, ensuring that the life of a new council member will be complicated. Many Guildsmen thrive on such challenges, and these are the sort most likely to achieve seats on the Guild council.

The limited number of seats and the ambitions of lesser Guildsmen make the job of Guild councilman a dangerous one. While outright assassination is rare (and generally frowned upon by the Directorate), economic and character assassination are common. The many favors owed to and by council members become weapons in the war for power and influence, and markets are naturally in flux. And while all factors are interested in profits, the ability to see the long term makes one more than a mere merchant; suffering in the short term to cripple one's rivals is considered an almost noble form of attack. Given the indulgent natures of the rich and powerful, social manipulations are common tactics as well: Friends, loved ones, vices and character flaws all become playing pieces to rival Guildsmen.

KEEPS

The owners and operators of inns, shops, warehouses, taverns, auction houses and brothels, these men and women are the foundation of the Guild's daily trade. Lacking the resources, the desire or the opportunity to join the caravans on the road, keeps are content to make their fortunes with what the caravans bring into the hub cities. Keeps rise from both the merchant and craftsmen branches

of the Guild. The title denotes a class of sedentary business owner, licensed by the Guild council to provide goods or services in a hub city. Hub cities are bustling centers for trade and see many visitors. The keep system is there to ensure that those visitors have access to all that the Guild has to offer, at the price the Guild thinks should be paid.

The businesses operated by keeps fall into four broad categories. The divisions blur in places, not unlike the branches of the Guild itself, but they help the administration and the Guild council maintain a semblance of order when cataloging the Guild operations in a hub city.

WORKSHOPS

The Guild defines a workshop as any place of business whose primary purpose is the production of goods. A workshop is always managed and operated by a master artisan. Often, the master owns the workshop as well, though it is common for factors to purchase such shops and hire artisans to produce goods for them. Workshops produce the goods sold in outlets (see below), though most workshops maintain some form of direct sales. The production level varies between workshops and is dependant upon size and available base materials. Some workshops are little more than a family weaving baskets, while others are foundries deep in the bowels of the hub cities, pumping out black smoke and hundreds or thousands of finished goods per day.

While the Guild licenses workshops and Guild wardens are ever-present, true oversight of the artisans work

comes from the lodges. A workshop can only be expected to be as successful as it is loyal to a lodge and its policies.

OUTLETS

The selling of finished goods is conducted in outlets. The keeps who own outlets are members of the merchants branch, though, sometimes, they come from the craftsman branch and change allegiance when they rise: For example, if a master potter retires from the craft due to arthritis but establishes a shop to sell pots, he is now a keep in charge of an outlet and is, therefore, a member of the merchants branch. There are as many kinds of outlets as there are commodities and goods.

SERVICE HOUSES

Any business that provides nonmaterial benefits to its customers is considered a service house. Restaurants, brothels, bathhouses, inns and taverns are the most common kinds of service houses. Also included in this category are training facilities and schools, hospitals and sick houses and all manner of diviners, such as astrologists and palmists. There are a large number of service houses in any hub city, ranging widely in both size and expense (which are not necessarily linked). Interestingly, the Guild does not vend legal or lobbying services on a formal basis. This is because lawyers, advocates and other courtiers have very specialized occupations and are seen as having mixed loyalties between their professional oaths and their oaths to the Guild. Many individuals within the Guild are lawyers or courtiers or employ them on a full-time basis, but the Guild does not sell or resell their services.

While there is some blurring of the lines between the branches, services houses are generally considered in the craftsmen branch: Even if no physical property is produced, the skill required to create a successful service house usually requires long apprenticeship. Service houses must meet the standards imposed by the Guild as a whole and by the lodges devoted to them. The Guild wardens, in particular, heavily monitor brothels, as abuse, of both customers and employees, is common.

COUNTING HOUSES

The term "counting house" refers to any business in which capital, hard coins or jade script or interests in existing enterprises, is the stock in trade. Moneylenders, banks, insurance companies, investment firms and the Guild's minting operations are all considered counting houses. The office of a factor that engages in such activities is also considered a counting house and must be licensed by the Guild. Counting houses operate under the auspices of the administration.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

The ideal of the daily routine of conducting business in a hub city is both stable and predictable. While neither exciting nor glamorous, predictability means regular cus-

tomers, consistent profits and the ability to make informed decisions. Above all things, the keeps and the Guild council of a hub city seek to protect and extend that stability.

THE WORK DAY

The start and length of the workday depends on the nature of the business. Guild rules prohibit any counting house or outlet from opening before one hour after dawn. Workshops may begin production one hour before dawn, while service houses have no such requirements, as many remain open throughout the day and night. Businesses other than service houses may operate for no more than 12 hours continuously and for no more than 18 hours in a single day. Counting houses and outlets rarely stay open past dusk, while workshops regularly push the Guild imposed limit to its breaking point. Guild businesses remain open every day, except for workshops, which may not operate more than six days in a row without closing for a full day. Many keeps attempt to bypass, or simply ignore, these rules. While they are often caught by the Guild wardens, the fine is minimal and does little to dissuade the practice.

DISTRICTS, SOUKS AND BAZAARS

Each hub city is unique in its layout and divisions, since no hub city was built by the Guild. However, the Guild has a powerful influence on the development of a city after making the city a hub. Guild businesses tend to cluster together by type, on a large scale, and trade, on a smaller scale: For example, a whole street might be consumed by workshops, with the northern end filled with leatherworkers and shoe makers, while the southern end of the street is a collection of tailors and clothiers. The collection of certain types of businesses and trades creates districts within the hub cities. These districts, which usually consist of a few square blocks, are usually named for the sort of business commonly found in the area, such as the Tanners' District or the Moneychangers' District. Districts abut one another, and abutting districts are usually complimentary (the Tailors' District typically abuts the Textile District, for example). Districts often have official status in the eyes of city administrator and are, in all cases, well known. Locals can easily guide new arrivals to them.

In many cases, it is advantageous for certain businesses that are not related, but feed off the same customer base, usually serving houses and outlets, to collect in a small area. These areas of a hub city are referred to as souks. While more specialized items can be found in the districts, souks offer a smattering of everything the Guild has to offer in the hub city, all in one place. Storage space in the souks is understandably limited and highly valued. Factors will often buy up the available space in a market district and rent it out to keeps at high prices, forcing the keeps to maintain higher levels of profitability. The keeps pass the cost along to buyers as a surcharge for the convenience of all-in-one-place shopping.

Bazaars are similar to souks in many ways. The primary difference between the two is a matter of scale: A souk services a neighborhood or a district. A bazaar is huge and serves as the central market to a large city. Usually located within an open area of the city, a bazaar is semi-permanent. Most buildings are simple lean-tos or tents, crammed together in row upon row of goods of every kind. Keeps from other city districts will often set up temporary kiosks among the aisles in order to sell wares. Other vendors are traveling peddlers and craftsmen, some members of the Guild and others merely willing to pay the small fee required to open a table. Bazaars often attract other sorts of business. Entertainers such as jugglers and dancers, streetside vendors of food and drink and pickpockets and *confidence men* infest the bazaars like fleas. Although extremely chaotic to the uninitiated, bazaars do have system, and the experienced shopper can locate nearly anything she desires. Because of the vast amount of competition between vendors, prices in a bazaar are noticeably lower than in the market district.

DUES AND TAXES

Dues are paid to the Guild council five times a year, during the Resplendent month of each season. Dues represent, on average, 15 to 20 percent of a keep's gross income for the season. Late payment of dues is frowned upon and may prompt an investigation of the keep, but it is rare for a keep to be removed from the Guild or stripped of his license merely for failing to pay his dues on time.

Taxes vary from hub city to hub city. The Guild prefers to base its operations in cities with limited governmental involvement and relatively low taxes, so Guild members operating in or out of a hub city will usually pay 10 percent or so of their gross income in taxes. Many hub city governments reduce these taxes for special considerations on the part of the Guild or the Guild council. This is a perfectly acceptable practice from the perspective of the Guild, so long as those considerations allow the Guild to continue to conduct successful business operations. Examples of these "special considerations" include reduced prices for bulk goods, the use of Guild-hired mercenaries to police the city or the surrounding region and unrestricted access to Guild service houses, particularly those specializing in drugs and prostitution.

THE UNDERGUILDS

While the lodges are the official and authorized faces of the trades, there are also other subgroups within the Guild. These subgroups, known to outsiders as "underguilds" but called by their members "associations" or "brotherhoods" or "secret societies," engage in discourse, political maneuvering and market manipulation as is most beneficial to their particular trade and the leadership of the underguild. Lesser Guildsmen of the same trade are often cajoled or threatened into joining these groups, and while the breaking up of their

shops or frightening of their customers ceases, they find themselves paying dues to the underguild as they do to the Guild. More prominent and influential keeps are invited to join, enticed with promises of increased revenues and temporal power. When these tactics do not work, assassination and sabotage are the responses of choice.

The use of curses, hexes and other maledictions is particularly common among the underguilds. Mortal sorcery pales in comparison to the magical powers of the fae, the spirits and the Exalted, however, and leaders of the underguilds must pay high prices for true power when it is needed. Since many demons can be summoned by even mortal magic, given the right sacrifices, these are a favorite among the underguilds when more powerful forces are necessary to achieve a particularly difficult goal or to remove a particularly stubborn obstacle. Outcaste Dragon-Blooded are also common enforcers, and sometimes, Fair Folk are used as well.

The underguilds are considered dangerous by most members of the Guild, but in a hub city, any number of Guild councilmen are likely to be members of one or to have been raised to their positions by an underguild. The Guild Directorate, while concerned by the instability presented by such groups, does not act openly. In part, this is because the underguilds strengthen the Guild, and in part, it's because the vast size both of Creation and of the Guild make such subcultures impossible to prevent. It is much easier to just accept them and police them for abuse than to attempt the impossible task of eradicating them.

By and large, the problem of the underguilds rests with the Guild wardens. Already saddled with the burden of maintaining Guild Law among ethical Guildsmen, the wardens must also contend with and put a stop to the more destructive machinations of the underguilds. Underguild leaders see a bribed warden as a rich prize and an incorruptible one as a dangerous enemy. Guild wardens must muster

USING THE UNDERGUILDS

The underguilds present built-in adversaries for Exalted characters, Guild members or not. The underguilds can be of particular use if the Storyteller wants to avoid painting the entire Guild as an organization made up of corrupt, scheming villains, yet still wants to make use of the "evil business organization" archetype typical to adventure fiction.

Exactly how prevalent and dangerous the underguilds are is open to interpretation: A pocket of corruption in one hub city might be enough for one series, while another story might require a deep-seated conspiracy going all the way up to the Directorate. The Storyteller should give the underguild, and its agents, whatever resources are appropriate to challenge the characters and remain internally consistent.



all of their resources, including the use of spies and even assassins, to battle the underguilds. Many times, innocent Guildsmen are caught in the crossfire.

CARAVANS

The Guild is Threshold's heart, and the many long roads that link the cities are the veins carrying the region's life's blood: Guild caravans. Far more than mere trains of goods, Guild caravans bring people, news and culture from one isolated region to another, creating a cohesive whole out of the disparate pieces that make up the Threshold. Certainly, the factors and merchant princes that fund the caravans are interested in the profits they bring, but even the most jaded among them recognizes the importance of caravans to the Threshold. Common currency, common language, communication and trade: These are the keys to a successful mercantile society, and these are the benefits of the caravan trade.

The great expense of pushing wagons through the desolate regions of the Threshold is offset by the regular stops it makes. Shortly after the Contagion, what little trade and communication that occurred between Threshold states did so because of the presence of independent peddlers and small merchant houses. Rarely did either of these types of traders cross great distances, which limited economic development to pockets of moderately well-connected nations and city-states. It was not until the official formation of the Guild that merchants braved the vast wilds between these pockets and cleared the old roads of the First Age and built new ones. With each caravan, the Guild managed to delve into new markets, to absorb existing trading houses and mercantile societies and to establish its supremacy.

While many smaller merchant houses throughout the Threshold choose to remain independent from the Guild, none manage the breadth and scope of the Guild, and most fade into obscurity after a few short decades or remain powerful only in a limited geographic region. Currently, Guild caravans can be seen on Threshold roads daily. From the frozen reaches of the North to the bustling markets of Nexus and then down to the burning sands surrounding Gem, a constant stream of goods and information issues forth from the hub cities.

Most caravans run at regular intervals, along established routes and with specific goods. Since linear routes are less profitable, most caravan routes are loops that return back to the hub cities days, weeks or months after setting out. The long loop may be divided into smaller sections based on products, however. The Spring Drive from Cherak to Whitewall, for example, brings herds of sheep and wool products to the many small communities along the route and to the thawing city itself. Rather than turning around and returning to Cherak, however, the caravan buys up a great deal of finished craft goods, ranging

from copper pots to heavy tapestries, and turns eastward to the next leg of its journey.

CARAVAN PREPARATION

Well before the first wagons set out on the road, the planning and preparation for the caravan begins. Any caravan, whether an established run that merchants have made for hundreds of years or a new caravan meant to carve a new road through the wilderness, must be backed. A caravan is backed either by one or more factors or by a merchant prince intent upon making the trip himself.

FACTOR-ESTABLISHED CARAVANS

When a factor sets to preparing a caravan, the first step is to find the merchant princes who will make up the leadership of the caravan. Often, this is a reward for loyal service and proven profitability. There is a fair amount of politics involved in the decision-making process as well, as merchant princes will be beholden to the factor for the opportunities presented by the caravan. Most caravans backed by factors have long-established, proven routes. Usually, the same factors will control the investment in a caravan for years, even decades, and are only replaced when they die or can otherwise no longer invest in the caravan.

It is common, particularly with large caravans, for more than one factor to be involved in the backing of a caravan. Factors invest interests in the caravan with the intent of seeing profit. Most often, one factor, called the primary, will invest the majority of the capital necessary to establish the caravan, and other factors, called associates, will invest what they can toward the remaining cost. There may be as many 10 or as few as one associates backing a caravan. It is not unusual for other Guild members, such as master artisans and keeps, and even non-Guildsmen, such as local nobility and other wealthy individuals, to make small investments in the caravan. Guild rules limit the investment of all non-Guild individuals to 10 percent of the caravan's total value.

Factors will commonly "trade" merchant princes with one another, treating them as pawns in their constant games of profits and politics. Merchant princes with proven capabilities can be borrowed or even sold, while those with well-known inadequacies may be inflicted upon rival factors.

MERCHANT PRINCE-ESTABLISHED CARAVANS

When one or more merchant princes choose to instigate a caravan, which is less common than merely heading those established by factors but in no way unusual, the merchant princes involved must find the necessary backing, which means going to the factors. The factors who will back the caravan must be courted, seduced with promises of profits as well as other favors that may, in the end, cost a merchant prince far more

than a simple percentage. Merchant princes are likely to attempt to establish new caravan routes or to bring new commodities along existing routes. The successful discovery of a new market can make a merchant prince's career: The risk-taking but prudent and profitable merchant prince is the ideal, and one who can achieve that ideal will be treated to choice positions and offered profitable contracts. Despite the success that can come from such risky ventures, in the end, the merchant prince still owes that success to the factors that backed the caravan in the first place and is not allowed to forget it.

THE CARAVAN MASTER

Regardless of whether the caravan is factor or merchant prince established, the foremost decision to be made is the choice of the caravan's master. The title caravan master is an influential one, and the one who bears it is responsible for the success of the caravan, even more so than the factors and merchant princes. The master will do most of the hiring for the caravan, as well as run the day-to-day operations of the caravan in the field. As such, the choice of caravan master is an immensely important one, and politics must often be put aside in favor of competence. The necessary intellectual, organizational and leadership skills that make a good caravan master are rare enough on their own, but they must be found in one person to make a truly great caravan master. Experienced and skilled caravan masters carry great renown within the Guild. While they lack the wealth and influence of the merchant princes, the masters' names still carry weight. In many cases, it is the merchant prince who has managed to secure the involvement of a well-respected caravan master who will win the backing of a factor.

Once selected, the caravan master becomes responsible for the details of the caravan's preparation. Armed with the knowledge of the merchant princes involved, what and how much they are carrying and where the route will take them, the caravan master can hire hands, purchase yeddim and wagons and contract mercenaries. This process begins at least a month before the caravan is scheduled to set out, and larger caravans require longer preparation times.

Caravan masters are also ultimately responsible for the caravan's spiritual matters. The master makes all the necessary supplications, benedictions and sacrifices to the great deal of spirits the caravan will encounter on the road. Far from being priests or sorcerers, caravan masters are nevertheless well acquainted with the small gods likely to be encountered during their caravans' travels and make preparations for such encounters.

JOINING A CARAVAN

It is often said that there are no orphans in the Threshold, only caravaneers. Guild caravans are well known as havens for outcasts, rebels, scoundrels and vagabonds. While

CARAVANS AND CALIBRATION

Caravans do not travel during Calibration: To do so is to invite disaster. Established caravan routes consider Calibration in scheduling and stops, but even so, a caravan is occasionally caught out during the five days between the years. If this is the case, the caravan will bring all of its defenses to bear, mundane and magical, and attempt to hold out until Calibration is over.

the pay is hardly outstanding and the work is often difficult, no other employer outside of Nexus so readily ignores criminal brands, slave tattoos and even more unusual marks and traits. For the most part, anyone with a strong back or a salable trade is welcome on a caravan.

Joining a caravan is a simple matter in the hub cities. For weeks before the caravan sets out, word spreads regarding the number and nature of hands needed for the trek. Shortly before the caravan actually begins its journey, the caravan master, under the employ of the factors backing the caravan and merchant princes leading it, interviews people willing to push yeddim, pull carts and shoulder goods. The number of slots on a caravan is limited, and those slots are coveted; hiring is usually done on a first come-first serve basis. For all but the most dangerous, longest runs through the far edges of Creation, all the necessary hands are hired within a single day.

To fill more specialized roles, the caravan master, the merchant princes and perhaps even the factors themselves seek out those with the necessary skills. Usually, such hiring is done merely on the basis of reputation. However, there are some individuals and agencies, unaffiliated with the Guild, that act as brokers for such talented individuals, linking clients in search of work with caravans in need of their skills. These agencies usually require a modest fee and/or a marginal percentage of their clients' pay from the Guild.

Guild-affiliated merchants may buy a place on the caravan as well. They are not considered investors in the caravan and profit only from their personal sales. They must provide all of their own hands and guards, though the mercenaries hired to protect the caravan in the event of attack are not likely to make distinctions. These merchants usually only stay with the caravan for a short time, joining in one city or town and leaving in the next. They are the up and coming, the merchants with the ambition to become merchant princes but not the backing. This can be a hard row to hoe, as merchant princes will undermine successful lesser merchants should they consider the lesser traders future threats.

THE RITUAL OF EXODUS

The departure of a caravan from a hub city is no small matter. Families of the caravaneers will not see their loved



THE COST OF A CARAVAN

Caravans range widely in size and scope — and, therefore, in cost. In game terms, the cost — and profit potential — of a caravan is determined by the dots of Resources and/or Backing dedicated to the caravan.

Resource Dots	Description
•	These are the smallest “caravans” and, in actuality, usually consist of a peddler with a laden pack animal or one or two wagons owned by a single merchant. These make short journeys and carry only the simplest of goods. They tend to follow the major caravan routes but travel on the “off season.” The Guild does not bother engaging in this sort of small-time operation, but it also tends to overlook the unaffiliated merchant who does — there is little threat to the power and influence of the Guild by a neophyte peddling copper pots.
••	The smallest caravans that the Guild will send out, these usually consist of either a small group of Guild-affiliated merchants or a single fledgling merchant prince and his retinue. The routes followed by these small caravans are short and are mostly found in rural stretches of inhabited lands where larger caravans would not likely offset their costs. Many factors back caravans of this sort as trials for young or inexperienced merchants who show promise or for the occasional merchant prince who has fallen on hard times.
•••	The beginnings of the true caravan are seen at this level. Consisting of a dozen wagons and usually under the control of a merchant prince of some note, these caravans tend to move staple goods that bring consistent, if not extraordinary, profits. Merchants looking to make names for themselves may petition the Guild to prepare and run caravans of this sort out of their own pockets, without the oversight of a factor. Such requests usually require a substantial fee.
••••	Caravans of this sort are what are commonly seen throughout the Threshold: two dozen heavily laden wagons, one or two merchant princes in their lumbering Conestogas, nearly 100 laborers and teamsters in tow and half as many armed guards and a string of hangers-on, whores and entertainers. The routes these caravans travel take them hundreds of miles over the length of a season, through medium-sized cities and tiny hamlets alike. These are the smallest sort of caravans likely to be seen in the extreme edges of the Threshold, as caravans with less protection are easy prey in those wild regions. Caravans in the Realm are almost always of this size: Smaller caravans are simply unprofitable, and due to the relative safety of the Realm’s road network, larger ones are unnecessary.
•••••	The Guild is renowned for its massive, ambulatory spectacles such as these caravans. Essentially traveling cities, these caravans range from 50 wagons to well over 200. Almost all such caravans leave from Nexus, and their routes take them many hundreds of miles. Such a caravan leaves during Descending Water or Ascending Earth and returns to its hub city by Resplendent Air. Some of the larger routes, particularly those traveling the North, make a half-trip per year, wintering behind the walls of friendly cities. Only the most powerful factors and the Guild hierarchs themselves can back such caravans. Up to a dozen merchant princes compete for assignment to such caravans, as the profits are proportional to the cost. The armies of mercenaries, legions of laborers and plague of stragglers and parasites that are an inevitable part of such caravans can swell the ranks to well over 1,000.

Determining the profits incurred from running or backing a caravan is dependant upon its value, as well as any special circumstances. In most cases, a character’s Resources can increase by • for rank 1 through 3 caravans and by •• for rank 4 and higher caravans. However, especially successful caravans can increase this by an additional dot, while those facing unexpected costs and hardships can reduce the profit by • or more — even to the point of reducing the character’s overall Resources Background.

All investors must wait until a caravan has finished its circuit before they receive any benefits or suffer any losses. Each factor and associate profits in proportion to her investment. Rank is important only when considering that more powerful factors are provided the right of establishing caravans and/or being primary among a caravan’s investors.

ones again for many months. Factors have entrusted great sums of money, in the form of wagonloads of goods or trains of slaves, to the merchant princes who, in turn, are gambling their lives and livelihoods on luck and faith. It falls to the caravan master to ensure the caravan good luck on the road through the Ritual of Exodus.

The Ritual of Exodus is a ceremony dedicated jointly to the gods of the hub city and the gods of the roads on which the caravan will travel. The caravan master serves as high priest for the ceremony, asking for good luck and protection as the train of wagons, animals and people pass out of the city gates. The caravan master will often make sacrifices to the small gods during the ceremony, slaughtering a prize beast of burden or tithing a portion of the caravan's worth to the poor of the city, depending on the desires of the local gods.

In many instances, the road and city gods will openly attend the Ritual of Exodus, and their pleasure or lack of it with the caravan master's ceremony will be obvious. Insulting such powerful spirits can doom a caravan to failure, so the Guild, despite its generally pro-mortal stance, takes great pains to supplicate the gods of the hub cities. City gods are aware of the positive influence a strong Guild presence can have on the economy and population of their cities, and most require only token sacrifices during the Ritual of Exodus.

DAILY LIFE ON THE CARAVAN

Though they may travel through areas ranging from the searing deserts of the South to the frozen tundra of the Far North, certain aspects of caravan existence are universal. The material that follows details what life is like in one of the Guild's caravans. Keep in mind that every caravan is unique, depending on its size, its administration and the different individuals who make it up. Discipline may be slack or taut, food and working conditions may be superb or terrible, and the competence and attitude of the individuals running the operation can vary wildly. The latter is especially true in the case of smaller caravans. Larger caravans tend to have uniformly competent administration, as only competent individuals are entrusted with that much wealth by the Guild.

WORK

For most members of a caravan, each day begins well before the sun rises. Preparations must be made for the day's travel, from hitching the beasts to their burdens to feeding the masses of laborers and guards to oiling and cleaning weapons and armor.

A caravan member is defined by the work she does, whether she is a merchant prince or a yeddim groom. While some of the caravan fleas (as entertainers, whores and peddlers are often called) spend most of their days walking or riding, true caravaneers are afforded little rest during the day. Teamsters must constantly attend to the wagons and carts that break down along the worn roads of the Threshold. Yeddim and other beasts of burden need nearly as much

CARAVAN SPIRITS

The Ritual of Exodus, in addition to appeasing the city and road gods close to the caravan, has another purpose: it is intended to summon a caravan spirit. As with all things, a caravan has a spirit associated with it. Unlike the land, a philosophy or a physical item such as a sword or pot, a caravan is neither immaterial nor physical, neither permanent nor temporary. As such, the caravan needs a spirit unlike any other.

Caravan spirits are not created out of whole cloth by the Ritual of Exodus. Instead, a successful Exodus ritual summons a spirit, often a servant of the road or city gods for which the ritual was performed, that is bound to the caravan for as long as it travels. The power of the spirit is relative to the power of the god that it serves and the size of the caravan.

The involvement of the spirit depends on the relationship between the caravan spirit, its master god and the Guild members in charge of the caravan. Merchant princes and caravan masters that are respectful of the spirits and act in a way that pleases the spirit's master find their caravan god to be strong and dedicated to the safe and speedy travel of the caravan. Those that give no more than lip service to the little gods find their caravan spirit to be slow to act and possibly even mischievously inclined toward the caravan.

The primary purpose of a caravan spirit is to protect the caravan against supernatural forces: Fair Folk, other spirits and Exalted. Because most caravan spirits are the servants of city and road gods, and occasionally gods of commerce or wealth, they usually lack powerful combat abilities. Caravan gods are well equipped to detect supernatural beings that might be hiding among the caravaneers and are more likely to negotiate with other supernatural forces than to fight them.

attendance by grooms, handlers and the like. Many caravans bring small herds of cattle and other livestock in order to feed the caravan, and the drovers must keep these beasts in line as well. Even the whores and mountebanks typically find themselves some sort of duty. Typically, it is the merchant princes who lounge in their Conestogas sipping honey and poppy. This is, of course, relative to the wealth and power of the merchant prince. Some are as likely to spend their days managing the goods and people under their charge as they are to while away the hours with intoxicants and courtesans. Usually, it is the young and inexperienced merchant prince who works hard along the way: She has not yet learned that the real work comes upon arrival at her destination, not on the road there.



Among the mercenaries and other caravan guards, most days are uneventful. While the low ranking among them must run messages — often of little importance and merely for the amusement of bored officers — and care for equipment and horses, most guards merely move along with the caravan. Some wait eagerly for any sign of trouble, sending arrows fly at the rushing of the wind or the flapping of doves' wings. Most, however, prefer to earn their pay with no threat to their skins. Whether or not the road is bloody, they say, the silver spends the same at the end.

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF YEDDIM, HORSES AND CAMELS

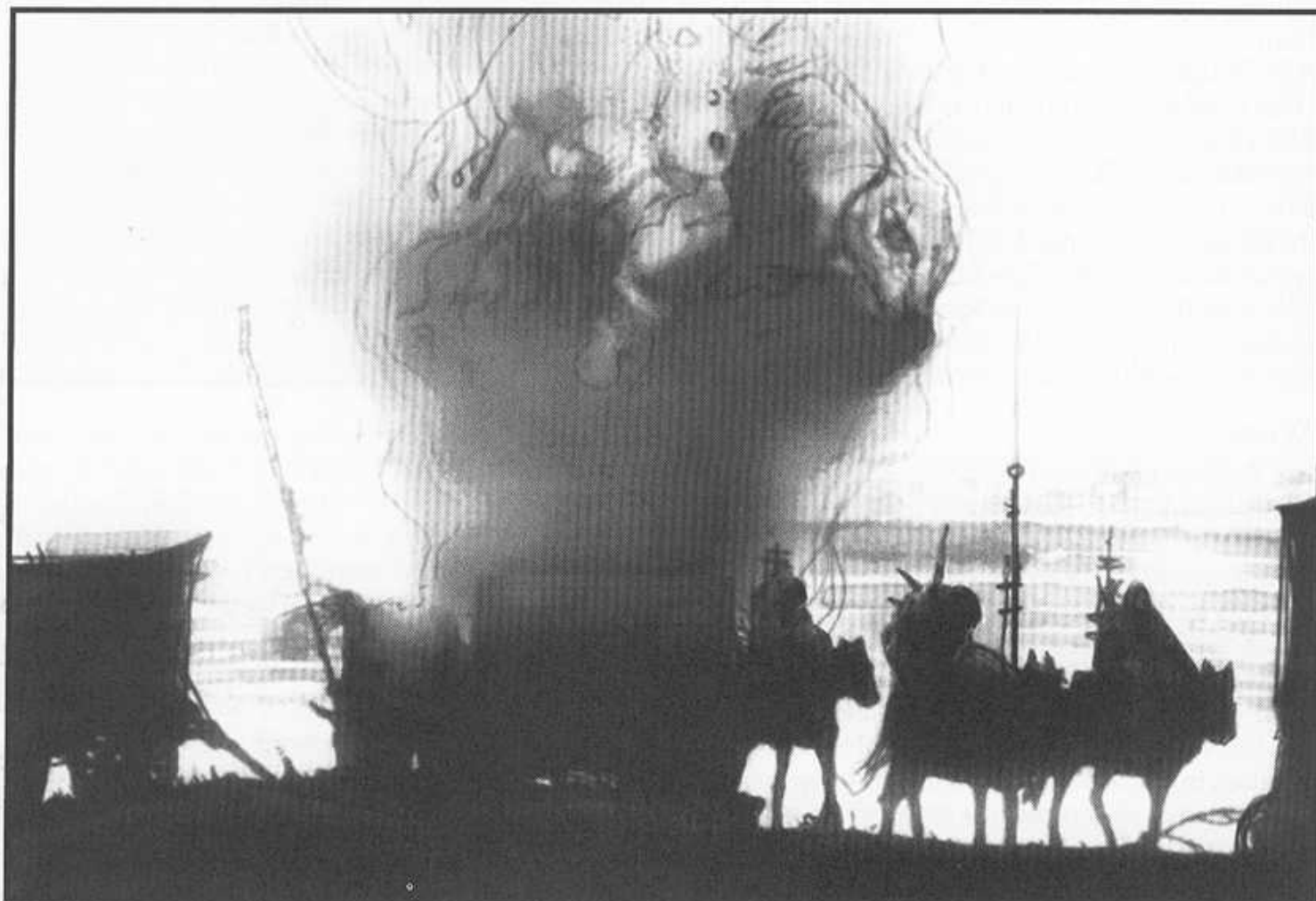
Animal husbandry is a profession akin to alchemy on the road: To the uninitiated, it seems more like magic than simple art. Husbands manage to keep animals fit and working, despite the fatigue of travel, rocks in hooves, biting flies carrying all manner of sickness and having far less fodder than any good diet calls for. Officially, husbands are craftsmen, thereby ranking lower in the Guild than the merchants they keep in business — or at least moving toward business.

Used nearly everywhere in the Threshold and the Realm, the yeddim has a number of traits that make it a preferable choice over the horse or camel as a draft animal. Foremost, yeddim are powerful: After mammoths, they are the strongest beasts of burden and are, in fact, far harder animals than mammoths. Two can haul what it takes a half dozen horses to pull. Their size allows the yeddim to carry

the contents of an entire wagon strapped to their backs, making movement through areas with rough or non-existent roads easier. This size, of course, requires that they eat more. Fortunately, the yeddim shares a trait with the camel: It can store water and food in its body, allowing it to go for long periods with neither. When corralled, yeddim are fed vast amount of food. On the road, yeddim are fed every day if it can be managed but are capable of going for up to four weeks without fodder and five days without water. Such extreme treatment will cause irreparable harm to the animal, however, and is avoided if at all possible: Even bad fodder is better than none at all.

Yeddim provide another useful service to the caravan: yeddim dung. Referred to as yeddim bolts because it resembles a bolt of cloth in size and shape, yeddim waste is extremely dense and made of up plant matter stripped of its nutrients. If left to dry, a bolt makes a tinder log that can provide a fire for a whole night. Dry bolts are nearly scentless, and the smell of burning bolts, much like the odor of burning grass, is characteristic of any caravan that makes use of yeddim. The scent permeates everything and makes carvaneers easily identifiable from the rest of the rabble when they come together in a town or city for the evening.

Horses, while lacking the power of the yeddim and the endurance of the camel, are very common as both mounts and draft animals. Draft horses pull wagons and carts where it is inconvenient or impossible for yeddim to do so, such as where the only paths are narrow. In addition, riding horses serve the



various scouts, messengers and guards of a caravan. Horses require a good deal of care, but that care is not particularly specialized, and the individual using the animal can often take care of it, barring serious injury or sickness. Horses need to eat and drink more often than either yeddim or camels, so their use becomes more and more restricted as caravans move farther toward the Elemental Poles of Air and Fire.

In hardiness and function, camels stand somewhere between yeddim and horses. They can bear moderate burdens similar to what a horse can carry but are not as useful for pulling. A camel is neither as comfortable nor as agile a mount as a horse, but camels are nevertheless used for riding. Many desert tribes and mercenaries from the South use camels in battle, but horses are far superior fighting mounts. Their high endurance and need for little food and water, however, make camels a staple of caravan travel.

VICTUALS

Food on the road varies with the region, the season and the tastes of the individuals. However, some generalizations can be made.

Laborers and other small-timers tend to eat simple foods. Because of the traveling nature of the caravan, foods that take long hours to cook, such as stews, are rarely present. Instead, most people eat food that is as hardy as they are, which usually amounts to dried meats, hard breads and aged cheeses. Mercenaries, craftsmen and others of middling rank do not eat better food than their lessers, but do tend to get more of it. Because they often have others to bear their burdens, they can afford to carry enough so that they might eat well, at least occasionally. Also, with somewhat more robust resources than those below them, some craftsmen indulge in more expensive foods, such as fresh meat and fruit.

For either group, perishable foods are provided at the evening markets, the nightly stops where local people trade with the caravan on a small scale. Fresh eggs, fruits and vegetables are common additions to the caravaner's diet thanks to the evening market.

Merchant princes and others of wealth and stature enjoy, as in all things, the best that the circumstances of the caravan allow. Many merchant princes bring small herds of cattle or sheep along with them, tended by the caravan hands, to provide fresh meat and dairy products during the journey. Aside from this, the staple diet of a merchant prince is not particularly different from that of the other members of the caravan. Merchant princes can afford to buy spices as well as to employ or own accomplished chefs and campfire cooks, however, making those same staple foods much more palatable to their more discerning palettes.

In addition, wealthier merchant princes often have a large supply of fruits and meats, which are kept fresh in enchanted urns called winterbreath jars. The urns are imbued with the power of elemental air, keeping their contents as cold as snow or packed with snow or ice from the farthest North. Winterbreath jars are rarely very large,

so they tend to be used to store the delicacies that make caravan food bearable, such as grapes and shellfish.

All classes of Guildsmen drink wine. Station merely determines the quality and quantity, usually in direct proportion. Barley beer, rice wine and palm wine are common as well, ranging widely in quality and origin. Caravaneers are well known for their thirst, and they are infamous for the presence of hard spirits among them. Drunkenness leads quickly to accidents on the road, however, and those who indulge overmuch are left to rot on the side of the road for the betterment of the whole caravan.

WINTERBREATH JAR (ARTIFACT •)


A winterbreath jar is an urn or carafe enchanted with the power of elemental air to keep its contents cold or possessed of a sealed area inside that's filled with unmelting snow or ice from the Far North. All winterbreath jars are typically crafted of blue jade and are of excellent craftsmanship. Common themes of one's construction include handles shaped like air dragons and clouds or glaciers engraved into the body of the jar. A winterbreath jar will keep its contents at a constant temperature of about 45 degrees, cold enough to keep perishables fresh or wine chilled. Winterbreath jars vary in size but rarely hold more than a gallon of liquid or a small watermelon. Winterbreath jars need not be attuned to their users.

REST

When the caravan stops for the night, usually late in the afternoon when there are a few hours left before dusk, the first priority is care of the animals. Horses, yeddim and camels must be secured, lest they wander off, and protected, lest beasts or raiders come for them. Next comes the securing of whatever goods are being moved, without which the beasts of burden are little more than an expensive nuisance. Guard shifts usually watch both the animals and the goods. It is common for competing merchant princes in the same caravan to sign their own mercenaries on as guards; the ethics of business often become blurred in the middle of a long trip. For the most part, guard shifts are divided among the rest of the caravaners, with the longest watches going to the lowest ranking laborers. Every member of the caravan understands the potential for disaster and while not as well trained as the professional guardsmen, even the lowest hands know how to spot trouble. Petty theft is a rare occurrence in the caravan, as it is a close-knit group and as a thief is never tolerated, or hidden, for long.

Caravans make their evening stops in caravansaries, in towns or, more rarely, on the road between the two. The caravan master takes great pains to navigate the roads on schedule, landing the caravan each night behind stockades and under the protection of Guild forces or local militias.





In addition to safety, caravansaries and towns provide the merchant princes, caravan master, mercenary captains and other important members of the caravan with soft beds and dry roofs in an inn. For those among the lesser caravaneers who can afford it, such as journeymen and many well-paid specialists, flop houses and common halls are available. The remaining caravaneers form an encampment around the wagons and animals, taking their rest where they can.

A caravan that has been forced to stop on the road for the night must take greater pains to ensure the safety of its goods and members. Wagons and carts are formed into a circle, and important individuals and materials are kept within, including valuable animals and slaves. Before fires are started or any rest is taken, the caravan master and his assistants take pains to placate the local spirits, road gods and other powers in the area. The favor of the small gods goes a long way toward ensuring the safety of the caravan.

Soldiers, both Guild mercenaries and privately hired guards keep the watches and, especially when the caravan has stopped on the road, are not expected to sleep much. Most mercenary companies consider themselves on duty whenever the caravan is outside of protective walls. When the caravan has reached one of its scheduled destinations, however, its guards scatter in search of whatever rest and recreation their wages can afford them.

Most merchant princes make it a point to be comfortable regardless of whether they are deep in the wilderness or in Nexus itself; location merely determines the degree of their comfort. The grand Contestogas of the wealthiest, or most indulgent, merchant princes rival the finer inns of the Realm for comfort and commodity. While usually only a single room, they are likely to contain a soft couch and a large bed, as well as a bar and, if the merchant prince so desires, a game table. Young men and women who serve as both chambermaids and bed partners are common, as are bodyguards of various sorts. Eunuch slave guards from the South are currently considered both effective and fashionable. When in the caravansaries, merchant princes are afforded all the luxuries of city life, if on a smaller scale. Bathhouses, full course meals, private chambers and the like are all readily available, though expensive.

COMMUNICATION

Communication between the hub cities, the caravans, the caravansaries and the caravan's destinations is difficult but, nonetheless, necessary. In order to facilitate communication without having to rely on sorcery or spirits, the Guild has developed a complex system of communicating through the use of messenger birds. Each caravan leaves the hub city with cages full of pigeons and other homing birds. The Master of Wings, one of the few members of the administrative branch to travel with a caravan, and his assistants keep the birds. At the request of the caravan master or the merchant princes, they use the birds to send messages back to the hub city or forward to the caravan's destinations.

The birds can fly much faster than even a swift rider can move, covering as many as 200 miles in a day. Some local spirits, most often spirits of birds or air elementals, take offense at the "enslavement" of the birds and disrupt the message system. In other cases, the number of predators in an area can reduce the effectiveness of the system. Anticipating these problems is part of the Master of Wing's duties, and in case of a threat, the caravan deploys duplicate messengers in hopes that one will successfully deliver the message.

Given the appropriate resources, a caravan will make use of sorcery for communication as well. Sorcery is expensive, however, and keeping spirits or outcaste Dragon-Blooded on the payroll merely to act as conduits for information is too expensive for most factors and merchant princes.

ENTERTAINMENT

Caravan fleas, as the jugglers and dancers and singers and players that follow a caravan are called, are tolerated only because they provide distraction from the monotonous rigors of the road. Every caravan, whatever the size, has a motley band of fleas clinging to its back. Most are musicians and dancers: A single man with a lyre can entertain any number of teamsters and guards, and dancers in short silken shrifts can easily find other work besides. For the small caravan running through well-populated lands, a half dozen such entertainers are usually the best the caravaneers can hope for.

Players with stage wagons, troupes of acrobats, exotic dancers and even more esoteric performers follow a caravan out of the hub city gates and become one with it as it winds its way through the Threshold. Each stop steals away a few of the performers and adds others, and the circus that follows the caravan shifts constantly in size and composition. In the South, dancers and fire-eaters are popular, while people of the North seem to prefer skalds and jugglers. In the East, players and acrobats are popular. Guild ships traveling the islands of the West rarely have room to spare, so well known minstrels and poets are best loved.

Gods and Fair Folk often join caravans as entertainers, as does the occasional Exalt. Elementals and demons may be bound by Terrestrial sorcerers to perform, or, like the gods and the Fair Folk, they may desire the adoration and awe that an audience provides. Fair Folk attached to a caravan feed off the caravaneers and the townsfolk they visit and often prefer emotions such as wonder, lust and joy. The motives of Exalts are more varied. Some outcaste Terrestrials join just for the sake of the adulation, others do it because they can blackmail the merchant princes into keeping them with the caravan, and many join purely for the human contact it affords them. Occasionally, the Exalts who travel with a caravan are Celestials — typically, those on the run.

EVENING MARKETS

For the common citizen of the Threshold, the arrival of a Guild caravan is a momentous sight: It means that life goes on, both for the individual village and for the outside world.

It means that the Anathema have not returned to overturn the world and that the Yozis have not broken free of their great prison. When the first yeddim-drawn cart appears far down the road, a celebration begins. For the people of the many small Threshold towns and villages, the caravaneers are the only people other than their cousins and neighbors they will see in the space of a year. The caravan brings much-needed goods, from plowshares to wagon wheels, and often takes local wares in return. The services and substantives the caravan purchases in that one night provide the village's total annual income in many cases. Moreover, the news and tales and the songs and rumors that the caravan brings with it are beyond quantifiable value.

For the Guild, these evening markets are its bread and butter. Every stop along the way, every sale and purchase of goods, is carefully anticipated. Successful merchant princes know exactly what to carry and how much, as well as what to buy and when. Running a caravan is an expensive endeavor, and the factors who invest most of the money want to know that it can pay for itself. From bolts of cloth to bags of seeds, it is the common items carried by the caravan that provide for its daily expenses. Inclement weather and other calamities can quickly destroy a caravan's profitability, as each extra day on the road is a day that simple goods cannot be sold to pay the caravan's expenses. Many caravan masters will drive the train through storms and worse, lest they return too late to their hub city and find themselves reduced to collecting yeddim bolts on the next outing.

Factors, merchant princes and caravan masters plan their route to allow as much flexibility as possible in time and trade. Longer runs provide more leeway, since each individual stop and evening market has less effect on the overall success of the caravan. Caravans that last a single season or move through a well-traveled region suffer more by comparison, since each stop represents a larger percentage of the caravan's total business.

CARAVANSARIES

Caravansaries are permanent trading posts, fabricated villages that exist to support the caravans that pass through them. The Guild establishes caravansaries at regular intervals along preexisting trade routes. The Guild runs the caravansaries, usually rewarding an exemplary member of the administration branch with the title of host, a position combining the jobs of mayor, shopkeep and inn proprietor. On occasion a less-than-exemplary merchant prince receives the title of host from the Guild council, which serves to keep the merchant prince under control and remove him from the regional marketplace.

Shortly after the establishment of a caravansary by the Guild, it invariably begins to grow of its own accord. Both locals and transients, often caravan members themselves, make the caravansary their home. This is tolerated so long as the individual can offer some useful service or skill, from shoeing horses to filling tankards. All residents are officially affiliated with the Guild, which means that a

good portion of whatever income they make must be paid to the Guild in the form of levies and dues.

Caravansaries are more akin to fortress villages than bustling towns. Thick walls of earth or stone protect a great open courtyard where wagons are parked and pack beasts are stabled. The structures within, ranging from flop houses to the Administrator's Hall, are built against the interior walls. The roofs of the buildings serve as battlements when the fortress is under attack and as gardens and patios at other times. Most of the permanent residents of the way station serve on what amounts to a militia, ready to defend Guild interests at a moment's notice. There are full-time troops stationed at caravansaries, but they are generally few in number since the caravansaries are extremely defensible and since the Guild mostly depends upon the mercenary units traveling with the caravans to protect these places when they are most valuable — that is, when there is a caravan present.

Outside the walls of a caravansary, particularly one along a well-traveled route, there is invariably a shantytown of ramshackle dwellings and businesses. Many who work at the Guild-approved businesses within the walls live here, as there simply is not room for them all inside, and many more come to feed off the scraps of the caravans that pass through. Prostitutes, craftsmen of dubious skill, pickpockets, drug dealers, money lenders, beggars and their ilk all congregate around the caravansaries, fighting like dogs for positions closest to the gates. Caravan fleas are not allowed within the walls of a caravansary, and many hands and laborers prefer the rough pleasures of the caravansary ghetto's lean-tos and fire pits to the dull beds found within. Thieves, murderers and evil spirits and fey stalk the ghetto, and sometimes, hands do not survive to rejoin the caravan as it sets out again.

If a caravan has suffered a loss in personnel, it can replace members before leaving. Hands and laborers are pulled from the riffraff of the ghetto, while more skilled members are hired from the pool of local talent that often waits at a caravansary in hopes of joining a passing caravan.

DANGERS OF THE ROAD

The long roads that link the cities of the Threshold are rife with danger. Assault and accident are ever-present worries, threatening to take not only lives, but also profits. Each day lost to a road choked by a landslide, each man lost to a barbarian raid and each silver coin paid in taxes to a petty king weakens the caravan and steals from the coffers of the Guild.

WEATHER AND OTHER CALAMITIES

Rain, snow, sleet, hail, the blazing sun and all other sorts of inclement weather are dangers as great as all the demons of Malfeas and all the monsters of the Wyld. A caravan is a well-balanced, well-oiled machine, and too much water, cold, sand or heat can cause the machine to begin to break down. An army of coughing, feverish mercenaries, fallen ill due to incessant rain, is less capable in its defense of the caravan, while a land of dust where there should be river beds and oases can end a caravan





very quickly. Deep mud and impassable snow-drifts will halt a caravan as surely as hordes of barbarians.

More difficult to deal with, but part of the same class of danger, are natural disasters. The heaving earth can destroy bridges and seal off mountain passes. Floods and mudslides wash roads and villages completely away, and volcanoes create impassable rivers of lava or bury entire cities in ash. Sandstorms create similar threats, burying whole cities or stripping all the caravaneers not within the protective wall of a Conestoga of their very flesh. Caravans have two weapons at their disposal to combat such menaces: good planning and prayer. Where the former does not succeed, the latter just may. The caravan master deals with local spirits, offering prayers and other sacrifices in order to protect the caravan from disaster and to beg the removal of natural and supernatural obstacles. In the wilderness, spirits demand much, and the caravan master must take a harder stance than during the Ritual of Exodus, attempting to negotiate the caravan's safe and profitable passage against the strong position of the local deities.

BANDITS AND WARLORDS

Bandits are political dissidents and the disenfranchised of the Threshold. Exiled or on the run from Threshold towns and cities, they form communities of their own, ranging in size from a single family to hundreds of people. The defining factor of bandits, however, is their form of subsistence: Bandits prey upon travelers for their survival. Bandits will generally only attack caravans when they outnumber the caravan guards three to one or more. If there is an obvious advantage among the caravaneers, such as a powerful spirit or Exalted protectors, bandits will not attack. However, bandit groups are often controlled by tyrannical rulers or non-mortal powers. Both are willing to sacrifice any number of their servants to achieve their ends. Left to their own devices, bandits prefer easy prey and would rather intimidate the caravan into paying a "toll" than to fight its guards.

Also found in the Threshold are the armies of petty warlords. There are innumerable kingdoms, city-states and nations in the Threshold, and they are constantly in flux. Powers change like the tides, and the strong warlord can only maintain his position through force of arms. In many cases, these warlords are rogue generals who have broken from their kings or are mercenary captains with visions of carving out a nation of their own. Well armed and well trained, the forces of these warlords pose a significant threat to Guild caravans should the warlords so choose. More often than not, these warlords merely wish to receive tribute and lip service from the Guild.

How the Guild deals with bandits and warlords is a question of politics and economics. When the Guild has strong ties with a Threshold nation, it will pressure the nation itself to deal with the problem. If the nation is weakened or the attacks take place between civilized lands, the Guild must weigh the economic issues. If it is more expensive to pay the tribute than it is to hire a mercenary army to crush the bandits

or the warlord, the Guild will hire the mercenaries and solve the problem. If the bandits or the warlord's forces are too numerous or, as is more often the case, too deeply entrenched, the Guild pays the tribute and attempts to establish a more equitable relationship with the bandits or warlord. Once they have found they can get tribute from the Guild, bandits and warlords often become greedy, and the required tribute increases with each passing caravan. Eventually, the expense will grow greater than the cost of war, and the Guild will remove the problem entirely. The Guild is also not averse to the use of mortal and outcaste assassins.

BARBARIANS

The uncivilized tribes at the edges of the Wyld pose a looming threat. Caravan routes tend to stay as close to civilized lands as possible, and if a route takes the caravan close to the edge of the Wyld, the caravan master, the factors and the merchant princes take the necessary precautions: more guards, fewer stops and alliances with local powers opposed to the barbarians. When attacks by barbarians do occur, they are swift, brutal and merciless. The savages kill the men, capture the women and loot the caravan for what goods they can use or sell. Everything else, they burn. While even less sophisticated attackers than bandits and the like, barbarians have the advantage of knowing their own lands very well: They know when and where to ambush caravans for maximum effect and minimal warning.

Attacks by savage tribes occur primarily between the cities in the far edges of the Threshold. Occasionally, tribes make incursions into the Threshold, whether because they are forced out of their land by other powers or because they have grown ambitious. When attacks have occurred within the borders of Guild-allied Threshold states, caravans can thereafter expect armed escorts from local governments. In nations where the Guild is less popular, barbarian attacks go unopposed and may even be instigated by the local powers that be.

THE FAIR FOLK

The Guild conducts business with many faeries, buying and selling slaves and, less commonly, trading in gossamer and other magical artifacts. The Fair Folk as a whole, however, have no alliance with the Guild. More to the point, there is no such thing as a concerted opinion among the Fair Folk, but it is certain that for every faerie that finds mortals to be amusing guests, 10 more find them to be amusing prey.

Fair Folk are dangerous because there is little that can be assumed about where, when and how they might attack a caravan. Fey are as likely to insinuate themselves into the caravan itself, masquerading as spirits or mortals or even animals, as they are to break out of the forest with an army of howling, Wyld-twisted cannibals under their command. Fair Folk may infect the dreams of the sleeping caravan hands or seduce the caravan master in order to lead the whole company into ambush.

Defense against the Fair Folk is largely dependant upon detection. Spirits allied with the caravan can detect disguised fey, and there are many artifacts designed to provide warning of or protection from the Fair Folk. Mortal sorcery is of little use against the Fair Folk, but guards armed with spears tipped with cold-wrought iron can discourage attack by weaker fey.

SPIRITS

The spirits that inhabit Creation are as numerous and varied as stars. Most spirits require only a little respect from mortals, exemplified through small rituals and offerings. In return, spirits provide some small benefit to the mortals, even if it is merely to ignore them rather than harass them. Guild caravans, being so widely traveled, are more likely than most to encounter various spirits. Shrines dot the roads of the Threshold, and the gods of various places and objects have many worshipers where the Immaculate Philosophy does not hold sway. The caravan's master, local guides and caravan spirits help to navigate this sea of powers and allow the caravan to continue on its business unmolested.

Of all the spirits that haunt caravan routes, it is the road gods that demand the most care and respect from the Guild. From the rutted cart path through the dense forest to the last remaining glass highways of the Old Realm, each roadway has a spirit. The power of these spirits depends on the age, size and usage of the road, and the disposition of the spirits depends on much the same. Road spirits are dedicated to the keeping their roads clean, well maintained and clear of obstruction. This can be a heavy burden, even for a spirit, and long but rarely traveled roads fall easily into disrepair. When the Guild establishes a new caravan route, however, one of these ill-used roads sometimes becomes part of the route. In such a circumstance, the Guild sends forth an emissary to the god of the road — the Guild uses caravan spirits for this purpose before releasing them — and requests use of the road and presents offerings. Most road spirits are pleased to have their domains in use and good repair, but a few prefer the solitude and actively oppose the Guild and its caravans.

The Guild has a policy of treading carefully wherever divinities are concerned. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of gods on the loose during the Second Age of Man, and it is vital for the Guild's operations that caravans be allowed to travel unmolested by the ranks of the deities. To this end, a special working group exists within the Guild called the Worshipful Company of Prayers and Preachers. It is the duty of the Worshipful Company to conduct negotiations on behalf of the Guild and to assist villages, towns and cities where the Guild does business in appeasing their local divinities.

The first step is to establish contact with a difficult god, and this often involves sending in veteran Exalts to awe the deity and to demonstrate the Guild's sincerity in achieving a resolution. The Guild's negotiators work through a combination of actual force, shows of force, threats, delicate diplomacy, offers of gifts and even out-

right bribery. The negotiators intimidate the gods they can and offer sacrifices to the gods they cannot.

Once a deity is sufficiently appeased or cowed that the Guild can operate in the area, the Worshipful Company assists the local mortal population in further pacification efforts. They begin by selling the community a temple, complete down to the last alms box and incense bowl. A flatbed yeddim-cart arrives nine months to a year later, carrying the temple and its furnishings in crates, ready for assembly. The Worshipful Company and the community then invite the deity to take part in dedication ceremonies for his temple. Usually, the temple contains a suitably splendid chamber for the god's residence in Creation and additional spaces for his public worship and for his priestly retainers. Theological experts working for the Worshipful Company design a set of rites and rituals for the god and copy them out in beautiful calligraphy in well-made books. Other experts usually check in on the temple for several years afterward, helping the priests attend to their duties and keeping the god satisfied. Caravans can cart in temple upgrades, as well, providing grander worship spaces or religious schools or monastic establishments, usually carved out of wood or other materials. When a temple has reached sufficient size, the Guild provides architectural consulting services in order to build a new temple complex out of locally quarried stone and also provides the god with counseling services on dealing with new-found fame and fortune as a regionally important divinity.

The Guild has discovered that augmenting the right local gods can be very good for business. Some deities find it stressful to give up their wilderness portfolios and remain difficult and dangerous for decades, and often, the Guild has little choice but to reroute caravans around their territories. However, other divine beings can be persuaded or bribed into accepting the title of civic god, and such gods often discover that it can be quite a lucrative business. Such a god can then reveal the locations of new resources and raw materials in exchange for larger offerings, and the presence of those resources attracts artisans and laborers who exploit the resources and also worship the local god as a matter of course. The community grows, and the god profits from the community's growth.

The trick lies in finding the right god to approach. The Worshipful Company is always seeking out deities who can be suitably primed to accept the presence of a new community and simultaneously finding the right combination of individuals prepared to worship a new god in order to have a new place to live. Matching settlers with deities is a difficult task, and yet, the Guild often benefits enormously from such relationships. Setting up these sorts of deals requires large investments of cash (particularly jade, since the gods love it), and yet, the Guild often reaps great benefits in the long term.





THE DEFENSE OF THE CARAVAN

For the Guild, the defense of its caravans is of the utmost importance. Over its long history, the Guild has developed a reliable system of defense, political and supernatural as well as physical. As threats continue to evolve, so shall the Guild's defenses.

ALLIES

The Guild does not rely solely upon its strength of arms to protect its interests. Foremost among the Guild's defenses are its alliances, contracts and debts—both owned and owed. Nations and city states, wealthy individuals, spirits and Fair Folk all deal with the Guild. When negotiating with any of its clients and allies, the Guild includes arrangements for the protection and free travel of its caravans in contracts and pacts. These arrangements relieve the Guild of at least some of the burden of ensuring its caravans safe passage and increase profitability, though concessions are made to such allies that, in turn, cost the Guild. In addition, the merchant princes and factors coordinating a caravan often make sure they are in debt to many influential individuals.

GUARDS

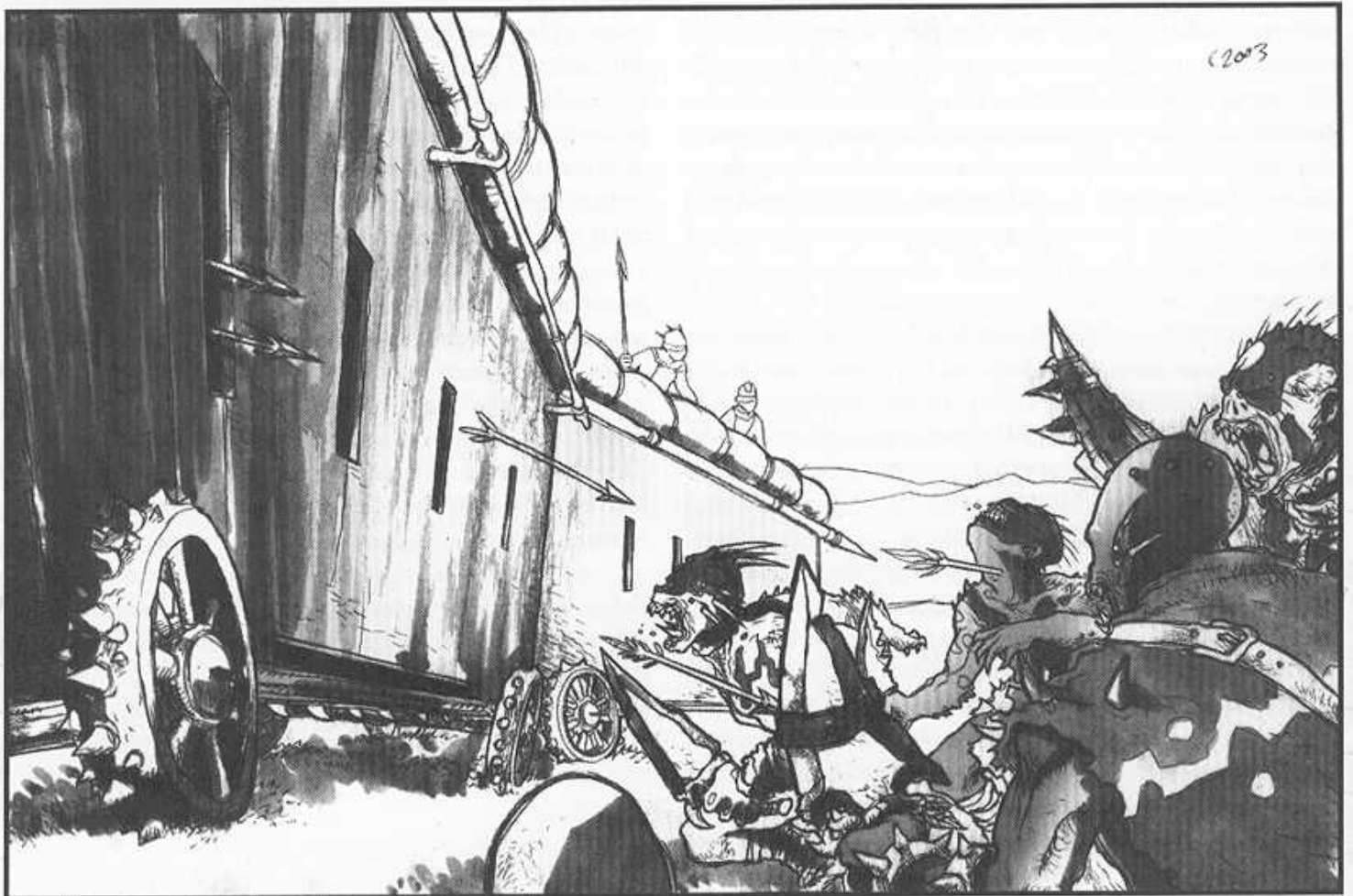
Mercenary units, called companies, affiliated with but not owned by the Guild are the most common defenders of Guild interests in the field. Mercenary companies range in size from a few dozen men to a few thousand. A caravan requires a number of guards roughly equal to the number of

hands it has hired. This number increases half again in areas close to the Wyld and in areas in which bandits, barbarians or warlords are known to operate. The caravan will hire multiple mercenary companies if necessary in order to fill out the required troops. In addition, it is common practice for merchant princes to hire guards of their own, often small but elite units.

The rank-and-file caravan guards are divided between infantry and cavalry, with one mounted warrior for every three foot soldiers. Cavalry are lightly armored and armed with bows, spears and short blades. Infantry wear heavier armor and use weapons designed for reach, such as pikes, and for close combat butchery, such as axes and chopping swords. The quality of the guards' gear varies; more experienced units have higher-quality gear because they demand higher prices, while untested companies arm their soldiers with whatever they can scavenge or afford.

Scouts are an integral part of any mercenary company. Drawn from the cavalry units, caravan scouts ride a mile or more ahead of the caravan. They move in groups of three, with one member ready to speed back to the column should there be anything to report. In more dangerous regions, scouts flank and follow the caravan as well.

Mercenary pay is not better than that of the common laborers, but there are perks: Mercenaries often get second choice, after the merchant princes, of any prostitutes, drugs and other entertainments traveling with the caravan. In addition, should the caravan see combat during its trek, appreciative merchant princes and factors give out



bonuses to mercenary captains, most of whom, in turn, pass the bonuses along to their men.

MOVING FORTRESSES

Among the specialized defensive measures developed by the Guild are the fortress wagon and the wall wagon. The fortress wagon is a box wagon four meters tall, four meters wide and ten meters long, pulled by either a pair of yeddim or a half dozen horses. Its walls are four-inch-thick hardwood beams banded by steel. The wagon holds three dozen bowmen within, who have access to murder holes in every direction. The roof of the wagon has battlements and heavy weapons such as ballistae are often fitted on them. In other cases, the area is kept clear for spirit or Exalted defenders who need a high vantage point in order to use sorcery or other magic. The fortress wagon serves primarily as a rallying point and as a place for the merchant princes and caravan master to hide during an assault. Very large caravans will have five or six fortress wagons in their company, all manned by mercenary bowmen and drivers.

Similar to the fortress wagon, but smaller and more numerous, are the wall wagons. The wall wagons are half the size of the fortress wagons and only one side is reinforced with steel. This side is covered in arrow slits while the other side of the wagon collapses to form a ramp into the wagon. When the caravan falls under attack, the wall wagons link with one another using great iron hinges, the protected side facing out against the assault. There are battlements atop the wall wagons as well. Wall wagons link to fill gaps in the caravans defenses or join with fortress wagons to create a castle that can survive a siege in the wilderness.

Fortress wagons are used as supply wagons for the mercenary companies protecting the caravan and also serve to carry the wounded after a battle. Wall wagons, on the other hand, are completely functional for carrying goods and do so. One in every four wagons in a caravan is a wall wagon except in particularly dangerous areas, where half the wagons are wall wagons.

The caravan must drill daily with the fortress and wall wagons if they are to serve as protection against assault. Given that scouts range only about a mile out from the main body of the caravan, there is a limited amount of time between warning and attack. Drills — during which the wagons circle up and wall wagons link together while the caravan fleas stare in awe — occur when the caravan stops for the evening, though some caravan masters or mercenary captains prefer more random drills. Merchant princes dislike such midday drills because they detract from the day's travel, but even the most obtuse merchant prince understands their value.

THE EXALTED

A caravan can hope for no better a defender than an Exalt. While the Exalted are too rare to be considered a standard part of a caravan's defense, the truth is that any caravan of even moderate size is likely to have an Exalted defender or three. Most such warriors are outcaste Dragon-

Blooded raised far away from the Realm or adventurous young Dynasts looking to amuse themselves on the road. The Guild actively courts such powerful individuals, yet keeps them at arm's length: These defenders are mercenaries and freelancers, ensuring power over the caravan remains in the hands of Guild members.

Non-Terrestrial Exalted can find work on the caravans as well. Caravan masters do not ask questions, and merchant princes may pry but know themselves the importance of secrets. Solar Exalted, given their power, are welcome on any caravan where danger is likely, but they must keep to themselves lest cries of "Anathema" erupt. Lunar Exalted are especially sought after on caravans that skirt the edges of the Wyld: As guides, scouts and ambassadors, Lunar Exalted are unparalleled in these regions.

Even one Exalted member of a caravan drastically increases the expense of the caravan. Caravans that use Exalted defenders and guides must ensure profits by going out longer and by carrying more valuable commodities, which, in turn, increase the likelihood of assault by bandits and barbarians. In addition, the mere presence of Exalted on the caravan draws attention, from spirits, from Fair Folk and from other Exalted — including Immaculates in search of newly Exalted Solars. Because of their expense, Exalted caravaneers invariably earn their pay.

The Guild is careful to make itself beholden to no one individual, no matter how powerful. The Guild keeps tabs on any Exalted it hires with the intention of using whatever information — friends and enemies, loved ones and rivals, virtues and vices — it can discover as insurance should the Exalt ever pose a threat to the Guild.

RANK AND PAY ON THE CARAVAN

The various members of a caravan draw different pay and possess different ranks. The following values are an average, and more famous or highly skilled individuals may draw slightly higher pay or be granted slightly higher rank. All rank values are considered dots of Backing appropriate for the character and all pay values are considered dots in Resources for the character.

Title	Rank	Pay
Hand	•	•
Groom	•	•
Teamster	•	••
Drover	••	••
Wainwright	••	••
Guard	N/A	••
Scout	N/A	••
Master of Wings	•••	•••
Caravan Master	•••	••••

Note: Exalted members of the caravan draw pay two dots higher than listed above (maximum •••••). In addition, a single Exalt will increase the overall expense of the caravan (see p. XX) by one dot, and multiple Exalts will increase the expense by two dots.





CHAPTER TWO

DRUGS — THE SOFT TRADE



The Guild sells all manner of drugs to anyone willing to pay its price. Although many Threshold rulers despair at the problems that addiction to opium or cocaine produce among their populace, few wealthy women are willing to do without access to maiden tea. Everyone who is sick wishes they had some seven bounties paste, and perhaps most importantly of all, the number of wealthy nobles using age-staving cordials is quite high. Although many rulers would love to keep their subjects from stumbling to work or even standing guard while high on marijuana, few are willing to forgo the benefits that the Guild's other drugs bring. To open this chapter is a list of some of the more popular and common drugs available in the Age of Sorrows.

QAT (RESOURCES •)

Qat is a common euphoric and a mild opiate. Qat is made from the leaves of a small leafy plant that grows extensively in both Great Forks and the Hundred Kingdoms. Users can either chew on the fresh leaves or brew them into a tea — chewing is more common since it requires fewer leaves and is said to produce a better high. Regular users all have pale-green stains on their lips and teeth. When he's under the influence of qat, reduce all of a character's wound penalties by one and subtract one from the character's Wits. Each dose of qat lasts for two or three hours. Qat is only mildly addictive, but its pain-deadening qualities are much in demand — few of its users are willing

to do without regular doses. Taking too many doses of qat merely sends the user into a mindless stupor that lasts six to eight hours. The user awakens sluggish and with a hangover (increase the difficulty of all rolls by 1 for the first four hours after the character awakens), but it has no other ill effects.

Qat is exceedingly plentiful in the East, and most of the market is in the hands of local growers. Unfortunately, qat leaves become useless when they are dried. As a result, qat cannot normally be shipped outside of the East. However, the Guild has developed a method of preserving these leaves. The leaves are coated with a shiny edible gum. The gum is a rubber-like sap from trees that are common in the Far Southeast. This gum is one of the more popular commodities collected or purchased by expeditions to the Southeast. Qat treated with this gum is either sold as whole dried leaves, or it is compressed into small chewy nuggets that are quite popular with sailors in the West. The Guild owns the vast majority of qat that is shipped outside of the East.

Overdose: N/A

MARIJUANA (RESOURCES •)

Marijuana grows almost everywhere and is widely used recreationally, as a cure for nausea and as an appetite stimulant for the ill. Although the majority of the marijuana trade is in the hands of local growers, the Guild makes money both selling exceptionally fine flower buds and selling marijuana to the residents of places such as the

Far North, where it doesn't grow. Low doses of marijuana do little except make the user feel relaxed, happy and somewhat hungry. Higher doses reduce the user's Wits dice pool by one for the next hour or two. Overdoses are essentially impossible. Physical addiction is weak and easily overcome, though many users become psychologically dependent. Marijuana leaves and flower buds are typically dried and then smoked, although they can also be used as a cooking spice.

Overdose: N/A

COCA LEAVES

(RESOURCES •; •• OUTSIDE THE EAST)

Coca leaves are a mild stimulant that only grows in the warm, high altitude portions of the East and the Southeast. Coca grows at an altitude between 1,500 and 6,000 feet. Users typically stick a small handful of fresh or dried leaves in the side of their mouths and slowly chew the slightly bitter mass. Coca is a relatively harmless drug that is far milder than either cocaine or rock cocaine. Coca makes its user slightly more alert and increases the user's initiative by 1. The effects of chewing a single wad of coca leaves lasts for several hours. Chewing coca also grants the user an extra die on rolls to stay awake and to resist the affects of working at high altitude. Chewing coca also allows users to drink limited amounts of salt water.

Coca leaves are normally only available in the East, relatively near to where it is grown. Since coca leaves are a far less concentrated than either cocaine or rock cocaine, the Guild does not find it practical to transport coca leaves outside the boundaries of the East. While a few wealthy nobles in other parts of the world have special green houses where they grow coca leaves, such places are rare, and coca leaves are a difficult to find specialty product outside of the East.

Overdose: Because it is only possible to chew so many leaves at once, it is impossible to overdose on coca. However, habitual users who are suddenly deprived of their access to coca will increase the difficulty of all Stamina + Endurance rolls to stay awake by 1 for the next three days.

COCAINE (RESOURCES ••)

While most other drugs are taken to relax and deaden the pain of an unpleasant existence, cocaine allows users to stay awake and to react faster than normal. In short, it is an ideal drug for performing any dull and repetitive activity ranging from standing watch to working at any number of jobs that demand tireless precision. Cocaine is a powder extracted from coca leaves. The leaves are mashed in strong alcohol, the leaf fibers are strained out, and then, the resulting doughy mass is dried and crushed into a fine powder. Coca is relatively common in the East and the Southeast and difficult to find everywhere else. It

is one of the major exports of the portions of the Hundred Kingdoms that contain part of the great Eastern forest. The people of Harborhead also cultivate coca, but it is not one of their major exports. One of the most notable things about cocaine is how little is needed to get the user high. A normal dose is a pinch of the white powder. Cocaine is normally snorted using anything from a hollow reed to a beautifully made jade straw.

When using cocaine, add one to a character's Wits score and reduce the difficulty of rolls to stay awake or resist fatigue by 1. Cocaine also makes user feel happy, and in control of their lives. A dose of cocaine lasts for one hour. After this time, reduce the user's Wits by one, and increase the difficulty of all rolls to stay awake or resist fatigue by 1. These penalties also last for one hour. Users also feel sad and hopeless during this time. However, taking another dose instantly alleviates these penalties and provides the normal bonuses for cocaine. Cocaine is not physically addictive, but regular users will do almost anything to avoid the depression that occurs when it wears off.

Overdose: Snorting more than one dose of cocaine in an hour doubles the bonuses but also reduces the user's Willpower, Compassion and Temperance by one each and makes the user extremely hyperactive. Increase the difficulty of all tasks involving either stealth or fine manipulation by 1 because the smoker literally can't stand still. Also, double the severity and duration of all penalties once the drug wears off.

If the user snorts a number of doses of cocaine greater than her Stamina score in one hour, her player must make a Stamina + Resistance roll. On a success, all penalties to Willpower, Compassion and Temperance and difficulty increases to stealth and fine manipulation are doubled for the next four hours after the cocaine wears off. At the end of this time, the character takes a level of bashing damage and must sleep. On a failure, the character's Willpower also drops to zero. On a botch, the character dies — her heart gives out from the strain of taking too many stimulants. Exalts who overdose on cocaine and roll a botch fall unconscious and take one die of unsoakable lethal damage from convulsions, but they do not die.

ROCK COCAINE (RESOURCES •)

Rock cocaine is simply cocaine that has been processed slightly differently. The crystals produced by this process do not dissolve in water and can only be smoked. Smoking rock cocaine produces all of the effects of normal cocaine use. However, these effects are both far more intense and last far less long. Increase all bonuses and penalties from cocaine use by one, including all effects from overdoses. Users add one to their Wits scores and reduce all fatigue rolls by 2. However, the difficulty of the Stamina + Resistance roll to resist an overdose is 2, and an overdose reduces Willpower, Compassion and Temper-

ance by three. Also, the drug produces an almost overwhelming feeling of euphoria, but this feeling only lasts for between 15 and 20 minutes.

Overdose: Rock cocaine is perhaps the most viciously addictive drug in the Guild's pharmacopoeia. A few minutes of total ecstasy are followed more than an hour of crushing depression. Serious users who can afford to do so occasionally take more than 50 doses in the course of a multiple day binge. Like cocaine, using more than one dose in an hour produces overdose effects, which is unfortunate for the user since a single dose lasts considerably less than an hour. Also, rock cocaine use can easily be fatal. In addition to the normal penalties for cocaine overuse, using more than (Stamina) doses of rock cocaine in a day temporarily reduces the user's Stamina by one for the next two days. If the user's Stamina is reduced for more than two weeks at a time due to overuse of rock cocaine, this reduction becomes permanent. Heavy users can die from overuse quite rapidly.

OPIMUM (RESOURCES •)

This drug is the Guild's most popular and one of the most common drugs in the Age of Sorrows. Opium is a gum exuded by the ripe pods of opium poppies. Unlike most drug-producing plants, opium poppies can grow almost everywhere in Creation. Opium is everything from an excellent painkiller and a cure for dysentery to a terrible and life-consuming addiction. Anyone taking opium reduces all wound penalties by two for the next eight hours. This reduction in pain happens even if the user only takes a half dose of the drug. When used solely as a pain reliever, opium is most commonly drunk mixed with alcohol. Taken in this fashion, opium is still just as addictive, but it produces no result other than pain relief. Many people who are in chronic pain from injuries or age use it regularly — most of these users become addicts. Each time a character takes more doses of opium in a week than his Stamina, his player must roll at least one success on Stamina + Resistance roll. Failure at this roll means that the user is addicted. Exalts only become addicted to opium if their players botch this roll. Long-term addicts often take one dose a day.

When using opium recreationally, it is normally smoked. Smoking opium affects the user both faster and in a more intense fashion than drinking it. The character subtracts one die from all Dexterity, Perception and Wits dice pools for the next (7 – Stamina) hours. Users feel powerful, confident and happy. Many users experience pleasant daydreams or enjoyable hallucinations. Most users are content simply to lie around and feel good.

Once addicted, a character must take at least one dose of opium every three days or suffer withdrawal. Withdrawal is harmless to anyone who is not already in very poor health, but it is a deeply unpleasant experience that

lasts approximately eight days. Many users believe withdrawal is eventually fatal, and even those who know better often wish to die when they are in the middle of it. Withdrawal doubles all wound penalties for the character (round up) and imposes a one-die reduction in all rolls even if the character is uninjured. Also, the character takes one level of unsoakable bashing damage that will not heal until withdrawal is over and reduces her Willpower, Valor and Temperance by one each. Taking a single dose of opium immediately removes all of these penalties.

Voluntarily quitting opium once a character is addicted requires the character's player roll at least one success on four separate Willpower rolls. Rolls are made every other day, starting two days after the first missed dose. If any of these rolls results in three or more successes, the character has overcome her craving for the drug, and her player does not need to make any more rolls. However, the negative effects of withdrawal still last eight full days. Characters whose players fail any of these rolls must immediately seek out a source of the drug. They will attempt to sell or steal anything that isn't nailed down to get the money to buy more opium and will become both violent and irrational if they cannot gain access to this drug. However, regardless of whether the character succeeds or fails these rolls, after eight days, the character has kicked the addiction, and all withdrawal penalties vanish. Exalts only need to make two rolls (also made every other day) to kick opium addiction.

Overdose: If the character takes two or more doses of opium at once or mixes opium and significant quantities of alcohol, she increases the difficulty of all Dexterity, Perception and Wits rolls by 1 and can move at no faster than a walk. These effects last for (14 – Stamina) hours. If the user takes a number of doses of opium greater than her Stamina score, her player must make a Stamina + Resistance roll. If the roll fails or botches, the character falls unconscious for half a day (two full days on a botch) and wakes up feeling quite sick (+1 difficulty to all rolls for the next full day). If the roll succeeds, she merely doubles the above penalties. Exalts whose players fail this roll only fall unconscious for four hours.

HEROIN (RESOURCES ••)

Widely seen as the prince of intoxicants, far too many users have forgone both adequate food and shelter to obtain this drug. Heroin is an excellent pain killer that also produces a mild stupor filled with exceedingly pleasant daydreams. Heroin's method of manufacture is a carefully guarded secret. It is normally sold as a pure white powder extracted from the highly concentrated urine of one of the Guild's seven huge and immortal beasts of resplendent liquids (see pp. 49-52). Users either smoke or snort this powder. Aristocrats frequently have special gold or silver straws made and sniff measured quantities of this drug off of





small jade plates or smoke it in specially made glass or silver pipes. A few of the wealthiest users inject the powder mixed with water under their skin using elegantly made silver and gold syringes. The effects of the drug are no stronger when used in this fashion, but the drug affects the user slightly faster and produces a more intense and enjoyable high.

Anyone taking heroin reduces all wound penalties by two for the next eight hours. This reduction in pain occurs even if the user only takes a half dose of the drug. Taken in this fashion, heroin is still just as addictive, but it produces no result other than pain relief. Many wealthy people who are in chronic pain from injuries or age use it — and most of these users become heroin addicts because the drug is so highly addictive. If a user takes a full dose, increase the difficulty of all Dexterity, Perception and Wits rolls made by his player by 1 for the next (7 – Stamina) hours. Each time a character takes more doses of heroin in a week than his Stamina, his player must make a Stamina + Resistance roll with a difficulty equal to the number of doses the character has taken in the last week. Exalts reduce the difficulty of this addiction roll by 2. If the player fails or botches this roll, his character is addicted. If the player succeeds in this roll, his character is not addicted — for now.

Once addicted, a character must take at least one dose of heroin every other day or suffer withdrawal. Withdrawal is essentially harmless to anyone who is not already in very poor health — even ill-fed, long-term addicts almost never die from heroin withdrawal. However, the withdrawal process is a deeply unpleasant experience that lasts between six and eight days. Many users believe withdrawal is eventually fatal, and even those who know better often wish to die when they are in the middle of it. Withdrawal doubles all wound penalties for the character (round up) and imposes a one-die reduction on all rolls even if the character is uninjured. Also, the character takes two levels of unsoakable bashing damage that will not heal until withdrawal is over and reduces her Willpower by two and her Valor and Temperance by one each. Going without a dose for more than four days also temporarily reduces both the character's Stamina and Perception by one. Taking a single dose of heroin immediately removes all of these penalties.

Voluntarily quitting heroin once a character is addicted requires the character's player roll at least one success on eight separate Willpower rolls. The player of an addict must roll once a day, starting two days after the first missed dose. If any of these rolls results in three or more successes, the character has overcome her craving for the drug, and her player does not need to make any more rolls. However, the negative effects of withdrawal still last eight full days. Characters whose players fail any of these rolls must immediately seek out a source of the drug. They will attempt to sell anything that isn't nailed down to get the money to buy more heroin and will become both violent and irrational if they cannot gain access to this drug.

Regardless of whether a character's player succeeds or fails these rolls, after eight days, the character has kicked the addiction, and all withdrawal penalties vanish. Players of Exalts must make the same rolls to end their characters' addiction but only need to make four successful Willpower rolls. Locking someone up and forcing her to go through withdrawal is a highly effective form of interrogation — offering heroin to someone in her fourth day of withdrawal will make all but the most hardened mortal offer her captors everything from the names of her allies to her mother's life. This same technique is also sometimes used as a way to force someone to quit using heroin — nobles and wealthy merchants often pay surgeons to perform this type of "cure" on relatives. Unfortunately, even once someone is no longer addicted, she still remembers how good heroin used to make her feel, and most return to the arms of their white angel in time.

Overdose: Taking two or more doses of heroin at once or mixing heroin and small amounts of alcohol doubles both the duration and the intensity of all penalties. If the user takes a number of doses of heroin greater than her Stamina score or takes heroin and drinks heavily, her player must make a Stamina + Resistance roll. If the roll succeeds, the character falls unconscious for half a day and wakes up feeling quite sick (+1 difficulty to all rolls for the next half day). If the roll fails, the character dies unless she is quickly given a stimulant, such as cocaine. Exalts whose players fail this roll are merely rendered unconscious for two full days and only die if a botch is rolled.

HALLUCINOGENIC WOAD

(RESOURCES •; •• OUTSIDE OF THE EAST)

Unlike most of the drugs the Guild sells, barbarian warriors, torturers and the Fair Folk are the only customers for hallucinogenic woad. Hallucinogenic woad is traditionally colored with a form of indigo called dyer's woad, but it is made medically active by a mixture of toxic mushrooms and glowing lichens that grow inside huge hollow trees found in the Far Northeast. Barbarian warriors spread this thin paste over their bodies, while Fair Folk and torturers smear it over their victims. The woad glows a faint, pale blue as long as it remains active. This drug must touch the user's bare skin to work, and it takes affect within five minutes.

The effects of this woad are twofold. In low dosages, where it only covers a small portion of the user's body, such as a single arm or leg, it causes the user to have vivid hallucinations. The user's player must subtract one die from all Perception rolls as a result of these hallucinations. The user sees all of his comrades and allies as powerful and glorious magical beings capable of defeating any foe. However, the user also sees all of his enemies and anyone who threatens or attacks him as horrifically deformed monsters. If fighting alongside trusted allies,

such as fellow members of a barbarian's tribe, the user's player reduces the difficulty of all Valor and Conviction rolls by 1. However, if the user is bereft of allies and is surrounded by "terrifying monsters," the user's player is at a -1 penalty on all Conviction and Valor rolls for the character. Torturers and the Fair Folk use this drug on their victims and then threaten and torture them until they believe themselves to be surrounded by a pack of the most horrific monsters in all of Creation.

If the user spreads this woad over most of her body, the higher dosage also makes the user less susceptible to pain—reduce all wound penalties by 1. Torturers and the fair folk naturally avoid giving their victims the higher dosages. The Guild buys this drug from the Northeastern barbarian tribes who make and use it, and sell it to professional torturers and interrogators and Fair Folk all over Creation. A single pot of the drug can supply eight low dosage uses four high dosage ones. This drug is relatively safe. However, if used more than once every three days, the intensity of the hallucinations increases and the user must subtract two dice from all Perception rolls. Regardless of how it is used, all effects last eight to ten hours.

Overdose: N/A

RASP SPIDER VENOM

(RESOURCES ••; ••• OUTSIDE OF THE EAST)

Rasp spiders are tree-dwelling spiders found in the hardwood forests of the East and Northeast. These spiders have fat bodies the size of a large man's head and long legs, and the largest ones are a bit more than a yard across. They sit in great webs that can be as much as 10 yards wide, waiting for prey. They primarily eat birds and medium-sized mammals such as baby deer. However, shamans and herbalists in the Haltan Republic long ago discovered the secret of distilling rasp spider venom so that it becomes far less poisonous but exceedingly powerful and useful as a hallucinogen. In its purified form, this venom only does one level of unsoakable bashing damage to the person who drinks the harsh and acrid liquid. Within a few minutes, the target begins experiencing vivid and powerful hallucinations that last for the next 10 hours. All rolls involving either the Perception or the Dexterity of the subject are made at -4. However, strong-willed subjects can use the intense concentration and focus that this hallucinogen produces to great effect. If the user attempts to perform a single task that requires both patience and creativity, such as writing an epic poem, crafting an exquisitely complex piece of jewelry,



making a talisman or even cooking a gourmet meal, this drug can help the user tap into resources of creativity and skill unavailable to her when sober.

To attempt to use the drug in this fashion, the user must have all the tools and parts needed for the project set out before taking the drug, and then, her player must make a successful Willpower roll for the character at difficulty 2 once the drug has been taken. If the roll fails, the user will not be able to focus on the tasks because the hallucinations are too bizarre and distracting. However, on a successful roll, the user has no Perception or Dexterity penalties for this craft task, and she gains two additional successes to her player's Craft roll. The only problem with using this drug is that the user is so focused on this task that she could be loaded on a wagon and taken away without ever realizing that she is being moved. So long as the user has access to the project she is working on, she will notice no other distractions. Getting the attention of someone in a rasp venom trance requires either taking the project away from her or doing at least one level of bashing or lethal damage to her. Even if you succeed in getting the person's attention, she is still at -4 to all other tasks requiring Dexterity and Perception until the drug wears off. If the user finishes or discards the task before the drug wears off, attempting to start another task requires the user's player to roll three or more successes on another Willpower roll. Also, the materials for the task must be readily available.

Occasional use of this drug is relatively safe. However, using it more often than once every (6 - Stamina) days means that the drug is not fully out of the user's system. Although the drug offers the same benefits to creativity and skill, the penalties for other Perception and Dexterity rolls are increased to -6, and the user's player must make a Stamina + Resistance roll for her character. Failure on this roll means that the user's Perception is reduced by one for the next full week due to mild hallucinations. A botch on this roll causes this loss to become permanent. Master craftsmen who overuse this drug seem half blind and nearly deaf because of the minor hallucinations they constantly experience.

Overdose: N/A

ICE FERN SPORES

(RESOURCES: ••; ••• OUTSIDE OF THE NORTH)

This is the premier dream-enhancing drug. It is harvested from rare blue-white ferns that grow up through the ice and snow during winters in the Far North. Both icewalkers and the dream-worshiping Haslanti harvest this drug. Although the plants are fairly rare, the drug's preparation is quite simple. The spores are scraped off the fern leaves, and then, users inhale the pale-blue spores, generally using a short straw made of bone or metal.

The effects of this drug are immediate and profound. Users fall immediately into a deep sleep that lasts between

six and eight hours. Characters can be woken up before the drug wears off, but they reduce all dice pools by one die for the next hour because they take a long time to fully awaken. Also, waking up someone using this drug requires much shaking and shouting and cannot be done either quickly or quietly. While under the effect of this drug, the user has a series of exceedingly vivid dreams. Users who have no skill at controlling their dreams can exert a limited amount of control over these dreams. Characters who know how to control their dreams, including any Haslanti and many members of barbarian tribes who have an Occult score of 2 or more or any characters with Occult specialties in Dreaming can completely control their dreams while under the influence of this drug. Also, if two or more people take this drug and remain physically close to one another while they sleep, they will share the same dreams and can either have complex dream contests or can work together to create a grand dream epic.

Although most users simply enjoy sharing dreams and having dreams that they can easily control, some folk allow these dreams to progress without control. When they are not controlled, these drug-induced dreams provide hints about the future. Unfortunately, the information gained from ice fern spore dreams is both fragmentary and confusing. If someone is going to attempt to assassinate the user the next day, the user might have a dream of someone attempting to kill him at the correct place and time. However, at minimum, the details will be quite different, and the dream is often highly symbolic.

Used properly, ice fern spores are both safe and enjoyable. Unfortunately, like most other drugs, this one can easily be abused. If users take a dose more often than once every (7 - Stamina) days, the drug has its normal effects, but it causes the user to remain asleep and effectively unwakeable for 12 hours. Also, the user will be groggy and at -2 to all dice pools for six hours after he awakens. The next night, sleeping will be quite difficult, and many regular users find it easier to simply take another dose of the drug. The user will be back to normal the next day, unless he takes another dose. However, repeated use can mean that the user cannot sleep normally without this drug and is groggy and distracted for the entire time that he is awake. Unfortunately, unless the user sleeps normally for at least one day, he must take two doses if he wants to have controlled, shared or prophetic dreams. Taking more than one dose of this drug at once has the same effect as taking it too often. Taking more than two doses at once causes the user to remain asleep for a full day. After two or more doses of this drug are taken, the user's player must succeed in a Stamina + Resistance roll, or the character permanently loses four points of temporary Willpower. On a botch, the user loses one point of Willpower permanently.

Overdose: N/A

GHOST FLOWER

(RESOURCES ●●●; ●● IN EASTERN SHADOWLANDS — ●● UNDERWORLD RESOURCES IN THE UNDERWORLD)

This rare and unusual drug consists of the ground dried petals of the luminous, palm-sized ghost flower. Dried ghost flowers are exceedingly rare in the land of the living because they only grow in shadowlands in the temperate portions of the East. Ghost flowers can only be harvested by ghosts and are typically sold to the living by Deathlords and Abyssal Exalted or by the few ghosts who regularly trade with the living. Users steep ghost flower with water, creating a faintly luminous tea that they typically drink just before sleep.

The exact effects of ghost flower depend upon how much one takes and how often it is used. The first few times the user drinks ghost flower tea, she has deep and vivid dreams where she can see and communicate with any ghosts who are nearby or who are interested in communicating with her. The ghosts need not be slumbering to communicate with the user, but they can be. Unlike various spirit-related Charms and artifacts, this drug only allows its users to see ghosts and other immaterial creatures from the Underworld, it does not permit anyone to see gods, demons or other immaterial beings.

If a user takes a number of doses greater than twice her Stamina + Resistance in a single season, then she has built up enough resistance to the drug that she can remain awake while under its influence. She can then see and communicate with ghosts while awake. This ability persists for eight hours after a dose is taken, and when the user next sleeps, she will also be able to communicate with ghosts in her dreams. If the user takes a number of doses greater than her (Stamina + Resistance) x 3 in a single season, she will also be able to touch and be touched by ghosts. Under the influence of this drug, users can have ghostly lovers and fight deadly duels with ghostly opponents. Each dose of the drug lasts until after the user next awakens.

Frequent users appear both pale and sickly. Also, in very dim light, their lips sometimes glow faintly. If used more than (Stamina + Resistance) x 5 times in a season, the user also becomes mildly addicted to this drug but can give it up by garnering two or more successes on a Willpower roll. Unfortunately, users almost always have some deep emotional need to interact with one or more ghosts and are usually quite reluctant to give up the drug.

Ghosts can also benefit from drinking ghost flower tea. Any ghost who drinks ghost flower tea before sleeping has a dream where he can communicate with a single living person who is familiar to him. As he is falling asleep, the ghost can decide who he wishes to communicate with. If the living person is awake while the ghost is dreaming,

this person has an exceptionally vivid daydream of speaking with the ghost. If the living person is asleep, she shares a dream with the ghost.

Overdose: Users who take this drug more than (Stamina + Resistance) x 5 times during a single season invariably die while taking the drug. Naturally, anyone who dies from taking too much ghost flower becomes a ghost. Exalts who drink ghost flower tea are affected in exactly the same fashion, but will only die from this drug if their players fail a Stamina + Resistance roll made after their characters exceed the critical (Stamina + Resistance) x 5 threshold. Otherwise, they can keep taking it as long as they wish.

MEDICINES

Some of the substances the Guild sells are not drug at all, at least not in the sense that they are substances ingested with the purpose of producing pleasurable sensations. Some of the most highly desirable drugs in the Guild's pharmacopoeia do not make the subject feel any different at all, but are highly treasured nevertheless. The Guild is not the only retailer of these substances, but it distributes them through the same channels as its more mundane drugs, deliberately bundling these medicinals with recreational drugs so that kingdoms are less willing to turn aside the Guild's trade.

MAIDEN TEA (RESOURCES ●●)

Produced from the bitter fruit of a low bush that grows in warm climates throughout the world, this drug renders a woman infertile for a month or a man infertile for a week. This drug is a favorite of concubines, high-class courtesans, women having affairs while their partners are away and wealthy men who wish to avoid siring bastard heirs.

Overdose: Taking three or more doses at once makes the user mildly ill (the user takes one level of unsoakable bashing damage and subtracts one die from all rolls until this level of damage heals). This overdose also induces abortions. Large overdoses of maiden tea (six or more doses) make the user violently ill (the user takes two levels of unsoakable bashing damage and increase the difficulty of all rolls by 1 for 12 hours) and renders the user permanently sterile.

AGE-STAVING CORDIAL (RESOURCES ●●●)

Some cynics consider this to be the Guild's ultimate drug because it provides life itself. Created from the sap of a vine found in the deep jungles of the Far East combined with the diluted poison of a species of small, brightly colored clams found on the coasts of the South and West, this drug is sold as small packets of dark-red powder. When mixed with water or wine, it creates a brew that slows aging. Anyone taking weekly doses of age-staving cordials will live 25 percent longer than those unfortunate enough not to have regular access to this drug. However, it is rarely



sold in the Realm — the Dynasts care little about increasing the lifespan of the unExalted and have potent drugs that prolong the lives of the Dragon-Blooded by 40 percent or more.

Overdose: Overdoses of age-staving cordials have no effect, except that the user has wasted some of this exceedingly precious drug.

THE DRUG TRADE

The trade in recreational drugs and potent medicines makes up a significant portion of the Guild's income. These commodities are especially lucrative because they are both valuable and extremely compact — they are an easily portable source of wealth. Equally useful is the fact that both addictive drugs and medicines for common ailments are always in demand. To an addict or to someone who is seriously ill, opium or seven bounties paste is at least as valuable as food is to someone who is starving. Continuous demand for highly compact, easily transportable products makes drugs an ideal commodity for the Guild.

Since many of these drugs are at least worth their weight in silver and some are worth their weight in jade, a single yeddin-load of most drugs can bring the Guild large amounts of wealth. In addition, the Guild can use addictive drugs and powerful medicines as a highly effective form of economic warfare. During even the sort of minor epidemics that occur several times a decade, threatening to cut off a state's supply of various medicines can cause the leaders of the region to make all manner of concessions to the Guild. Similarly, if a region has a large number of opium addicts, the rulers know that if the Guild cuts off or even reduces the supply of opium, riots may erupt. More than any other type of commodity, these goods represent the true power of the Guild.

Naturally, the Guild does not just sell addictive drugs and vital medicines — while these two items are responsible for the majority of their drug profits, the Guild also sells a wide variety of recreational drugs and useful medicines. Like any other luxuries, goods such as rasp spider venom, age-staving cordials or ice fern spores are all expensive commodities that can bring in large profits because the wealthy and powerful are eager to gain access to them.

DRUG PRODUCTION

The Guild is the primary seller of a wide variety of rare medicines and recreational drugs, but it only manufactures a few of them. Qat and cocaine are cash crops grown throughout portions of the Scavenger Lands and the East, while opium, tobacco and maiden tea grow all over the world. The Guild is the primary buyer of all of these drugs, but it directly controls only a small portion of their production. The Guild attempts to keep farmers it deals with from selling any of their harvest to the Guild's competitors. However, there are always farmers who sell

directly to local distributors. Fortunately, there are far too many farmers who grow these drugs for any individual or even any local region to be able to seriously damage the Guild's supply of any of these drugs.

Both farmers who grow these drugs and entire nations who sell large amounts of these commodities have attempted to organize with fellow drug producers and demand that the Guild pay higher prices for their goods. The Guild strongly opposes all such attempts, and on several occasions, it has overthrown queens and princes who refused to abandon these policies. The last of these attempts was 17 years ago.

Jas-Kel is a small Southeastern kingdom that was once ruled by Sera Zan, an extremely charismatic Wood-aspected Terrestrial Exalt. Jas-Kel produces large amounts of cocaine, and after some local economic trouble, Sera Zan made alliances with half a dozen other small kingdoms that also produced cocaine. These states attempted to negotiate better terms with the Guild — when the Guild refused its terms, this alliance refused to sell any cocaine to the Guild and, instead, sold its entire crop to independent merchants who traveled throughout the Southeast.

Since this alliance grew almost a fifth of the cocaine purchased by the Guild, its refusal to sell this drug reduced Guild profits. Within six months, a horde of Arczeckhi barbarians attacked the northernmost nations belonging to this alliance. The Guild army offered to help drive off these barbarians in return for the alliance's dissolution. After the Arczeckhi conquered Jas-Kel and tortured Sera Zan to death, the alliance collapsed, and the Guild's troops moved in to restore order. Because the Guild effectively owned the barbarian's well-bribed leaders, the Arczeckhi departed as soon as the Guild's security forces began to advance. Since that time, the nations in this region may have complained about the prices the Guild pays for their crops, but none of the rulers or nobles has dared to offer any serious opposition to the Guild.

The Guild is interested in the well-being of the nations that grow its more valuable or popular drugs. Since the East and the Scavenger Lands are where most drugs are grown, the Guild pays close attention to this region. While Great Forks is extremely stable by virtue of its rule by a triumvirate of powerful gods, many of the Hundred Kingdoms have mortal rulers. Although it rarely sends in its mercenaries to settle civil wars or disputes between these nations, the Guild has spies and operatives who constantly keep track of the situation in this volatile region. When a war erupts, the Guild works to make certain that the conflict does not significantly interfere with agricultural production.

The Guild almost always chooses sides in a civil war and backs the side that seems most amenable to its wishes. While it prefers to avoid the expenses and ill feeling generated by directly using military force, it supplies food, weapons and medicines to the side it backs. On occasion,

it will even loan out or sell elite troops as trainers and commandos and powerful First Age weapons such as light implosion bows. Naturally, the Guild attempts to maintain control over the supply of alchemical reagents that power these weapons and makes certain that their allies do not possess sufficient amounts to stockpile these supplies and use them to support independent policies. Because the Guild worries as much about avoiding later problems as about helping its allies win, it often ends up undersupplying factions involved in lengthy civil wars.

GUILD DRUG PRODUCTION

The Guild actually produces a few of its most expensive and difficult to create drugs. The Guild would love to be the sole producer of age-staving cordials, heroin, seven bounties paste and sweet cordials. However, in a world of immaterial gods and sorcerous spying, it is extremely difficult to keep anything valuable completely secret. Instead, the Guild must be satisfied with being, by far, the largest manufacturer and distributor of these substances. All of these drugs are exceedingly costly, so the Guild keeps careful track of any of these supplies that do not come from it. Except for Dynasts from the Realm, who are protected from the Guild by both treaties and the reluctance of the Guild to attack the Realm, anyone who is manufacturing large amounts of these drugs can expect to face sabotage, blackmail and assassination (see "Dealing with Competition" pp. 66-67). The leaders of the Guild are unwilling to face widespread competition for the sale of these drugs. However, some producers are too small to be worth the trouble to locate, and others are skilled and paranoid enough that the Guild has not yet managed to locate them.

The Guild also vigilantly monitors its own production of these drugs to prevent theft and pilferage. The Guild creates sweet cordials, seven bounties paste, heroin and age-staving cordials in a series of small, well-guarded manufacturing settlements scattered throughout the Threshold. There, a few well-paid alchemists and a host of assistants create these complex formulas from valuable ingredients. The Guild learned long ago that creating these medicines in a single area and then shipping them around the world was both far more expensive and an open invitation to theft. Instead, the Guild ships the various ingredients to the nearest regional manufacturing centers and creates the actual drugs there. Guild guards carefully watch everyone employed at these facilities — any attempt to steal the finished product is punishable by death. To further deter theft, the Guild does not permit workers in these facilities to wear loose or flowing clothes, and the guards search all employees whenever they leave the complex.

The Guild carefully guards shipments of the components that make up these drugs, but thieves and raiders rarely attempt to steal them — without both the other components and the knowledge of how to create the actual

drugs, these ingredients are of little value. However, heroin, age-staving cordials and their other expensive medicines and drugs all make exceedingly tempting targets for thieves. In addition to guarding all such shipments quite heavily, senior officials in the Guild keep the time and nature of these shipments secret from everyone except those Guild members who are actually part of the caravans. Also, if Guild investigators discover that any of its personnel sold or otherwise passed on information about these shipments to thieves, Guild guards torture these traitors to death after first killing their entire families. The profits involved in these drugs are so high that the Guild wishes to convince all potential turncoats of the terrible consequences of betrayal.

COLLECTING WILD DRUG COMPONENTS

Most drugs are ordinary agricultural products grown by farmers. Some, such as opium, can be grown everywhere, but most, such as cocaine, can only be grown in specific areas of Creation. However, collecting drugs that cannot simply be farmed is a far more diverse and difficult process. Almost all substances that cannot be farmed must be collected in various wilderness areas. If the substance is relatively common and easy to acquire, the Guild typically buys it from people in the area where it is found. However, if the substance is rare and difficult or dangerous to obtain, the Guild employs skilled professionals to collect it. The Guild generally pays these professional drug collectors quite well, but it also makes certain that they keep their trade secrets to themselves.

The vine whose sap is used in age-staving cordials only grows in the Far East. However, it is relatively common there, and the Guild purchases it from a variety of barbarian tribes who collect and sell it. Because this medicine is so valuable, a few of these barbarian tribes do little except collect this sap — the Guild effectively owns these tribes. Guild troops help guard these tribes and those portions of the jungles where the barbarians grow the vines under a primitive form of cultivation. When rival barbarian tribes, hungry jungle beasts or Fair Folk raiders threaten either the tribe or the vines, the Guild sends in soldiers or outcastes to protect its interests. The Guild keeps these tribes ignorant and illiterate and discourages all members of these tribes from traveling — at spear point if necessary. The Guild is not about to risk anyone else finding out about its prized jungle-vine plantations.

In contrast, the bile from the rare Tulach fish is one of the ingredients in sweet cordials. Although only tiny amounts are required, it is an essential part of sweet cordials, and the fish can only be captured by skilled divers able to swim down to the bases of various coral reefs found far to the West. The Guild trains and employs these divers and is willing to threaten, blackmail or even kill any divers who attempt to leave the Guild and teach others how to collect these valuable fish.





THE SLAVE PLANTATIONS

The majority of the easily farmed drugs such as qat, tobacco and coca leaves are bought from various nations in the East and the Scavenger Lands, and most opium is purchased from small growers located all over the world. However, the demand for all of these drugs is quite high, and the Guild's leaders know better than to depend solely upon trade with a variety of potentially unstable kingdoms. As a result, the Guild owns land where it grows a portion of the most popular drugs that it sells.

Although the Scavenger Lands are fairly populous, in various sections of the East, there are large stretches of arable land that no one farms. The Guild looks for fertile wild lands located far from any city or town. Many of these regions contain dangers such as gods or Fair Folk who require unusual offerings from mortals tilling their domains. As a result, the Guild can often lease or purchase such land from the local nobles or barbarian queens for very little money. Most Guild lands are located in the East, where they are used to grow additional supplies of all of the popular agricultural drugs. However, opium can be grown almost anywhere, and so, the Guild also owns land in the South and on the coast of the North.

To supply these plantations with labor, the Guild diverts some of its slaves to work these plantations. There are many horrific stories of the conditions in these plantations, but most are untrue. Constantly chaining or beating slaves renders them almost useless for heavy and demanding farm labor. Also, there is little need for security beyond well-trained guards and sturdy barracks that the guards lock at night — most slaves realize that running off into the wilderness typically results in some form of unpleasant death. However, this is not to say that any sane person would ever want to become a slave of the Guild. The work is hard, and these slaves labor until they die — the overseers shift old and infirm slaves to lighter and less demanding work such as packing the drugs for transport. The slaves' only solace is regularly rations of various drugs. On rare occasions, the Guild frees slaves who fight heroically against attacks by Wyld beasts or barbarians or who save their overseers from or warn their overseers about slave uprisings. However, all but a tiny number of slaves who end up on these plantations will work there until they die... and possibly beyond death — a few slave plantations located near shadowlands use the walking dead as workers.

Although they vary somewhat according to local conditions, these plantations are surprisingly uniform. Each one consists of several square miles of cleared land surrounded on all sides by wilderness. Guild caravans stop at the plantation regularly, but the Guild attempts to make certain that these plantations are as isolated

from other traffic as possible — slaves who have no contact with outsiders are far less likely to revolt. Some of these farms are located next to rivers that lead to major waterways, but they are always a good distance from any major ports.

There is one overseer for every dozen or so slaves and a similar number of well-armed guards. The slaves live in crude but sturdy barracks designed to resist all attempts to break free. The overseers lock all the barracks at night. While these barracks will burn if a fire breaks out inside, guards only let slaves out of burning barracks one at a time — at least a few slaves are likely to burn to death in any serious fire. Slaves grow most of their own food, supplemented by supplies brought during the seasonal visits by Guild caravans. Chirurgeons provide crude medical care for the slaves, and overseers dispense justice that ranges from the lash to a week or two hanging in chains to (for the most serious offenses) death.

The overseers and guards have better food and live in sturdy houses built for both comfort and defense. However, these amenities cannot make up for the fact that life on one of these plantations is both isolated and risky. Guild leaders almost never station personnel here for longer than five years, and most personnel leave within three years — this policy also serves to prevent long-term friendships from forming between slaves and Guild personnel. These plantations are also never less than a week's journey from each other to prevent slave revolts from easily spreading.

Although quite rare, slave revolts are always a risk. At least once a decade, a caravan stops at one of the Guild's many hundreds of plantations and finds it deserted except for the bodies of the guards, the overseers and whatever slaves died during the revolt. More often, the guards put down the revolt and execute all slaves who were even peripherally involved.

Also, because of their isolation, bands of ravagers or angry gods can lay waste to such places and kidnap or kill everyone present. In addition, deathknights have occasionally killed the entire population of one of these plantations and then animated the corpses as their followers. Lunars and, more recently, Solar Exalted who have an interest in freeing slaves find that these places make excellent recruitment stations for thousands of desperate and loyal followers. With no one else to turn to for help, the Guild members who run these plantation must either fight whatever threats arise on their own or flee and abandon the slaves to their fate. Because they are few in number and almost never possess more than a handful of effective talismans and one or two minor artifacts, the Guild employee have little chance to defeat any attack by Celestial Exalted or other similarly powerful beings.

Because of the dangers inherent in living on one of these plantations, few Guild members wish to be stationed there for more than a few years. However, the pay is excellent, and the Guild looks quite favorably on anyone who can both increase productivity and prevent troubles at one of these plantations. As a result, these

plantations are popular posts for ambitious or money-hungry young Guild members. However, any older Guild employee who is stationed on one of these plantations is either truly desperate for money or someone who cannot find a posting anywhere else.

THE BEASTS OF RESPLENDENT LIQUIDS

The Guild's slave plantations are only one of the many valuable portions of its drug-production facilities. The Guild owns processing centers for preserving qat leaves, for distilling sweet cordials, for turning coca leaves into rock cocaine and for turning rock cocaine into cocaine. However, the Guild's greatest drug resources are their seven beasts of resplendent liquids. These strange creatures are living relics of the First Age that devour vast amounts of raw opium and excrete high-quality heroin in their urine.

In the First Age, the Exalted realized that producing large amounts of various drugs could easily be a labor and Essence-intensive process. To avoid this problem and make it into something that ordinary mortals could supervise and direct, a group of No Moon Caste Lunar Exalted joined with several Twilight Caste Solar Exalted and a number of dragon kings skilled in manipulating living things. These beings all worked together to create hundreds of different huge, immortal creatures that could perform the processing needed to create the drugs inside their own bodies. Each of these creatures was a stocky, short-tailed lizard a bit more than 20 yards long and standing more than 6 yards at the shoulder. Each creature produces one type of drug as long as it has access to the appropriate raw materials. During the First Age, there were more than five dozen types of these creatures. Each variety produced a single drug that ranged from painkillers such as heroin to medicines such as sweet cordials and potent longevity drugs. Although no one alive today knows what all of the different colors mean, the scales of each sort of beast of production were of a different color. The heroin beasts have reddish ochre scales with small dark yellow spots. In contrast, the Realm's longevity-drug beasts all have royal-blue scales.

Needless to say, the vast majority of these creatures died at the end of the First Age. Most varieties are gone forever, and only one or two members of some types of these creatures survive. The Realm possesses a pair of these beasts that excrete a longevity drug considerably more potent than the age-staving cordials. This drug almost doubles the life spans of both mortals and Terrestrial Exalted. These beasts are housed in the Imperial Palace and are two of the most prized and heavily guarded items on the Blessed Isle. These creatures only produce drugs sufficient to supply 20 percent of the Realm's Terrestrial Exalted. As a result, the Sidereals of the Bronze faction carefully regulate the use of these drugs and keep their existence a secret from all but the most trusted imperial officials. Because almost all of this drug is reserved for the



Dragon-Blooded, less than two dozen of the empire's most valued mortals ever taste the substance.

The Guild possesses seven beasts that produce heroin. Because the heroin they produce is so concentrated and pure, these seven creatures produce sufficient heroin to allow the Guild to regularly supply this drug to almost two million heroin addicts. Each of these creatures must eat almost a ton of raw opium every day to work at full productivity. To reduce the distance heroin must be transported, the Guild stationed these beasts all around the civilized world. The Guild keeps three of its beasts in the fertile and abundant East — each is in a separate compound near the center of the largest of its poppy-growing slave plantations. One is just north of Rubylak, another is 400 miles south of Nexus, and the third is near the Meander River, 100 miles east of Mist Island. It keeps two in the South — one beast is located in the Southeast, inside the lands controlled by Harborhead, and one is in the Southwest, 200 miles south of the Lap. Finally, two are in the North — one is a few hundred miles east of Cherak, and the other is on the coast, 500 miles west of Whitewall.

Except for requiring vast amounts of both fresh water and opium pods, these creatures have few needs, and one or two keepers can do everything necessary to care for one of the great beasts. These magical reptiles have been high on opium for the past 2,000 years and have not moved more than a dozen times during these two millennia. In the absence of exceptional events, the beasts sit with their bellies on the ground dreaming strange reptilian opium dreams.

However, while they appear to be utterly placid and completely immobile, if something interrupts their supply of opium, they are designed to alert their handlers that they are hungry. Their creators assumed that the only reason these beasts would remain unfed was if they required special medical treatments or if their owners were transporting them somewhere. Therefore, their creators also imprinted each beast with an instinct to climb up to its pens where its owner could examine the beast or pack it into a vast shipping crate. This instinct only affects one of these beasts if it goes hungry for more than 36 hours.

As long as its handlers give the beast at least five percent of its normal supply of opium and water (which still involves giving the creature at least 100 pounds of opium a day), the heroin beasts continue to produce heroin — the amount they produce is based solely on how much they are fed. However, if it is given less opium, 24 hours later, it starts making loud but deep cries. These cries, which sound like a combination of a huge lion roaring and an unimaginably vast parrot squawking, begin at about the volume of a person shouting and rise to a volume similar to being a few yards from a great waterfall. The creature takes only eight hours to reach peak volume. At this point, mortals must flee from the volume of sound unless a successful Valor roll is made for them every 10 minutes. Exalts need only flee if this roll is botched. Being within 20 yards of this noise for more than an hour will

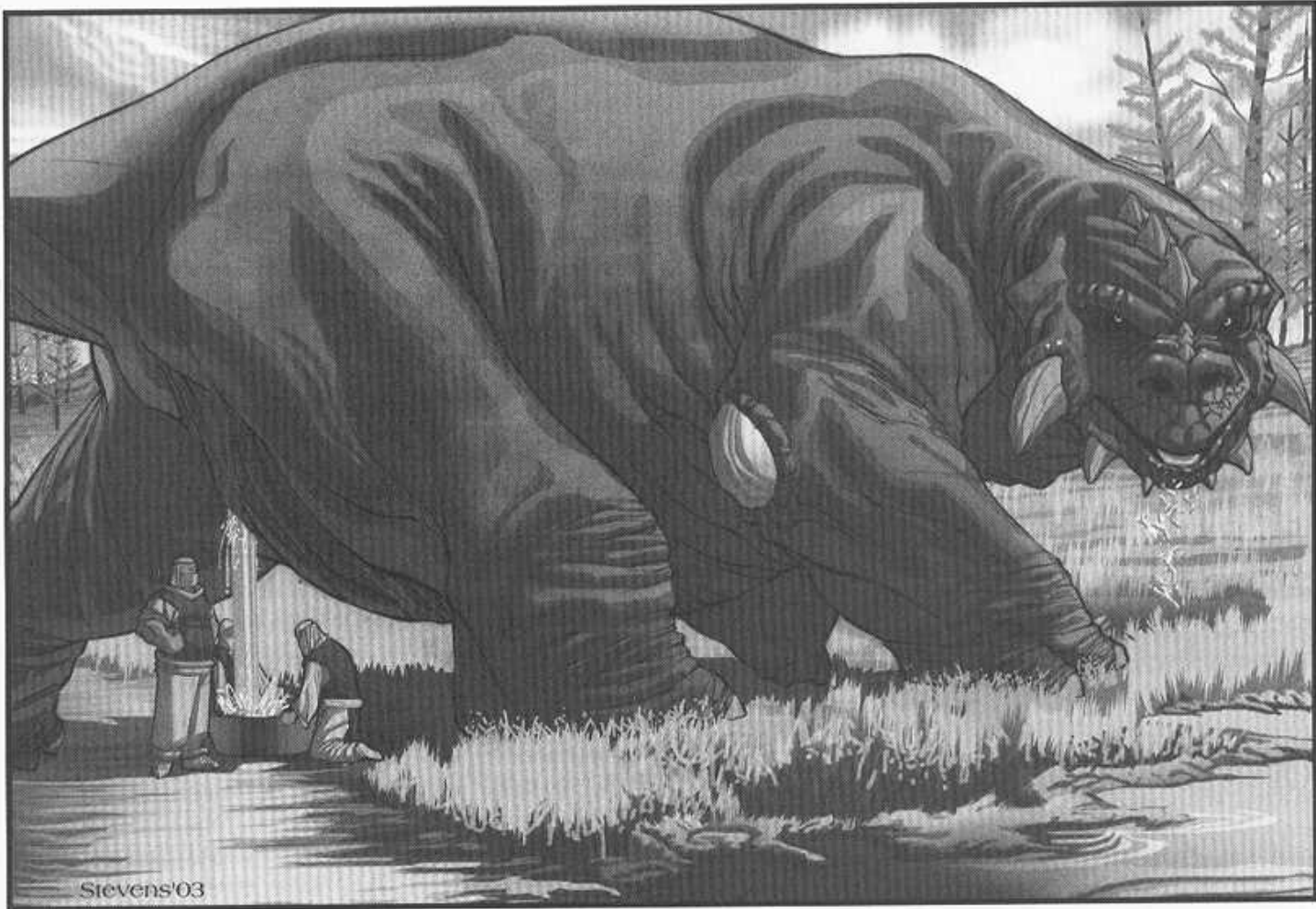
permanently deafen any mortal whose player fails a Stamina + Resistance roll at difficulty 2. An Exalt whose player fails this roll will go deaf for one full day, and then, her hearing will fully recover. Make a new roll every hour.

After the creature cries at peak volume for four hours, it will attempt (while still emitting its alert sounds at full volume) to climb at least 10 yards above the ground. It will only climb on buildings and other structures made by humans or Exalts, it never attempts to climb natural features unless they are in its way. These beasts are as mindless as frogs and cannot even begin to conceptualize that their great weight will crush most structures built during the Age of Sorrows.

If for some reason one of these creatures is in a city or town when it gets the urge to climb, it will attempt to climb upon a house or shop, undoubtedly collapsing the building in the process. At this point, the beast looks for another building to climb, until it either finds a building large and sturdy enough to support its weight or collapses every building in the town. Once it has destroyed all of the buildings, it looks for a road and walks until it finds other buildings it can climb, still emitting its vast and terrible distress calls as it does so.

These creatures move no faster than a mortal walking, but they are both incredibly strong and utterly tireless. If one of these creatures actually manages to find a high place that can support its weight, it will cease crying, lie down and go into a deep stasis where it needs neither to eat nor drink. It can remain in this state for many centuries. One of these beasts can be brought out of this state either by placing 10 or more pounds of opium in its mouth or by moving it off of the high place it came to rest on. If it is moved without being fed, it will immediately wake up, begin to cry at top volume and attempt to climb back to where it was resting.

The Guild originally had eight of these beasts, a third one was in the South, near Chiaroscuro. However, 200 years ago, thieves stole this creature. This act is one of the seven truly legendary thefts known to the high-ranking members of the Guild. No one is entirely certain how the thieves managed to steal such a huge creature, and no one has found this beast in the intervening two centuries. However, the Guild is certain that it still exists, not only because these beasts are almost impossible to kill, but also because in the South and the Southern portions of the West, a few non-Guild sources sell heroin. Since there is too much heroin for it to have been stolen from the Guild and it is too cheap to be a part of the small amounts of extremely expensive heroin produced by skilled alchemists, the stolen beast must still be in use. The Guild continues to offer a large reward to anyone who can provide information that leads to the recapture of this creature (this reward is sufficient to give Resources 4 to two or three people or 3 dots of Resources for up to two dozen people).



SOAK
 12B
 10L
 30

Thieves working for the Perfect of Paragon stole this beast in cooperation with a local crime syndicate based in Chiaroscuro. The reason the Guild cannot find the beast is that it is carefully guarded by citizens of Paragon who all know they will die an agonizing death if they ever reveal that they know anything about this creature. The beast is currently located in a large cave 300 miles south of Paragon. The Perfect's assassins will also relentlessly hunt anyone who discovers the location of this creature.

SECURITY ON THE BEASTS OF RESPLENDENT LIQUIDS

The Guild realizes that its seven remaining beasts of resplendent liquids are utterly irreplaceable resources. Each of the beasts is kept in a highly guarded compound located at least five days journey from any cities or towns. Each compound is located very near one of the Guild's major centers for opium refining and on one of the major Guild trade routes. The beasts receive daily shipments of opium carried by Guild caravans. As was stated above, they can each eat up to a ton of raw opium a day. Every day that it eats its fill of opium, a beast produces enough urine to create over 100,000 doses of heroin.

Less than two dozen people actually have direct access to each beast. The beasts are each kept in well-fortified wooden stockades made from hardwood logs at least six feet in diameter (Soak: 12B/10L, 30 levels of damage are neces-

sary to create a hole large enough for one character to pass through). Each stockade is circular and 40 yards in diameter. Twice a day, guards open these well-fortified gates and porters carry in more opium and wheel out the huge vats of urine to be dried and packaged. Ten elite troops guard these gates, and another 10 walk the external perimeter of the stockade at all times. Whenever the gates open, half a dozen additional guards escort the opium to the gates of the stockade, and half a dozen other guards escort the urine to the drying plant. Finally, while most of the individuals given access to the beasts are skilled animal handlers, there are also three highly trained guards inside the compound at all times. Guild shamans and magicians also bargained with elementals (generally either a trio of wood spiders or a single garda bird) to help guard each beast.

Everyone who works with the beasts, from the people who carry food to those who wheel off the huge vats of heroin-rich urine, is a highly trusted employee who has worked for the Guild for at least five years. The three senior animal-handling personnel actually live inside the compound and keep careful track of everyone who enters or leaves this compound. The production stations where these compounds are located are not as secure, but the Guild endeavors to keep the location of its seven beasts highly secret, which is only possible because the Guild placed them all far from any city. Also, there are several dozen guards charged with protecting the entire station

Creature	Physical Att. Str/Dex/Sta	Willpower	Health Levels	Attack Spd/Acc/Dmg	Dodge/Soak	Abilities
Beast of Resplendent Liquid	15/2/12	2	-0x10/-1x4/ -2x4/-4x2/1	Bite: 3/4/16L	0/14L/20B	Brawl 1

and even more guarding the heroin drying plant and the heroin supplies. Since stealing a vast fortune in pure heroin is far easier than stealing one of the beasts of resplendent liquids, the Guild ships out heroin to various regional distribution centers every day, so that these isolated production stations do not contain temptingly large stockpiles of the drug.

AGRICULTURALLY PRODUCED DRUGS

Although many tales are told of exotic drugs and the many dangers faced and unusual methods employed to obtain them, the vast majority of all drugs are grown in fields and then subjected to various amounts of processing. The following explains how the most common agricultural drugs are both cultivated and/or prepared.

OPIUM CULTIVATION

Opium is the most common drug sold by the Guild and is worth examining in greatest detail. In contrast to the way the Guild deals with expensive, difficult-to-create drugs such as sweet cordials, most opium is grown by farmers, who sell the majority of the crop directly to the Guild. Opium poppies can be grown almost anywhere in the world, but they thrive in warm tropical and semitropical lands with mild winters. Because opium poppies are both abundant and easy to grow, many farmers use opium as a secondary cash crop. These farmers simply plant the poppies, grow their other crops and only worry about the poppies once they are in bloom.

A day or two after the poppies bloom, the farmers pluck off the flower petals and use small short-bladed sickles to cut several long shallow slits in the thumb-sized pod. Over the course of several hours, the cuts in the pods ooze a sticky sap. When this sap has dried to a gummy consistency, the farmers come back and collect it in large bags or buckets. Farmers often cut the pods in the evening and harvest the sap the next morning. The raw opium starts out as a thin white liquid but dries on the pod into a thick, wet, dark-brown gum. After collecting the opium gum, farmers cut the pods again to collect more. Each pod can be cut as many as three or four times. Although growing opium is very easy, harvesting it is not. A single farmer can rarely harvest more than a pound of opium a day. Many dozens of plants are required to produce a single pound of opium, and it takes a square mile of land planted thickly with opium poppies to produce a ton of opium. As a result, opium cultivation supplies these farmers with a steady source of supplemental income, but they never become rich. However, all opium farmers are aware that

the Guild will always be interested in purchasing more opium, so they know that they will always have a ready market for this crop.

Once the farmers sell the raw opium to the Guild, porters take the raw gum to the local processing plant. Here, as guards watch carefully for any sign of theft, workers carry the sacks of opium gum into large warehouses. Porters drop the raw opium into huge storage pits, and then, on hot, sunny days, the tar-like black opium is gathered up from these pits and carried in buckets out to wide flat ceramic or metal trays exposed to the full heat of the sun.

Workers with long shovels constantly stir the opium in these trays to force it to dry evenly. After three or four weeks in the hot sun (or, in the winter months, in large rooms heated by great fires), the vast majority of the water has evaporated, and the opium has become a coal-black, stiff, putty-like substance. The opium is now ready for either transport or smoking. Drying opium is hot back-breaking labor, and workers can only tend a tray that holds as much as they weigh. As a result, production plants that deliver many tons of opium must employ hundred of workers. The Guild primarily uses slaves to dry the opium, but it also hires poor locals and pays them both cash and a tiny portion of each pan that they dry.

COCAINE PRODUCTION

Cocaine is one of the Guild's most popular drugs. Coca leaves are easy to grow and harvest but difficult to prepare. Unfortunately, coca only grows in the warm wet lands of the Southern portion of the East. It will only grow at altitudes between 1,500 and 6,000 feet — unlike opium, the regions that grow coca are relatively small and localized. All of the cocaine found in the world grows in these Eastern and Southeastern plantations. Part of the reason cocaine is more expensive than opium is that the Guild must ship all of its cocaine from the East and the Southeast — cocaine shipped to the North or the West must travel truly vast distances before it arrives at its destination.

Coca plants are tall bushes that can grow as high as 18 feet, when wild. However, farmers rarely allow cultivated coca to grow taller than six feet. As many as three times a year, coca farmers come and harvest most of the plant's leaves. These leaves can be chewed without further processing, but they are bulky and difficult to transport. The Guild purchases the majority of all coca leaves sold. Although many alchemists know how to produce unstable rock cocaine, the Guild has a near monopoly on the secret of processing these leaves into ordinary cocaine.

To produce rock cocaine, workers place coca leaves in great vats full of a weak acid, such as vinegar or wood ash. Laborers stomp and press the leaves to squeeze out their juices. The resulting liquid is treated with alcohol to cause the cocaine to crystallize out. These crystals are rock cocaine. The Guild rarely stops with rock cocaine because it is both less stable and far too destructive to its users. Instead, Guild alchemists dissolve these white crystals in various chemicals and add other reagents to cause the drug to precipitate out as pure cocaine. The only real difference between rock cocaine and ordinary cocaine is that rock cocaine does not dissolve in water and so it can only be smoked.

Rock cocaine is very easy to create, and this process uses only widely available ingredients. However, the process needed to transform rock cocaine into ordinary cocaine requires specialized chemicals and techniques. Coca leaves are normally transformed into rock cocaine at small local processing stations. Rock cocaine is far less bulky than dried coca leaves — the Guild ships most of its rock cocaine to one of the large nearby cities, including Cho-Holuth, Meresh and Marita. Here, Guild alchemists convert rock cocaine into ordinary cocaine, unless the Guild requires a supply of rock cocaine for economic warfare (see p. 62).

OTHER AGRICULTURAL DRUGS

Maiden tea and qat are both only grown in the East, while tobacco and marijuana are weed-like plants that can easily grow almost everywhere. All four plants are extremely easy to grow, and a single farmer can produce large quantities of the drug. As a result, all three of these drugs are primarily grown by farmers, who grow these drugs as their main crop. Maiden tea and marijuana only need to be harvested, dried and then sold to the Guild for shipment. Qat is equally easy to collect, but if it wishes to ship the drug long distances, the Guild must coat the qat with a gum-like sap that it collects or buys from barbarians located in the Far Southeast. However, none of these drugs require either complex processing or rare and expensive ingredients.

DRUG SHIPMENTS

Talking about drug shipments as a general category is no more useful than talking about metal shipments as a category — just as shipping gold ingots is different from shipping pig iron, shipping heroin is different from shipping marijuana. Qat, coca leaves, marijuana and tobacco are relatively inexpensive drugs that users consume in relatively large quantities. The Guild loads whole caravans of yeddim with bales of qat or maiden tea and completely fills the holds of large ships with tobacco. While considerably more valuable than a bushel of grain, stealing a cask of marijuana buds is not going to make anyone rich for life, no matter how good they are. Well-organized pirates and bandits sometimes raid ships carrying these drugs, but they are rarely anyone's first choice in items to steal.

In contrast, because so little is needed for each dose, heroin, cocaine and, to a lesser extent, opium are all

wonderfully compact forms of wealth. Age-staving cordials, seven bounties paste and sweet cordials are all also exceedingly valuable. Much like raw gemstones and precious metals, a single stolen crate or yeddim-load of one of the most valuable drugs could transform a small band of thieves from ragged beggars to hedge nobles eating roast meat off of silver plates. The risk of theft is far greater with the more expensive drugs, as is causal pilferage — an individual could carry away enough of these drugs under her cloak to live well for quite a while.

Despite many tall tales and ill-written plays, the Guild does not simply store such valuable commodities in large, poorly guarded warehouses. Guild factors keep the most valuable drugs in great safes guarded by talismans, soldiers, heavy locks and, occasionally, simple but lethal traps. Except for opium, which is the least expensive of the high-value drugs, the Guild does not transport any of its more valuable or compact drugs in large shipments — instead, these drugs form small portions of larger loads of diverse goods.

In particularly dangerous and lawless regions, such as the Far North, where both bandits and Wyld barbarians are far too common, caravaneers often pack these easily concealed valuables inside bales of grain or dried fruit or store them in concealed compartments in the bottom of merchant ships. Many of the best private smugglers are cargo masters who once worked with the Guild and learned the secrets of keeping extremely valuable goods both safe and well hidden from thieves and tax assessors.

The Guild ships opium as tough, black tar-like blocks packed inside burlap or canvas bags the size of an adolescent's torso. When stored like this, opium is resistant to water, cold and all but the most extreme heat. Each bag contains enough opium for several thousand doses of the drug. The Guild transports cocaine in both its raw state, as rock cocaine, and as ordinary cocaine. Rock cocaine is shipped as fist to head-sized chunks placed together in the same types of bags used to transport opium.

Cocaine, heroin and age-staving cordial powder are all extremely stable but water-soluble powders. The Guild ships these drugs in tightly woven canvas bags stored in torso-sized hardwood boxes that are sealed and made watertight with wax or pitch. The Guild finds it easiest to simply ship qat, maiden tea and tobacco as dried leaves packed in these same boxes, and ships marijuana buds in watertight wooden casks. Sweet cordials are shipped in narrow, man-sized ceramic amphorae, and seven bounties paste is shipped as a soft paste packed into wide, flat wooden trays sealed with wax and pitch.

The Guild packages all of its drugs in well-guarded warehouses staffed by trusted employees. The potential for losses due to pilferage is quite high, especially when packaging expensive drugs such as sweet cordials or seven bounties paste. The Guild normally does not divide up any drugs into individual doses or package the drugs for sale until they have arrived at the city or Guild trading post





where the Guild actually plans to sell the drugs to customers. In places where the Guild instead sells drugs to local distributors, the Guild representatives normally peddle these drugs by the bag or box and leave it to the distributor to divide up and package the drugs.

The way in which the Guild packages drugs for sale depends upon both the form these drugs are in and their cost. The Guild sells inexpensive drugs such as rock cocaine and opium as several small rock-like crystals or wads of dark gum wrapped in twists of cheap paper. Most merchants also sell dried leaves such as tobacco, qat, marijuana and maiden tea in the same fashion, although sellers occasionally package maiden tea in cheaply made jars made from bark or horn — members of the upper classes who wish to use maiden tea generally prefer the fancier containers.

In most places, merchants sell both heroin and cocaine as powders packaged in small inexpensively made tubes of wood or tin. Depending on the seller, these tubes hold between a half-dozen to a dozen doses. Most buyers purchase these drugs in such quantities, and apothecaries and drug parlors that sell the drugs in bulk prefer to sell multiple doses at once. However, drug parlors that dispense drugs for use on the premises normally purchase the drugs by the bag or the box, since they are going to divide them up into individual doses for sale at higher prices. Similarly, many extremely small-scale peddlers who also sell snacks and herbal medicines of dubious effectiveness

purchase the less expensive drugs in units of a dozen doses and resell them by the dose in tiny twists of paper or leaves. Such peddlers make money by almost doubling the price of these doses — a poor laborer might not be able to afford a dozen doses of opium, but she may be able to afford one even without a bulk discount.

Merchants sell the most expensive drugs such as sweet cordials, age-staving cordials, ghost flower, ice fern spools, rasp spider venom and seven bounties paste by the individual dose. Because anyone purchasing such drugs or medicines is a person of wealth and distinction, sellers package these drugs in inexpensively decorated glass vials or small chased tins of brass or even silver. The cost of these tins is only a small fraction of the cost of the drugs, and few of the wealthy are willing to buy potent medicines packaged like the blackish opium gum sold to dock workers.

In every city, there are beggars and scavengers who extract these empty tins from the garbage middens of the wealthy. These scavengers scrape or boil the tiny drug remnants out of the containers and combine these dregs to either use or sell to disreputable apothecaries and drug parlors. The only times this does not occur is when an aristocrat's own servants collect these empty containers for the same purpose. A few of the most decadent nobles add small amounts of poisons or other impurities to the dregs of their drugs to ensure that anyone who makes use of such remnants greatly regrets the experience.

SUPERNATURAL TRANSPORT

Like most residents of the Threshold, many Guild members honor and worship the local gods and elementals. Mostly, this worship is designed to placate potentially hostile spirits. However, the Guild caravan leaders have also managed to obtain a number of exceedingly valuable services from certain gods. Making the proper offerings to certain road spirits (see *Games of Divinity*, pp. 39-40) allows caravans to double their normal movement rates while on roads controlled by the spirits. Making offerings to Burning Feather, Lady of Intoxicants, (see *Games of Divinity*, pp. 28-29) sometimes enables Guild members to instantly send messages to factors throughout Creation about local drug shortages or surpluses. Performing similar offerings to other powerful spirits can allow the Guild to send small shipments of drugs thousands of miles in a few minutes. While all such supernatural favors are infrequent at best, even sporadic miracles can be exceedingly useful.

Although none of the gods the Guild regularly deals with are powerful enough to transport an entire caravan or even a single merchant ship across long distances, even a single pack horse or a full ox-cart full of drugs such as sweet cordials, seven bounties paste, heroin, opium or cocaine can carry many thousands of doses. The price exacted by the spirits providing these Charms can be quite high. However, the chance to make huge profits by taking advantage of a local shortage can more than offset these costs.

Although they cannot equal the supernatural prowess of the more powerful gods and elementals, the Dragon-Blooded can also use their Charms and spells to aid in both transportation and communication. Unlike the Dynasts of the Realm, who frequently bully elementals into doing their bidding, the Guild only makes use of such services when there is great need. Although its membership includes a few outcaste Dragon-Blooded sorcerers, the Guild does not wish to become too dependent upon their services, and these Exalts are also too few to make a major impact on Guild operations. As a result, the majority of the time the Guild uses no magic other than talismans and minor offering to lesser spirits.

However, the drug trade specifically benefits from the aid of various spirits because most senior Guild drug merchants regularly make large offerings to Burning Feather. Although almost no Guild leaders involved in the drug trade sample their own drugs, they do everything from requiring addicts in some Guild-run opium dens to pray to Burning Feather before they can purchase opium to offering minor artifacts to her.

Because of the Guild's central role in producing and selling all manner of drugs throughout the world, Burning Feather has a loose alliance with the organization and occasionally provides minor aid to Guild drug merchants and helps convince other spirits to aid the Guild. She knows that her continued power depends upon the Guild's continued success in selling drugs. No one outside the Guild knows the specifics of this unofficial patronship, but

several of the Sidereals and Dynasts who control the Realm know that she helps the Guild sell drugs.

SELLING DRUGS


Recreational drugs, especially addictive recreational drugs, are remarkably easy to sell to regular users. Addicts need their fix, and anyone who regularly uses qat or marijuana to make it through the day will almost always pay the silver penny or two necessary to get a weeks' bag of his favorite drug. However, many of these drugs, especially the addictive ones, ruin users' lives, shorten their life spans and devour most of their money. As a result, persuading people who don't take these drugs to become users or, more preferably, addicts can be a somewhat challenging task. In a city where it is obvious that cocaine and opium addicts are pathetic wretches who almost everyone holds in contempt, convincing someone to join their number is not easy.

The Guild has come up with several successful strategies to create new addicts. Most focus on the young — since most addicts never permanently overcome their addictions, a young addict is going to be paying the Guild for drugs for many decades. The Guild regularly pays messengers and the other mostly young casual laborers that it employs at least partly in opium or cocaine. Most of these youths sell these drugs to addicts and drug parlors, but some are curious and try a dose. While many never try another, the quick joy these drugs produce tempts some to try the drugs again. With cheap, regular access to these drugs, it is relatively easy for one of these young laborers to become an addict, especially if he begins buying more of these drugs from his fellow youths. Also, Guild factors instruct both their own merchants and local retailers to give discounts to anyone unfamiliar with their drugs. Some taverns even go so far as to include a free pipe of opium with the patron's first drink on certain holidays. Owners often give regular customers at drug parlors discounts for bringing in new customers. This practice is but one of many reasons that long-term opium, heroin and cocaine addicts have few friends who are not themselves addicts — everyone else long ago grew tired of the addict attempting to get cheaper drugs by persuading them to try some.

Another way the Guild gets new customers earns it both praise and hatred. The Guild normally gives a discount on opium and heroin to surgeons. Since both of these drugs are excellent painkillers, they are invaluable for the treatment of most injuries. Almost everyone in pain, especially if their pain is at all prolonged, has said at least a few heartfelt prayers to the goddess Burning Feather for the wondrous surcease that her opium provides. Healers and their patients find no fault with the Guild's generosity, but some realize that greed as much as altruism is behind this practice.

Anyone who ends up taking large amounts of opium or heroin for pain for more than a few weeks usually ends up addicted. Patients who recover usually become long-term addicts. The Guild provides a range of services and





incentives to surgeons who prescribe opium, cocaine and heroin to patients more freely than is perhaps strictly necessary. Many surgeons refuse to needlessly promote the use of these drugs, but enough do that the Guild finds the practice quite profitable. Most Guild factors also arrange to provide small amounts of cheap or even free opium and rock cocaine to hospices that care for the dying. This small charity may not make the Guild any money, but it does help quiet many of its more vocal opponents.

SELLING MEDICINES

Selling medicines such as sweet cordials or age-staving cordials is far easier. Everyone instantly realizes the benefits of these wonders and is willing to pay for the privilege of having access to them. Many women would kill for access to maiden tea, and kingdoms have fallen over questions of access to age-staving cordials or seven bounties paste. Everyone who needs these drugs will pay whatever they can conceivably afford. As a result, the cost of these drugs bears little relation to the expense of either their ingredients or their production. Instead, the Guild simply charges a price that will maximize its profits. As a result, the only question the Guild has is how to price these commodities. In reality, sweet cordials cost no more to produce than seven bounties paste. However, illnesses are far more common than the types of serious injuries that require sweet cordials — the market for seven bounties paste is larger, and so, they sell it more cheaply.

The only other factor is scarcity. While maiden tea is quite abundant in the East and is not difficult to grow elsewhere, age-staving cordials are made by combining a rare jungle plant and an equally rare clam, while both seven bounties paste and sweet cordials require several rare and unusual ingredients to produce. As a result, the Guild cannot provide enough of these three drugs to supply everyone who needs or wants them. Instead, senior Guild members decide how much to charge for these drugs based upon supply and demand.

The Guild typically raises the price of seven bounties paste during local plagues. However, in many cases, prices increase simply because there are local shortages of the drug. Foolish and greedy Guild factors used to raise the price of this remedy drastically during plagues. Unfortunately, on several occasions, the desperate populace focused its fear and anger on the Guild, killed all local Guild personnel and raided its storehouses. Although, in theory, the Guild has no problem profiting from local disasters, its leaders learned long ago that if they use the Guild's vast economic power incorrectly, they could call down upon themselves the murderous wrath of angry mobs with nothing to lose. Today, the price of seven bounties paste can go quite high during local epidemics. However, all Guild factors are forbidden from inflating the prices of drugs more than threefold — prices higher than this are too likely to create a level of resentment that can cause riots.

Of course, plagues also provide yet another opportunity for the Guild to use its economic power as a tool to aid its political ends. States are almost always in turmoil during plagues, and the Guild frequently peddles its medicines in regions held by the side it favors in a civil war or palace dispute. Even simply reducing or raising the prices of medicines during an epidemic can shift the course of a civil war or cement an alliance between the Guild and some local government. If the side the Guild backs loses the war, the Guild has gained another enemy. However, the Guild is highly skilled at economic warfare, and between bribes of valuable medicines and threats of embargoes, only the bravest or most fanatical leaders remain unwilling to deal with the Guild.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN DRUG SALES

The world of the Age of Sorrows is exceedingly diverse, and the drug trade varies greatly by region.

THE REALM

The Guild sells large amounts of medicines such as seven bounties paste, sweet cordials, maiden tea and age-staving cordials to House Cynis. The members of this house then resell these drugs inside the Realm. The Dynasts also permit Cynis-sponsored merchants to sell mild euphorics and stimulants such as qat, marijuana and tobacco. However, highly potent or addictive drugs such as cocaine, opium and heroin are all strictly forbidden, and supernatural drugs such as bright morning (see *Scavenger Sons*, pp. 32-3), ice fern spores, rasp spider venom or ghost flower can only be sold to Dragon-Blooded. Anyone convicted of selling such drugs illegally is enslaved, and anyone taking these drugs illegally is whipped. All imperial citizens and everyone who trades there knows of these laws. However, the Realm's rules on drugs are actually considerably more complex.

Naturally, the Realm wishes to avoid the majority of its citizens becoming stuporous addicts whose only goal is to find some way to obtain their next fix. However, the Dynasts also use the fact that these drugs are illegal as a way to both enrich their coffers and to control the populace, which is why the Realm forbids any drugs that allow mortals to perform feats reserved for the Dragon-Blooded. Nevertheless, there is a high demand for many illegal drugs at all levels of society — wealthy patricians can evade the law fairly easily, and small amounts of cocaine and heroin are a feature at many of the wilder parties held by the rich.

However, the lower and middle classes have a far more difficult time obtaining illegal intoxicants. In the Realm, a large number of small-scale competing criminal syndicates smuggle in various illegal drugs and sell them to anyone who can meet their prices. The Realm knows a great deal about these syndicates and carefully monitors their activities though the use of Charms, spies and paid informants. The Dynasts make certain that the various

syndicates remain small and antagonistic — they do not want any of these groups to grow powerful enough to provide a threat to the power of the imperial houses.

As a result, the Dynasts put a stop to any attempts at mergers or long-term alliances between criminal syndicates by arresting and enslaving everyone involved in these efforts. However, the Dynasts have no desire to completely wipe out these syndicates. The leaders of all of the local drug syndicates regularly pay large bribes to the Dynasts, providing a significant source of unreported income to the coffers of the Dragon-Blooded who help police the Realm's drug trade. Also, the drug syndicates offer a relatively harmless place for highly ambitious and amoral mortals to expend their energy — the Dynasts would far rather have these people peddling intoxicants to shop keepers than engaged in activities that might actually threaten the safety and stability of the Realm.

The leaders of the Guild are far from happy about the loss of a potential market as large and prosperous as the Realm. However, in return for its agreement to severely limit drug sales on the Blessed Isle, the Realm has granted the Guild an exclusive monopoly on medicine sales to House Cynis and on opium sales to the rich agricultural states of the Northern coast. Also, the Dynasts have only prohibited the legal sale of addictive drugs — naturally, the various criminal syndicates that sell opium, cocaine and heroin in the Realm all purchase their drugs from the Guild. To avoid the Realm's wrath, the Guild honors its agreement to sell only a limited amount of these drugs in the Realm, but it charges high prices for those that it does sell and makes a very nice profit on this endeavor.

THE THRESHOLD


Because it can only sell small amounts of addictive drugs in the Realm, the Guild makes the vast majority of its drug sales in the Threshold. Although selling drugs in the Threshold is much like selling any other commodity, sales in the Realm-dominated Northern coast and in the Guild-run border stations are both sufficiently different to be worth special mention.

THE NORTHERN COAST

Although all of the Guild's recreational drugs are forbidden in the Realm, their sale is both legal and encouraged in the agriculturally rich states of the Northern coast. In Cherek and the other cities and farming villas of this highly productive land, the Dragon-Blooded and other wealthy landowners issue the agricultural serfs small daily rations of qat and opium and often reward especially bright or innovative serfs with both cocaine and additional supplies of opium. The landowners are well aware of the problems that drug use on such a massive scale causes and know full well that



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agricultural productivity would rise by more than a tenth if the serfs were not using these drugs almost constantly. However, these same landowners have also seen the massive peasant revolts that occurred in the past and know that a docile populace that eagerly awaits its next dose of various drugs is worth almost any reasonable drop in productivity. Also, the fact that the landowners are the ones who control the supply of drugs means that they can keep productivity relatively high by cutting the drug supply if productivity falls. To maintain a steady supply of opium, the serfs must remain functional.

The rulers of these states wish for the agricultural serfs to spend their meager amounts of free time in a drug-induced stupor rather than risk having the serfs plotting against their powerful masters. Naturally, the Guild supplies all of these drugs. The rulers of these Northern states are the Guild's biggest customers, and every one of the Guild's caravans and round-bodied merchant ships that arrives at Cherak carries a large shipment of qat, cocaine and opium. These drug shipments are part of the complex agreement the Guild has with the Realm. In return for not contesting the Realm's control of what drugs it permits inside its borders, House Cynis granted the Guild a complete monopoly on drug supplies to the Northern coastal states and makes certain that the land owners in these states do not buy their drugs from anyone else. However, opium sales in the cities are extremely limited — although the Dragon-Blooded land owners want their serfs to be helpless drug addicts, the mortal rulers have no desire to have the skilled workers and bureaucrats that live in the cities to become similarly useless.

BORDER STATIONS

Although some tyrants are overjoyed with the idea that their populace mostly consists of docile drug addicts, the rulers of most nations wish to avoid the many problems that occur when drugged citizens stumble mindlessly through their jobs and spend most of their income buying yet more foreign-grown drugs from the Guild. Since it is possible for the upper ranks of society to obtain alternate (if inferior and more expensive) sources of age-staving cordials, sweet cordials and other valuable medicines, a few nations simply refuse to accept any of the Guild's drugs. Others, such as Gem, are important enough trading partners that they can obtain promises that the Guild will not sell addictive drugs within their boundaries. More accurately, the Guild promises not to sell such drugs to anyone except criminals and the wealthy.

However, unlike the Realm, almost none of these nations are powerful enough to convince the Guild to actually limit the drugs they sell to the nation's citizens. The Guild's most common solution to selling drugs to such nations is setting up border stations — commerce stations located just outside of the borders of Threshold kingdoms that prohibit drug sales. Located in nations that have no laws against such commodities or in wilderness areas where no one can effectively police them, these border

stations are some of the Guild's most profitable operations. The Guild typically maintains a dozen or more border stations around the borders of prosperous nations that forbid drug sales. Here, the Guild sells its drugs directly to middle men and local distributors, as well as to local users who live near the station.

Border stations begin as small frontier outposts that sell all manner of drugs, as well as food and supplies for patrons who have traveled long distances to purchase these drugs. Most stations also contain an inn where weary patrons can spend the night before returning home. Most of those who come to these border stations are local distributors who make a living reselling these goods within their own countries, believing the large profits they make offset the dangers of selling these illegal commodities. These distributors normally mark up the prices of most drugs by a factor of 10 or more. As a result, many of the patrons of the border stations are citizens who live just across the border. These individuals simply walk or ride out to the stations and buy their drugs for far less than they could pay for them at home. So long as these citizens only purchase drugs for their own use, the jealous distributors rarely care.

In time, successful border stations frequently grow into actual towns that serve as trading posts for all manner of foreign goods — traders from all over the nearby state come to buy and sell a wide variety of goods. In many cases, drugs become only one of the many commodities bought and sold there. Aj-Aran, located just across the western border of the Varang City-States started out as a border station two centuries ago. Today, it is a thriving town of almost 10,000 where traders from all over the South come to buy Varang goods without having to actually deal with the restrictive and highly constrained customs faced by anyone who actually lives and trades within the Varang cities. The Guild still sells drugs in Aj-Aran, but it is not one of the major commodities, and few remember that this town started out as a border station where Varang drug users came to purchase their supplies.

Other border stations specialize — some become expanding dens of vice and crime, where criminals come to fence their loot and jaded visitors sample expensive drugs, exotic prostitutes, high-stakes gambling and a host of less savory entertainments. Protected by a good-sized garrison of Guild militia from both local officials who wish to shut them down and bandits who wish to steal their profits, these border stations are widely hated — but are also exceedingly popular and profitable. A few of these places have grown into small towns devoted solely to vice.

One of these towns is a vile pit popularly known as Scab. Located just to the south of the Realm-controlled city of Greyfalls, Scab is a thriving, if dangerous and ugly, town of almost 5,000 hearty and amoral souls. The Guild garrison there works to prevent open murder and theft and protects the lives and property of Guild personnel and the town's wealthier customers. However, the garrison does not concern itself with lesser matters such as the capture

and enslavement of the poor or robberies that happen behind closed doors — so long as no one important is robbed. Except for the well-guarded Guild personnel, the only long-term residents are either those on the run from multiple nearby states or the well-protected representatives of various local organized-crime syndicates.

However, some border stations avoid this fate and, instead, become places of surprising refinement that cater to an exclusive clientele. With the dangerous but enticing carnal delights of Nexus located only a few hundred miles to the East, the Guild knew that any border station they located near Lookshy would have to possess a somewhat different character. The small resort town of Centak, located just to the north of the lands controlled by Lookshy is an exclusive resort used by the more open-minded of Lookshy's Dragon-Blooded and by wealthy mortals seeking unusual forms of entertainment. In addition to discretely selling drugs to illegal distributors from Lookshy, the merchants of Centak sell both the finest drugs and the best medicines to the mortals and Dragon-Blooded who actually visit Centak. Dragon-Blooded gain access to the best high-quality longevity drugs and powerful healing artifacts that the Guild has smuggled out of the Realm, and mortals partake of the finest medicines and intoxicants the Guild has access to. In addition, skilled surgeons working for the Guild attempt to treat all of the visitors' ills. Also, Centak offers extremely high stakes gambling, where Dragon-Blooded have been known to wager everything from lavish villas to (on rare occasions) jade warstriders. Add in the finest entertainers, highly skilled prostitutes and discrete but ever-present guards who keep anything from troubling paying patrons, and visitors from Lookshy can look forward to a thoroughly enjoyable stay. Of course, the joys offered in Centak are one of the primary reasons that Lookshy's Dragon-Blooded rulers have not attempted to shut it down as a way to stop the drug trade that originates there.

While the rulers of some nations object to the Guild placing border stations nearby, other princes and queens find this arrangement perfectly equitable. Where drugs are illegal, prices are higher, and few of the poor can afford them. Instead, drugs are primarily used by members of the middle and upper classes and are, at best, infrequent treats for the poor. Both the cost of the drugs and the fact that their use must be hidden help to limit their negative effects on the populace. Also, most of those who sell these drugs are quite willing to supply regular bribes to various officials. Such payments provide a useful source of income for the guards and militias of these kingdoms.

DRUGS SALES IN THE REST OF THE THRESHOLD

Although the process of selling drugs is fairly similar throughout the Threshold, sales tactics are very different in nations where drugs are legal and where they are not.

DRUG SALES IN REGIONS WHERE THEY ARE FORBIDDEN

As anyone in the Age of Sorrows can tell you, vice is impossible to forbid. Even the Perfect of Paragon does not utterly forbid his people access to recreational drugs, lest he watch much of his population writhing in the pain of their transgressions every night. Everyone knows that making various recreational drugs illegal merely makes them more expensive and difficult to acquire, not less popular. Of course, as was mentioned above, this is sufficient for the rulers of many states.

Only a few states ruled by fanatics or fools attempt to forbid drugs that grow abundantly within their boundaries — few sovereigns in the coastal sections of the East or in the Scavenger Lands attempt to forbid their populace from using qat or marijuana, and alcohol is accepted almost everywhere. However, imported drugs are a drain on both wealth and productivity and so are forbidden far more often. Where they are illegal, these drugs are mostly used by rebellious youths, criminals and members of the middle and upper classes. Although many of the poorer residents of such states have tried drugs such as cocaine or opium, few can afford to be regular users.

Dangerous criminals are the primary drug sellers in nations where drug sales are illegal. These individuals freely maim or kill any potential competitors or anyone who threatens to turn them in. Such people often cut their drugs with useless or even dangerous substances ranging from salt and culinary herbs to (hopefully) small amounts of poisonous berries and other toxins that sometimes make impure and diluted drugs seem more potent. Users who unknowingly purchase tainted or useless drugs have no recourse beyond attempting to find another supplier. In the vast majority of cases, local law-enforcement officers and judges take bribes from drug suppliers to overlook their offenses — as a result, guards most often arrest and punish those who make complaints of tainted drugs, while leaving the sellers free.

Depending upon just how strict the laws are against selling recreational drugs, they may be sold out of the houses of the suppliers, at certain shops or in the private back rooms of taverns and restaurants. Gaining access to such places may involve knowing a complex and changing series of code phrases, and in the strictest states, dealers will have their aides check out everyone who asks to purchase drugs.

DRUG SALES WHERE THEY ARE PERMITTED

Some states that permit the sale of addictive drugs have few problems with overuse — in much of the North, anyone foolish enough to become a shambling wreck rarely lives long. Few people sleep or fall unconscious in alleys in a city where they will freeze solid during the winter. Similarly, while the people of the Haltan Republic make certain that children and people who are old or disabled have the help they need to get around, the intoxicated must rely upon their friends to keep





them from falling out of the trees or thoughtlessly climbing down to the forest floor. In general, cities located in harsh and difficult environments have few problems with the overuse of such drugs, as those who abuse them rarely survive long and others learn from their mistakes.

In addition, some peoples, such as the Haslanti of the Far North and the Haltan of the East, have learned how to use a wide variety of drugs safely. In regions where rulers forbid the use of drugs or where all good citizens see them as the refuge of the desperate and the hopeless, few people learn how to use them safely or in moderation. However, peoples such as the Haslanti and the Haltans have long traditions of ritual drug use as part of their religions.

In the Haslanti League, marijuana and opium are sold in markets and are used at home in private religious ceremonies where the person attempts to get in touch with the sacred source of dreams — overuse is rarely a problem among the Haslanti because drugs are used almost exclusively for spiritual purposes. The Haltan believe various drugs bring them closer to the spirits of the forest they live in. In these and similar nations, young people are taught the proper uses of everything from rasp spider venom to opium. Individuals who use various drugs in moderation and avoid addiction and overdoses are well regarded. However, most people in these lands see anyone who overuses any drug as either someone who is ill and in need of treatment or as a pathetic wretch worthy only of scorn.

Elsewhere, similar attitudes toward overindulgence are also common. Life in rural and wilderness areas is mostly too harsh and demanding for people to tolerate farm hands or family members who do not pull their weight, and the population is too small for addicts to go unnoticed. Conditions are much the same on many of the smaller islands of the West. On an island with a population of a few thousand, every resident is well known, and having access to everyone's labor for harvesting crops and setting the larger nets is too vital for residents to tolerate apathetic, slack-jawed addicts.

In contrast to attitudes on the less populated islands, the few large cities of the West have a very open and accepting attitude toward most drug use. Merchants sell drugs in open-air markets, and most users take them and then go about their business. While this means that the most seriously addicted are of little use, almost everyone else has learned to maintain at least a minimum level of functionality. So long as an individual does not need to perform some vital task and avoids creating a disturbance, the relatively carefree inhabitants of Wavecrest see nothing wrong with someone enjoying himself publicly. In the Coral Archipelago, most people see those who lose themselves in drugs as failures who are unworthy of notice, and so, the inhabitants have a similarly dismissive attitude toward public intoxication.

Addictive drugs are only a serious problem in large cities where addicts can be fairly anonymous and in climates that are sufficiently mild that sleeping on the streets or in abandoned buildings is not instantly lethal for much of the year. Unfortunately, most of the Scavenger Lands and the coastal portions of the South fit those criteria. In both regions, there are many large cities, and the weather is generally comfortable and mild. As a result, many of these cities have serious problems with addictive drugs.

The worst problems are to be found in Nexus and Chiaroscuro—since both cities are major centers of trade, drugs are easily available and slightly less expensive than normal. Also, both cities have large numbers of desperately poor inhabitants who are eager for any escape they can find from the dreary suffering that makes up the majority of their lives. Chiaroscuro's Old City is a classic example of what such drugs can do. The only people who move there are those who have lost all hope of making a good life in the vast city and who are either too poor to leave or who have nowhere else to go. Day after day, most of the residents of the Old City drown their sorrows in a mixture of marijuana, cheap wine and opium. The worst off sell their bodies or beg for enough money to obtain more drugs and enough food to keep themselves alive, while the rest scavenge and sell ancient trinkets, muck out stables or work at other ill-paying mindless jobs such as collecting shards of the ancient vermilion glass to obtain enough money to make it through one more day.

A few of the more motivated or more desperate residents instead make use of the false joy and borrowed vigor of cocaine. Forgoing sleep and often food, they become tireless, if often careless, pickpockets and burglars—many sport a missing hand to prove that their thefts have not always been entirely successful. In places such as the less-ruined buildings on the outskirts of the Old City, there are a multitude of inns that carry every form of inexpensive intoxicant that one could desire—beer, wine, qat, opium and all of the other options are available for those who can pay. The costs are generally quite low, but so is the quality, and few connoisseurs of fine wines patronize these ill-kept establishments.

In less desperate regions, drugs are sold and used in a wide variety of different settings, depending upon the local customs surrounding intoxication. In most of Nexus and in many other cities throughout the Scavenger Lands, innkeepers openly sell drugs in almost every inn that does not specifically cater to stolid foreigners who abhor such pleasures. Many people use these drugs at the inn, and some who can afford to do so rent a small room at the inn until the effects wear off to prevent them from having to wander the streets in a state that makes them easy prey for all manner of criminals. However, many others take their drugs at the inn and then go off to some party or other destination. Most wealthy and middle-class individuals who do this pay special guides and linkmen, known as keepers, to take them safely to their destinations or to

escort them home. The best keepers work for one of a small number of highly respected agencies—cheap keepers sometimes lead clients straight into the hands of those who would rob or kidnap them.

In most Southern cities where drugs are legal, merchants sell them in special parlors—each drug is sold in a different sort of parlor. Even in cities where these drugs are legal, the strict mores of the South dictate that no one should wander the streets while seriously intoxicated. While few care about these rules in the poorest neighborhoods, elsewhere, those who stagger around while intoxicated are targets of public ridicule, and if they do not have rich or powerful friends, they may end up paying a fine or spending a week helping to repair roads or performing other menial but necessary tasks.


DRUGS AND POLITICS

Drugs are more than just a moneymaker for the Guild, they are also a significant political tool. Guild leaders are perfectly aware of the effect various drugs have on the people who use them, and its factors in various cities keep careful note of local variations in drug use. By declaring a local shortage and withholding some of its normal drug shipments to a city or state, the Guild can produce significant social unrest as prices go up and people attempt to horde the remaining supplies of drugs. Alternately, although it rarely uses this tactic, the Guild also sometimes reduces prices locally to help encourage more people to use drugs. In a region where laws have changed and drugs that were previously forbidden are newly legal, the Guild often sells its first few shipments at a significant discount to encourage everyone to try these new intoxicants. Also, in areas with significant social unrest, low-cost drugs can cause many of the poorer dissidents to temporarily forget their complaints. The Guild is sometimes willing to come to the aid of friendly politicians by lowering the price of popular drugs such as marijuana or opium for several months.

When a state in the Threshold is undergoing any form of open rebellion, the Guild often charges different sides and regions significantly different prices for all forms of drugs and medicines. As a result, many of the common people will leave the side that is being charged higher prices in an effort to obtain more affordable intoxicants and medicines. In this way, the Guild can take sides in such conflicts without resorting to less subtle tactics such as arms sales or sending Guild mercenaries to aid one side or the other.

The Guild sometimes performs more subtle manipulations by varying the quality and purity of its drugs and medicines. Although it almost never risks the outcry that would result from selling poisoned or unsafe drugs, selling significantly stronger or weaker versions of drugs such as cocaine or opium can have a profound affect on people who have gotten used to a specific strength of dose as “normal.” This tactic has allowed the Guild to secretly stop several local rebellions and to foment several others. When selling a drug to a region where it has not previously been available,





the Guild sometimes makes the first few shipments quite weak, allowing people to use it without becoming addicted. Then, once the ruler is convinced that this drug does not seem to be a problem and the populace is used to using moderate amounts of the weak drug to obtain a pleasant buzz, future shipments are of normal potency. Casual users can rapidly become addicts, and to many rulers, the problems seem more the fault of their citizens than the Guild.

ECONOMICS AND ECONOMIC WARFARE

Opium forms the majority of the Guild's drug sales. Though it sells a wide variety of drugs, many are either expensive in themselves or are only produced in one location and so are expensive to transport worldwide. In contrast, opium grows almost everywhere in the world, it's inexpensive, and it is a relatively safe and highly addictive drug.

In many ways, opium is the ideal product for the Guild. Because it is so addictive, the Guild can easily build up a reliable customer base — few addicts ever willingly give it up. Even better, while opium addiction can easily destroy someone's life, it is almost never fatal, even when the addict overdoses. As a result, addicts usually live for many decades — they tend to die a decade or more sooner than non-addicts, but the Guild can easily obtain at least 20 years of regular sales from each addict. Opium also does not cause addicts to become agitated or violent. Regular opium users are unlikely to start revolutions or otherwise attempt to upset the social order. Opium addiction may impoverish a nation, but it will almost never destroy it unless the opium supply is cut off suddenly. Finally, opium is both compact and easy to transport. The Guild plans for the long term, and its leaders are canny enough to realize that focusing solely on short-term profits is a foolish policy that can lead to boom and bust cycles that can wreak havoc with any large organization.

In contrast, selling rock cocaine to the residents of a nation means that the Guild is interested in bankrupting the nation and turning its people against the nation's leaders. Typically, the Guild will flood the nation with inexpensive rock cocaine and then allow the supply to run out. After the social chaos dies down, it will sell more rock cocaine. It rarely takes more than two cycles of selling the drug and then cutting off the supply (combined with skillfully planting rumors that the government is responsible for the supply being cut off) to cause vast social and economic upheaval.

This strategy is most effective when the nation in question already contains a large population of opium addicts. The Guild first announces that it is unable to deliver opium to that nation. Then, as the addicts begin to panic, the Guild offers an alternative drug (rock cocaine) to help ease the addicts' cravings. In almost all cases, addicts find rock cocaine to be at least as enticing as opium. With no alternative other than the pains of withdrawal, most of the opium addicts sate their cravings with rock cocaine. When thousands or even millions of people take

rock cocaine, the Guild's manipulations effects all facets of the society. The Guild sometimes uses discrete local merchants to sell the rock cocaine, to attempt to reduce any anti-Guild backlash against its efforts.

Few governments survive such attacks. Those that do normally capitulate to the Guild's demands to prevent them from ever again becoming the target of another such attack. However, the selling of rock cocaine is a tactic of last resort. The Guild never starts this sort of economic warfare without careful deliberation, especially since it can take a region a decade or more to recover from a concerted economic attack. Producing this sort of economic ruin means that Guild profits in that same region will take even longer to recover.

The most recent example of the Guild's economic warfare happened seven years ago in the Southern city-state of Dan-Far-Noh. The pair of oligarchs who ruled Dan-Far-Noh encountered financial difficulties when the low-level conflict between Gem and Paragon caused trade routes to shift. In an effort to help restore prosperity to Dan-Far-Noh, the oligarchs significantly raised all tariffs. The oligarchs also placed the blame for the city-state's financial troubles firmly on the Guild. After a Guild embargo designed to force Dan-Far-Noh to lower its tariffs, the populace rioted and burned down a Guild trading station, killing several Guild personnel. Shortly after that, bandits based out of Dan-Far-Noh began raiding Guild caravans. Several nearby city-states were sympathetic to the events occurring in Dan-Far-Noh, so the Guild avoided military force because it did not want to risk having these states form a large-scale alliance against the Guild. Instead, the Guild placed a total embargo on all opium sales to Dan-Far-Noh and used its soldiers to prevent any of the neighboring states from selling opium to the residents of this city-state. Then, the Guild paid local peddlers to sell rock cocaine. Since the peddlers belonged to a despised local caste, they were eager to help disrupt their homeland and agreed to keep the source of these drugs secret. Although the government killed dozens of peddlers, the sale of rock cocaine in Dan-Far-Noh soared — bringing with it a serious increase in all types of crime, including a rise in random violence. Between the economic collapse and rising crime, the people began to turn against the oligarchs. Guild agitators trained bands of peddlers in the basics of revolutionary organization, and the members of this caste soon formed the nucleus of a growing revolutionary movement.

The Guild supplied these rebels with arms and a surplus of medicines in return for promises of open trade with the Guild. These medicines persuaded many citizens to join the rebels, and after four years of increasing unrest, the people rose up, mobbed the oligarchs' palace and stoned them both to death. Immediately after that, the Guild ceased selling rock cocaine to the peddlers and finalized its deals with the new government. Today, Dan-Far-Noh remains quite poor but is showing signs of gradually increasing prosperity.

RESPONSE TO RESISTING DRUG SALES

With access to potent medicines as a carrot, the Guild has managed to gain permission to sell its addictive wares in most nations other than the Realm. However, some rulers see the havoc opium and similar drugs have caused and attempt to halt the sale of those drugs in their realms. In many cases, the Guild is willing to work around such problems and simply set up border stations. However, the Guild's leaders hate to lose an especially profitable market, and so, they occasionally attempt to prevent nations from halting drug sales. Most of these attempted rebellions against the Guild's economic dominance fail, generally around the time the upper classes realize that they no longer have access to their precious medicines and longevity drugs. The following three incidents should help illustrate the possible range of outcomes to attempting to resist the Guild's drug sales.

WHITEWALL

Several years ago, rebellions began to trouble the Realm-controlled coastal states of the North. Beginning shortly after over a third of the Realm's peacekeeping troops departed to help deal with troubles on the Blessed Isle, these rebellions meant that the demand for opium in the coastal states went down. The Guild attempted to find a lucrative Northern market for the drugs produced in the North to use up its new surpluses. The Haslanti buy only limited amounts of the Guild's recreational drugs and trade with the Haltan Republic for most of the medicines they need. However,


Whitewall contains over a million residents. The long winters and the constant threat of attack by both the undead and the Fair Folk mean that many of its residents would happily seek solace in the fleeting joys of an opium pipe.

Unfortunately, the three Syndics who rule Whitewall wished to avoid having a large part of their population turned into useless opium addicts or potentially violent cocaine users. Also, the Syndics were concerned that someone under the influence of one of these drugs might succumb to the empty promises and cunning threats that both the Fair Folk and the dead constantly use to attempt to gain access to Whitewall. To avoid these problems, the Syndics decreed that both opium and cocaine could not be bought or sold inside the city. The realities of life in Whitewall made this decree unusually effective — the entire population of the city-state surrounding Whitewall sleeps inside the city walls. Once night falls, anyone who is not either inside the city walls or standing on the Traveler's Road is fair game for both the Fair Folk and the dead. This makes discrete drugs sales quite difficult.

As a result, the Guild found few local distributors who were willing to sell opium and other drugs in the city. Also, the Syndics are immortal spirits of ice and silver who have no use for mortal medicines. While the local nobles and merchants were far from happy when the Guild cut off the supplies of various medicines, these worthies were not in any position to attempt to overthrow the Syndics.

In its last attempt to open Whitewall to drug sales, the Guild imposed an embargo on this city. Since the Traveler's





Road is kept safe by powerful supernatural pacts, neither the Guild nor the Syndics was willing to risk blockading it, but for a period of almost a year, the Guild refused to buy or sell goods in or near Whitewall. Guild caravans simply camped on the Traveler's Road and traveled around the city during the day, when going off of the road was safe. The people of Whitewall had to rely upon what they could produce locally or trade with local merchants from the coast or Gethamane. Conditions were quite hard during that year, especially during the long winter months when many in the city had to live without various luxuries—or near necessities—that they had previously been able to purchase. However, the Guild also paid a heavy price for this embargo. Unable to stop and replenish supplies in Whitewall, Guild caravans had to carry considerably more provisions. As a result, they could carry fewer trade goods to and from both Gethamane and the prosperous Haslanti city-states.

After most of a year, both the Syndics and the Guild realized the full magnitude of the problems this embargo caused for both of them. They reopened negotiations and reached a compromise—the Guild cannot sell opium in Whitewall, but it can now sell both heroin and cocaine. As a result, the large lower class cannot usually obtain drugs, but the Guild can sell drugs to the city's middle and upper classes. Since both of these drugs sell for considerably more than opium, the Guild has lost some sales, but it still makes excellent profits off of the drug sales that the Syndics permit. In practice, the Guild sells little cocaine in Whitewall because of the distances it must be transported. However, it now feeds a good portion of any local opium surpluses to one of its two beasts of resplendent liquids stationed in the North and obtains heroin that is sold in both Whitewall and Gethamane. The Guild also sells limited quantities of heroin in the Haslanti city-states. These new sales have eliminated all of the Guild's worries about accumulating a massive overstock of opium. Everyone who is aware of the realities of this situation agrees that Whitewall was in a uniquely good position to resist the Guild and that few city-states would have such an easy time getting the Guild to agree to a compromise.

ALOM VILAG

Alom Vilag is a small Southern nation located on the coast between Chiaroscuro and the border of the Varang City-States. More than a century ago, the king and the mandarin-eunuchs of Alom Vilag gave the Guild the right to build half a dozen trading stations just outside the border of the Varang City-States in return for a yearly payment of a small portion of the profits from these stations. As is the case with most border stations, the Guild sold great quantities of opium and other drugs to Varang merchants, who then resold the drugs inside the Varang City-States. Unfortunately, these trading stations also became quite popular with the residents of Alom Vilag, and a large number of them became addicted to opium.

Alom Vilag was most noted as a nation of dyers and potters. The excellent kaolin clay from the Rizek cliffs that separate Alom Vilag from Chiaroscuro was an easily available resource that allowed the people of Alom Vilag to become renowned as producers of excellent porcelains. The wares of Alom Vilag were sold all over the South, and the best were sold in places as distant as Nexus and the Imperial City. Also, the presence of the murex conch on the coast allowed artisans in Alom Vilag to produce a rare purple dye that is one of the most prized colors in the world.

Before the Guild set up trading stations near the Varang border, they paid large amounts of jade or silver for Alom Vilag's porcelain and dye. However, in addition to wishing easier access to trade within the prosperous Varang City-States, the local Guild factors suspected that opium would become quite popular within Alom Vilag. These shrewd merchants hoped that the demand for opium created would allow the Guild to trade opium instead of jade and silver for the local porcelain and dye.

Within a decade of the opening of these border stations, more than one in twenty of Alom Vilag's population was addicted to opium. In addition to wealth flowing out of this city-state and into the hands of eager Guild merchants, the social effects were immense. Productivity in both the dye factories and the porcelain shops slowed significantly, and both crime and poverty increased dramatically. Alom Vilag went from being a small, highly prosperous city-state to one that was gradually becoming poor and downtrodden.

When the king ordered the Guild to cease selling opium to residents of Alom Vilag, the Guild retaliated by cutting off the yearly payments for the privilege of operating these stations. Since other sources of revenue were down, the loss of these funds hurt the government. The king retaliated by ordering the execution of all opium sellers and addicts. Although he wisely avoided directly threatening Guild members, many hundred of local distributors and addicts were killed before the Guild intervened.

The Guild responded with a combination of military force and propaganda. Prominent Southern sent an army to Alom Vilag—and with it came several hundred of the Guild's more charismatic merchants and negotiators. These civilians provided medical aid and distributed inexpensive but useful items such as knives and simple medicines to the poor, and the army made a special effort to avoid harming civilians or damaging their property. Since the king's army had already earned the hatred of the populace for the widespread summary executions of opium sellers and addicts, most of the nation welcomed the arrival of the Guild forces.

Although the king of Alom Vilag was familiar with the Guild's military might, the rulers of the Varang City-States had promised him aid since they also wished to eliminate these border stations. Unfortunately, the Guild bribed half a dozen senior Varang leaders with both cash and access to unusually potent medicines and longevity drugs. These bribes secured the Varang leaders' promises to remain neu-



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tral during this conflict so long as it did not spill over into Varang territory. Outnumbered and without his expected allies, the king had no choice but to surrender to the Guild, especially since the Guild's propaganda campaign ensured that most of the common people supported the Guild.

When the army arrived at Vilag City, the populace welcomed it. At this point, the beaten and haggard king and his three senior eunuch ministers all came out to surrender. The Guild could afford to be generous—it ordered the king to repeal the laws against the sale of opium and other drugs. In return, the Guild agreed to sell a slightly weaker variety of opium in Alom Vilag, primarily because the Guild wished to be able to purchase this land's porcelain and dye with opium, but it didn't need a nation of addicts unable to produce high-quality goods. Today, this king's grandson rules Alom Vilag, which is again reasonably prosperous. However, the nation still contains a large number of opium addicts. The crown finances hospices for anyone who wishes to end their addiction, but neither the king nor his eunuch ministers have been willing to risk the Guild's wrath by attempting any stronger measures against this drug.


ILMARINI

Ilmarini is a large, warm tropical island located 600 miles west of the Southern coast. The island's warm climate and fertile soil made it ideal farmland, and the Guild had paid the inhabitants to grow opium for more than 300 years. The Guild also processed this opium

locally and sold the islanders a portion of this drug as well the qat it grew on the mainland. Almost one tenth of the island's population of 80,000 regularly used opium or qat. The island was a quiet and peaceful place where a combination of a near-ideal climate, easily available food and abundant drugs produced a society where the inhabitants worried little about politics or other larger issues.

This state of affairs continued as it always had until three years ago. Then, the Lunar Exalted Tekia Blue Water, a member of the Changing Moon Caste who was loosely associated with the Lintha Family crime syndicate, came to Ilmarini. Using her inhuman powers of persuasion, she convinced the inhabitants that they were little better than slaves working under the Guild's well-drugged yoke. She organized secret meetings and summoned powerful water elementals to aid her, and six months after she and her allies in the Lintha Family arrived on the island, Ilmarini rose up in open revolt against the Guild. After killing or driving off everyone associated with the Guild, her lieutenants from the Lintha Family moved in and reorganized the government of the island.

Tekia's overwhelming charisma meant that almost the entire populace supported the selection of Akio Felik as the new prince. Prince Felik was a local smuggler with close ties to the Lintha Family—he had been one of Tekia's first open supporters when she came to Ilmarini. Under Tekia's direction, Prince Felik made opium and qat illegal and ordered his guards to burn all of the poppy fields. Tekia used spirits and



medicines obtained from the Wyld to help the thousands of addicts overcome their cravings. A year later, the island was a thriving port that the Lintha Family used as a place where it could openly purchase food and other supplies. The Lintha Family also used the large docks that the Guild had built as a place where it could refit and repair Lintha ships without compromising the sanctuary of Bluehaven. Also, the people of Ilmarini had greatly expanded their practice of making scrimshaw and were selling these miniature sculptures as far away as Chiaroscuro and Arjuf.

During this time, the Guild made one attempt to repel Tekia and the Lintha Family. However, between Tekia's Exalted martial prowess, the aid provided by the elementals she summoned and the might of the Lintha Family fleet, the Guild ships retreated after one short engagement. Still, the Guild was not ready to relinquish access to the island's growing land. Although it avoids using this option too often, senior officials in the Guild appealed to the Dynasts of the Realm and requested that the Wyld Hunt destroy the Exalt who was controlling this island. Although the Wyld Hunt had been severely curtailed by the departure of the Empress, the threat posed by a Lunar Exalted that close to the Realm was too great to ignore. The Immaculates dispatched a team of two dozen Dynasts and two elder Sidereal Exalted to Ilmarini. In less than half an hour, they had destroyed all the Lintha Family ships in the harbor and had slain more than 2,000 people who had been working at or near the docks. Tekia Blue Water and her allies in the Lintha Family were unable to halt this destruction and all fled the island. Later that day, Guild ships that had been waiting a short distance away sailed in and quickly restored order on Ilmarini.

After they saw what the might of the Realm could accomplish in a single hour, the people of Ilmarini did not resist the Guild soldiers. However, the islanders had tasted freedom and were not prepared to give it up. Although they were willing to go back to opium farming, the number of residents who use opium is now far smaller than before, and few of the residents currently use qat (which used to be a major import). The trade in carved whale ivory also continues to be an important part of the island's economy. There is now a large amount of resentment against both the Guild and the Realm, and most residents of this island wrongly believe that the Guild and the Realm are close allies who regularly work together against the people of the Threshold.

Recently, several sailors from Ilmarini have made contact with the Lintha pirates and are secretly taking orders from Tekia Blue Water, who is currently seeking allies among Solar and Lunar Exalted to help her hold off any future attacks. Because she employs aquatic Wyld barbarians who can sneak onto the island with great ease, she has also been able to renew her contacts with local farmers. The fate of Ilmarini is not yet decided, and it could easily end up controlled by either the Lintha Family or the Guild.

DEALING WITH COMPETITION

Although other, far smaller merchant companies occasionally sell cocaine, inferior versions of sweet cordials and other drugs primarily controlled by the Guild, none of these traders significantly hinder the Guild's profits and so are largely ignored. The Guild's first rule when dealing with any form of competition is that competitors who are too small to pose any threat are also too small to be worth the effort to eliminate. Guild factors keep careful track of all competition but only interfere with merchants who significantly cut into Guild profits.

The opium trade forms the backbone of the Guild's drug sales, and while no single kingdom or trading collective can hope to rival the scale of the Guild's opium trade, if growers sold most of their opium to local distributors in enough different regions, the Guild would quickly lose its hold on the opium market. As a result, the Guild must ensure that this does not happen. Each individual competitor is rarely worth worrying about, but the Guild must make certain that the total business held by all of its local competitors does not cut into its profits too much. In practice, this means that the Guild attempts to control at least three quarters of all of the opium trade in any kingdom.

CONTROLLING DRUG PRODUCTION

To guarantee its commercial dominance, the Guild attempts to ensure that the vast majority of all opium growers sell their wares only to the Guild. Its first step is to deal only with growers who swear never to sell opium to anyone else. The Guild forces growers who break this agreement to pay heavy fines and then never buys from them again.

In practice, these fines usually mean that growers who sell to others have their land confiscated by the Guild. Also, unless they have friends or allies among the wealthy, growers who break oaths to the Guild are usually beaten and, occasionally, enslaved. Since it is large enough that local fluctuations in demand have little effect on its purchase of opium, the Guild can promise that growers who sell to them will have a continuing market. Growers who sell solely to local distributors may find that in particularly bad years nearly half their crop remains unsold. Finally, the fact that the Guild has both vast opium reserves and the fact that it can ship local surpluses to regions with opium shortages means that the Guild can also pay consistently higher prices for opium and any other drugs that it purchases. As a result, growers have little incentive to sell their drugs to anyone else.

SHIPPING OPIUM

With many thousands of specially bred pack yeddim and vast fleets of swift but fat-bodied merchant vessels, the Guild can ship vastly more opium than its largest competitor. Only the Realm could stand any chance of rivaling the Guild's opium shipments, and the Realm does not deal in addictive drugs. If competition in one area grows too large, the Guild redirects a few of its caravans or fleets and ships twice the usual amount of opium to a metropolis or even an entire kingdom.

The local price of opium plummets, and the Guild's competition soon leaves, goes out of business or switches professions. If necessary, the Guild can ship so much opium to a location that anyone attempting to sell opium in the region will do so at a significant loss. Although this sort of economic warfare also causes the Guild to lose money, its leaders long ago learned that long term success is far more important than short-term, local profits. To use this tactic, the Guild must divert opium from other regions, so it can also charge somewhat higher prices in the regions that now have slightly less opium — these profits help offset the losses the Guild takes from underpricing opium in another region. Also, the amount of casual use of low-grade opium by non-addicts rises when opium prices drop, further offsetting the Guild's losses.

SELLING OPIUM

Although economic warfare is useful for destroying large-scale local competition, it is too blunt a tool to eliminate smaller competitors, especially since too much economic warfare can lose the Guild even more money than having competitors. Despite the Guild's best efforts at both economic warfare and putting pressure on growers, some local distributors are able to purchase opium from local farmers. These distributors then sell this opium to anyone willing to purchase it. In regions where there is significant anti-Guild sentiment, such distributors can do quite well. However, in most cases, their operations are less profitable than the Guild's.

Naturally, the Guild attempts to discourage local churgeons, drug parlors and others from purchasing drugs from the Guild's rivals. The Guild persuades the majority of local shops to swear an oath to purchase drugs only from the Guild. In return, the Guild sells these clients drugs at slightly lower prices. Shopkeepers and others who break this oath are subject to both fines and beatings, and some find that their shops are mysteriously vandalized or burned shortly after the Guild discovers their betrayal.

In regions where opium and other recreational drugs are legal, Guild factors cultivate close ties with the local leaders. As a result, any competitor who becomes too successful could easily end up arrested when the Guild bribes the local chief of police. Similarly, in places where drugs are illegal, Guild informers spy on their competitors and then turn the information they have gathered over to the local government. Local merchants who attempt to turn the Guild in for similar offenses soon find that not only does the Guild have enough money to buy its employees' freedom, but Guild assassins and thugs make life both unpleasant and exceedingly short for anyone who informs on the Guild.

Despite all opposition, a few canny and determined local drug merchants manage to successfully compete against the Guild. There are two primary types of successful competitors, raiders and financial geniuses. Raiders remain successful because they steal from the Guild. Anyone who simply steals the Guild's drugs and attempts to resell them locally is easy to discover, and the Guild makes certain that such foolish thieves end up messily dead.

Currently, injecting a slow poison that leaves the victim writing in agony for three days or having the thief slowly dissected alive by a small god friendly to the Guild are the most popular forms of execution for this crime.

Successful raiders manage to hide the true source of their drugs. Most buy the majority of their opium and other drugs but supplement these supplies by hiring freelance thieves to deplete the Guild's storehouses and so increase their own supply of drugs at a lower cost than actually purchasing and processing the drugs would cost. The most successful raiders belong to well-organized organized crime syndicates and are exceedingly adept at hiding all facets of their enterprise behind a façade of legitimacy.

Much of these criminal enterprises are difficult to distinguish from ones that are simply run by brilliant and highly determined business people. These individuals use bribes, minor magic, governmental connections, great skill at reading local markets and their local gods' predictions of the future to stay one step ahead of the Guild. When confronted with a successful competitor it cannot simply drive out of business, the Guild employs spies to investigate this business. At first, these infiltrators do nothing other than insert themselves into the rival organization and send back regular reports. Their first goal is to determine if the business is relying upon buying drugs stolen from the Guild. If the spies find out that the business is based on theft, the Guild's response is swift and ruthless — the Guild does not permit anyone who steals from it to live. As a warning to anyone else who considers attempting to set up a business that preys upon the Guild, its agents kill everyone involved at the top levels of the rival organization and torture both the leader and her entire family to death.

In contrast, if the competitor relies upon skill and cunning rather than theft, the local Guild factor approaches the heads of this company and offers to allow them to join the Guild. Before he makes this offer, the factor will make certain to acquire some sort of hold over the leaders of this business. If the competitor refuses the offer to join the Guild, the Guild factor then turns to bribes, blackmail or information obtained from the spies who investigated this rival to convince the rival either to join or to seek another line of work. However, if (as is most often the case) the rival joins the Guild, then all such information is stored away for later use, and the Guild welcomes the competitor into its ranks. Many successful drug-selling organizations have been invited to join the Guild, and some who have joined in this fashion have become important members of the Guild. Although profits always come first, the Guild has also learned that talent at business is relatively rare and attempts to never waste talent.

Because of its skill and ruthless determination, the Guild has relatively little serious competition in the opium trade. Naturally, there are a large number of very small-scale merchants selling locally produced drugs. However, individually, they are too small for the Guild to worry about, and even taken together, they do not reduce Guild sales by any significant amount.





CHAPTER THREE

SLAVES — THE HARD TRADE



Slavery is common throughout the world of **Exalted**, but it isn't universal; the lands between the elemental poles are simply too vast for anything to be common to every society. Nonetheless, in many places, slavery is a vital industry; the chained keep the Great Houses of the Dragon-Blooded clothed in glory and give the Fair Folk the strength they need to assault Creation.

To the Guild, slaves are the commodity that defines civilization; any nation willing to traffic in human lives is open to almost any other sort of trade. Preeminence in the slave trade is one of the Guild's major strengths. By cutting off supplies, a factor can force the acquiescence of nations that depend on imported labor. Genteel merchant princes call it the "threefold trade," referring to the powers that influence slavery: the Guild, who acquire human merchandise; the Fair Folk, who hunger for the dreams of the chained; and the Realm, whose wealth depends to such a great degree on indentured toil.

However, there are more than just three factions at work. The life story of a slave is as complex as anyone's, from her capture (or birth) into service to her travels, labors and death.

THE SUPPLIERS

Unless there's some novelty to it, few slave owners care about how their property came to be enslaved. In the Realm, inquiring about a slave's previous life is considered

SLAVERY AND BIGOTRY

In the world of **Exalted**, the racism we associate with the transatlantic slave trade of our world does not exist. Except for the obvious divide between the Exalted and the unExalted of the Realm, there is no racist ideology that permeates the slave trade during the Second Age of Man. Slavers can be of the same ethnic background as their victims or of wildly different ethnic backgrounds. Many of Creation's inhabitants dislike foreigners and are apt to enslave them, but with the exception of Wyld-taint, physical appearance creates little prejudice. The Guild, the Fair Folk and the Realm don't discriminate either. Slavery is a social condition, not an ethnic one.

gauche, if not naïve — a common sense attitude that most slave owners across Creation adopt. Exceptions do exist; reminding a slave that he was once an enemy, a rebel or a criminal is one of the pleasures of ownership. Still, a master only stands to weaken a slave's obedience if she reminds him of his free life. The rare few who oppose slavery are rarely better informed about the realities of enslavement and tell tales of "Guild raiders" and "murderous soldiers" descending on unsuspecting villagers.

Slavery is common, but the Guild, the Realm and the Fair Folk are hardly omnipresent. Those unlucky enough

to fall into irons are usually pushed there by their neighbors. The slave trade could never survive if people were simply ripped from their homes by slavers. Since the Great Contagion, slave labor has been an integral part of the rebuilding and maintenance of societies across Creation. The Guild's major contribution to the trade has been to enrich the rewards of slavery. Many of the tribes, city-states and nations the Guild purchases captives from already practice slavery, but the merchant princes offer exotic and vital goods in trade for slaves. The widespread demand for and steady supply of slaves makes it a convenient backbone upon which to lay other forms of commerce, to the extent that many states owe their wealth to it.

The Guild's unequalled network allows it to acquire trade goods cheaply enough to provide a constant incentive. Usually, wholesale trade results in a bargain for both parties. For example, an inhabitant of Harborhead can acquire an excellent Haltan bow by trading a farm's worth of livestock, or she can simply capture two of her neighbors. The value of a slave sold to the Guild outstrips that of one retained as a farmer or worker, since the captive's body can be traded for steel, fine cloth and exotic drugs from the length and breadth of Creation.

But this is only one of the hundreds of ways someone might suffer the slave's collar. Many civilized nations sentence their prisoners and debtors to slavery. The armies of the Realm and its peripheral states throw conquered populations into chains. These slaves often find their way into the Guild's hands as well, through a small stream of direct trade that enriches the coffers of independent merchants, bureaucrats and generals. With its Creation-spanning scope and pragmatic policies, the Guild draws slaves from all of these sources and more.

RAIDERS AT THE THRESHOLD

After the Great Contagion, lands far from the Imperial Mountain battled each other for the remaining resources of a newly twisted world. Many settled on customs designed to ensure victory without sacrificing the few survivors, and massacres were gradually replaced with hostage taking and indenture. Labor was a scarce thing in the wake of the Great Contagion; it was far better to hang on to workers by any means necessary. If a captured tribe farmed, its people would be put to the field. These slaves didn't lead pleasant lives, but the depopulated wilds didn't allow their captors to treat them as inhumanely as the civilized masters of later eras. Warriors took concubines from losing tribes, and the peripheral cities of the Realm reclaimed some of their old power.

In their exile, the Lunar Exalted promoted ritual warfare, so that matters of honor could be settled without depriving the victor of needed labor. Any person able to contribute to the tribe's survival had some value — sometimes as the occasional sacrifice to a local god or a Fair Folk marauder, but more often as a worker whose lot was little

worse than that of her supposed masters. Closer to the Imperial Manse, the warring diamyos' First Age weaponry crippled the Old Realm's mystical infrastructure. In some regions, indentured servants went from being mere status symbols of the officer class to necessary labor, toiling beside the wreckage of artifacts that had once done their work a dozen times more efficiently. When the Dragon-Blooded marched under the new Empress' banner, the only tribute that the many devastated regions had to give was a portion of their own population.

Then, the Guild arrived, able to ferry riches to any warlord with prisoners to spare. Tribes on the periphery of the growing cities learned that slaves were their greatest resource and began to harvest them in earnest. The refugees and petty lords of the wrecked River Province saw the opportunity to regain civilized comfort and kidnaped their equally unfortunate neighbors to supply the market.

At present, a thousand fiefs and tribes raid each other for captives in the outer Threshold. The Scavenger Lands are dotted with fortresses built to collect prisoners for Guild purchase. The richest slaving states take their "wares" directly to cities such as Nexus.

TYPICAL CAPTIVES

Prisoners of slave raids are usually young, in their middle childhood or teens. They are easy to catch and have the constitution necessary to endure the trials they'll face. However, there are many exceptions. Local customs may dictate the capture of enemy elders or people with certain physical characteristics. These typically remain the chattel of their captors, but the Guild will purchase expert craftsmen or exotic-looking slaves from these groups.

In addition, capturing a young prisoner allows her community to continue functioning, making it a renewable resource. Some perennial victims of raids have dropped the pretense of struggling and provide a regular tribute of captives to raiders.

RAIDER TRIBES, SLAVER STATES

Most slave-taking groups are richer than their fellow barbarians; the wealth they accrue from capturing their neighbors gives them the power to buy goods forged in the smithies of faraway Nexus and Chiaroscuro and foreign seed to multiply the yield of their crops. Most are culturally sophisticated; they've adapted their native hostage-taking customs to the slave trade and retain similarly complex beliefs about the social order, religion and ritual. Most lack some vital resource that allows them to compete with the larger cities; technological deficits or a lack of mineral resources are two common problems.

Occasionally, a raiding fief grows large enough to thrive off of other trade, and slave raids are no longer practical. If this would reduce profits, the Guild retards this process when it is viable. Factors nurture emergencies, plagues, political strife and small wars when they don't want to lose a valuable source of revenue. One less extreme solution is to pay slightly more for captives while carefully withholding resources that might allow the slave raiders to grow out of their profession. This allows the Guild to retain slave raiders in as many places as possible, reducing transportation costs. Eventually, a rich tribe's slave prices grow too high, and the Guild decides that it would be more profitable for them to graduate into a more diverse market for Guild wares. Tribes graduate into cities as they come to afford the goods necessary to support a fully civilized infrastructure, and the factors adjust prices accordingly.

A RAIDER'S LIFE

A typical barbarian or near-barbarian raider tribe adapts the ritual of taking captives to serve the Guild and other slaver interests. Tribal customs and Guild pressure combine to create a powerful predilection for taking slaves. In return for the prisoners, a raiding band receives better weapons, drugs and other goods. The Guild takes care to provide exactly what the raiders need to prosper and do their work more efficiently. The most successful groups are rewarded with fortifications and holding pens. These trading posts can hold hundreds of captives and are incorporated into the routes of Guild caravans and nomadic raiders alike. To meet the Guild's demands, the tribe intensifies the raiding that it has practiced for generations.


The web of feuds surrounding the capture and counter capture of future slaves is complex; criteria vary wildly depending on the traditions of the raiders and the victims. Some raiders only capture commoners because full-blooded warriors would be dishonored by such treatment. Other raiders stand to gain a great deal of prestige from capturing an enemy chieftain. Neighboring tribes often have traditional patterns of human-tithing, originally set in place to promote intermarriage and trade. Faced with the Guild-equipped superiority of their attackers, tribes on the weak side of such a relationship often have little

choice but to continue submitting to slave-taking, even when the victims are sold to the Blessed Isle rather than kept as spouses.

A merchant prince who buys slaves wholesale generally attempts to modify the traditions of the tribe he deals with in order to make it better at slavetaking. When the Axe of Judgment band disfigures all captured warriors, a Guild representative purchases them at a poor price, lamenting that the demand for mutilated slaves is so low. Under such conditions, it is likely some of the Axe of Judgment will stop mutilating their slaves. In many cases, the merchant prince will be incorporated into the rituals. For example, Marukani horsemen sidestep their nation's usual prohibitions against slave trading by "marrying" prisoners to a Guild merchant.



SUPERNATURAL MATTERS



Raiders face more than material pressures. Away from the bulwark of civilization, they must contend with supernatural powers that are often aware of why the tribe takes so many captives. The raiders' gods rarely object to raids to take captives, as frequent raids garner more wealth and glory for the whole tribe. However, most gods expect that the captives will be made into slaves or spouses and used to strengthen the raiders, not sold to the Guild. Elaborate rituals and sacrifices by the Guild bribe the tribal gods into allowing the raiders to escape unmolested with their captives. Usually, the gods demand an offering in lieu of the worship (and Essence) that they would receive if the captives were left to bolster the numbers of their subject tribes. Most gods generally value prayers in their ears and the smell of burnt offerings more than the possibility of future prayers and let the captives go at a significant discount.

If the tribe worships an Exalt, its patron's sentiments may well trump any of the Guild's ambitions — many among the Silver Pact disapprove of the sale of slaves to the Guild. In most cases, the tribe will not sell its captives out of deference to its god-chief's will. Still, many Exalted chiefs approve of raiding or were once raiders themselves. Others who have learned to harness the Essence of worship sometimes make the same demands as other gods. The Guild prefers to keep Exalts at arm's length, but with Lunar Exalted so intimately connected to tribal societies, and with others who unpredictably appear to complicate matters, the situation is sometimes unavoidable.

The greatest supernatural threats come from the enemy tribe's gods, who are loathe to lose worshipers. Most raiders carry a few rough charms designed to placate the gods of their victims. These are worn openly as a gesture of respect for the gods. When properly constructed, they serve as a message sent from the raiders' shamans to the enemy's gods. One type of charm tells the gods that the tribe is willing to offer them a blood sacrifice in compensation; another promises to include the gods in its own rituals, so that the gods will recoup the lost Essence from captured worshipers.

Unfortunately, even the best precautions can fail, and the raiders' tribe suffers for it. Angry gods drive away herds, spark plagues, spit down storms and, worst of all, complain to other gods, so that no member of the tribe can live in peace. If the tribe isn't destroyed outright, it's forced to move or to rely on the Guild to meet its needs. When the Guild recognizes this phenomenon, it raises prices for its wares, while keeping the price the Guild pays for slaves stable. The tribe will either find that slaving turns too poor a profit and make its peace with the gods or step up its raids to pay for needed goods, enriching the Guild.

When a tribe has nowhere else to turn, cults sometimes deify the merchant princes and their wares. Exotic goods become ritual objects, and shamans create effigies of

Guild caravans, waiting for the divine counterparts of the merchant princes to arrive with the magic the shamans need to save their people. The Guild generally considers this sort of thing to be bad for business, since more elaborate rituals have a tendency to both eat into profits and to offend local supernatural powers. The factors are well aware that jealousy is a trait common to many gods and aren't eager to court the gods' anger.

PRISONERS OF WAR

More civilized nations acquire captives over the course of military campaigning. An army can rarely make a profit from slaving without the help of city-states and satrapies that will pay to relieve them of the burden of guarding prisoners. Unlike tribal raiders, the first goal of a military campaign is to win the battle. Slaves can hinder an army on the move and provide a ready supply of spies and saboteurs for the enemy. The slave trade is a sideline, but a tempting one. An undisciplined force can easily become sidetracked with taking captives for profit, so most armies have set policies about the disposition of prisoners. These determine the conditions under which a given prisoner is interrogated, enslaved to an officer, sold or executed. Otherwise, general orders about the division of spoils are applied to prisoners suitable for slavery.

Southern states have a particularly strong appetite for prisoners of war. The Delzahn of Chiaroscuro raid their nomadic cousins to provide the large number of slaves aristocrats keep as trophies. The raids hone mounted fighting skills and are a part of Delzahn tradition, so they often result in the nobility taking more prisoners than they can comfortably support. Many are given as gifts or sold in Chiaroscuro's markets.

Varangian armies often acquire large numbers of captives because the caste system makes it difficult to rely on native labor. Members of the military caste are born to fight, not to dig earthworks, but astrology doesn't always provide the right number of ditchdiggers and cooks for the task, and by a strict interpretation of Varangian custom, the kind of general multipurpose labor an army on the march needs clashes with the ideal of perfecting a single profession. Foreigners present no such difficulties, so one of the first tasks of a Varangian army is to capture as many foreign prisoners as possible to provide workers for subsequent battles. Eventually, the campaign ends, and the Varangians are eager to rid themselves of their unlucky prisoners, so they sell them to both neighboring allies and the Guild.

While military prisoners are more likely to be brought directly to market, the Guild does occasionally intervene. Brave merchant princes follow campaigns that are likely to acquire large numbers of captives, then purchase slaves from the force's commander or quartermaster. This lightens an army's burden while keeping it well supplied. The Guild can pursue political objectives along with doing a

little price gouging in the process, since even successful armies are often desperately short of supplies.

THE FATE OF THE CONQUERED

Not all military slavery is permanent. When a war ends with a truce or surrender, the conditions often require all sides to repatriate any remaining captives. Captives means prisoners who have not yet been sold or given away to other parties. Those who are already sold are on their own — the best they can hope for is that some compassionate or patriotic fellow countryman will see them enslaved and seek to buy their freedom. When political considerations demand that a soldier return her personal slave (a common situation when the slave has a noble background), the warrior's ego can cause problems. After the release is negotiated, there is no formal manumission. The enslavement is treated as having never existed.

Otherwise, slaves captured in war are often left to suffer at the hands of their conquerors. In the Southwest, the Delzahn disfigure enslaved prisoners. Killing one in the process is considered a sign of almost foolish zeal but is not considered immoral. Similarly, public executions and scapegoat rituals release popular hatred for the enemy among tribes such as the Linowan, especially if the war was based on a long-standing feud. Slaves sold to the Guild often face a better fate than those marched to their fate by a conquering army. If a city has a thriving slave market, armies and mercenary companies might put their slaves on the public block, but not until the officers and their allies take a cut. Nexus is an exception. Mercenary companies are small enough and close enough to a major center of the slave trade to put all or most of their prisoners on the open market. With its constant appetite for slaves, Harborhead also welcomes prisoners of war. Harborhead emissaries pay well for military engineers, smiths and construction laborers as their nation prepares for war with the Varangians.

THE LEGION TRADE

The legions' slave trade is an informal business that formed around exploiting the loopholes and contradictions in the Scarlet Empress' general orders. The Empress never encouraged taking slaves, but it was an important part of tribute and trade systems after the Contagion because it controlled the flow of needed labor and appealed to the daimyos, who kept slaves as a status symbol. Positioning herself at the top of these practices, the Empress imposed regulations designed to require her intervention if the legions were to make any significant profits and designated House Cynis as the only Dynastic house that could make an open business of it. This had the added benefit of preventing the legions from earning their own profits without her consent, curbing their economic self-sufficiency and making them less likely to turn against her.

As a result, the legions are technically forbidden from establishing a full-blown slave trade with its own markets


and the bulk sale of prisoners, but forced labor and personal attendants are permitted. Captives are divided into those capable of working and those who appeal to Dragon-Blooded officers. The former help build fortifications, and the latter serve their Dragon-Blooded masters. Personal slaves, captured in battle, are part of long-standing legion tradition that predates the Scarlet Dynasty. There is no set limit to how many slaves an officer may acquire other than legion policy, and many Dragon-Blooded run a side business selling captives to House Cynis.

Dragon-Blooded officers have the right to choose human spoils commensurate to their station. Most Exalted veterans acquire at least one concubine, menagerie inmate or valet by the time they return to the Realm to retire. Theoretically, Exalts select prisoners in order of rank — junior officers must make do with what remains after the generals have had their pick. Long-standing tradition holds it dishonorable to use this privilege to take away a prisoner another officer has personally captured, but the custom is often breached in the case of beautiful or exotic prisoners. Also, overly successful or arrogant young officers are sometimes punished by the loss of their favorite slave, but this tactic is a dangerous one, since it can stir resentment in the ranks.

Aside from such selections, any prisoners who are not executed (a common occurrence in the middle of a campaign) are pressed into labor. The legions rely on neither slave soldiers nor levies, but these captives are expected to work in the heat of battle, forming false trains to draw ambushes or pulling loads over difficult terrain. Those that survive are displayed for the Realm to see in a successful legion's triumphal procession, after which enemy leaders are executed and the rest are enslaved and given to other Dynasts as gifts. From time to time, these "presents" are actually transferred in significant numbers, with the giver fully expecting a "gift" in return as payment. Before her disappearance, the Empress let it be known (through her consorts or bureaucrats) when she felt that such gifts were getting out of hand and threatening the Cynis monopoly. At the same time, these events also served to remind House Cynis that its monopoly could be revoked at any time, so she hadn't begun a full-scale clampdown on the matter. After the disbursement of gifts, excess slaves are sold to House Cynis, a practice that continues to the present day.

Imperial legions never deal with the Guild. The Scarlet Empress' policies forbidding it have lasted to the present day. Such trade would put a legion in a compromising position and would anger House Cynis, who usually deal in the Realm's military captives. The Vermilion Legion is an exception. Under-funded and already poorly regarded, the Red Piss Legion has been known to trade the occasional windfall of prisoners to the Guild to shore up supply deficits. Other legions occasionally sidestep the rules by using rigged bookkeeping or several intermediate partners, but this is both criminal and poorly regarded by the Dynasty.





House Cynis is the strictest adherent to and advocate of Dynastic policies on slaving. Long ago, the Scarlet Empress permitted it to hold a near-monopoly on the sale of slaves in the Realm so long as it did not gather them with force of arms. The other Great Houses are well aware that Cynis would gain an immense advantage by being able to directly acquire slaves without paying the Guild and have let the house know in no uncertain terms that it will suffer should it attempt to do so.

Now that the Scarlet Empress is gone, there are fewer controls in place to prevent the legions from directly selling their slaves, but it still happens only rarely. The legions lose battles more often now, and therefore, occasions to herd an ocean of prisoners ahead of them in triumph occur less frequently than they once did. Finally, the Deliberative holds many of the same concerns as the Empress once did, and doesn't wish to let the legions turn enough of a profit that they can afford to follow policies independent of the Scarlet Throne.

ENSLAVED BY LAW

Legally mandated slavery is common throughout civilized Creation. In the Realm, commoners can be enslaved for severe debts, while the disenfranchised may be summarily enslaved before a Thousand Scales magistrate so long as the plaintiff provides proof of any debt. Other nations practice debt slavery and voluntary indenture to limited degrees.

In some places, it is also common to be enslaved for committing crimes that warrant neither execution nor torture. Imprisonment is a rare legal innovation and one usually limited to the aristocracy, so slavery is often one of the most merciful fates a convict can hope for.

CRIMINAL SLAVERY

In the Realm, slavery is a common punishment for insulting the Deliberative or the dignity of the Empress, for minor theft or for smuggling and other nonviolent crimes. Only commoners can be enslaved. UnExalted Dynasts and patricians face fines and censure instead.

Criminals make up a small proportion of the Scarlet Empire's slaves. They are owned by the Thousand Scales until sold at a Cynis market (for which the house takes a cut of the profits). As the criminals have often been disfigured for their crimes, they are commonly put to hard labor out of sight of a Dynast's household.

Elsewhere, a sentence of slavery may be a temporary one. In these cases, the slave cannot be sold and has further limited rights. Such is the case in Great Forks and in Lookshy. In Great Forks, all slaves have property and marriage rights. In Lookshy, temporary indenture is a separate class of slavery, distinct from enslaved prisoners of war and slaves purchased from the Guild. Alongside prisoners of war and the semi-free helot class, this makes for a complicated system, so Lookshy generally imposes this penalty as a last resort.

DEBT SLAVERY

Because all slavery in the Realm is permanent barring manumission by a Dragon-Blooded who applies to the Deliberative (see *Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded*, p. XX), debt slavery is only imposed on commoners who have amassed a larger debt than they can ever repay or after attempts to negotiate repayment have repeatedly failed to bear fruit. If the complainant is Exalted, he can file to have the commoner enslaved himself. Because only the Dragon-Blooded are permitted to own slaves, an unExalted complainant typically asks a Dynast for sponsorship. The complainant and the sponsor negotiate a contract where the Exalt agrees to lodge the complaint in exchange for a percentage of the slave's market value. The complainant and the sponsor visit a judge and produce evidence of the debt, after which the debtor is enslaved to the sponsoring Dynast. The Exalt and the complainant then divide the remainder of the new slave's estate and estimated market value according to the previously agreed-upon contract.

If a patrician is an unExalted Dynast, she makes this arrangement with an Exalt of her own house. Otherwise, patricians build upon previously established business relationships to arrange the deal. Some Exalts (especially those of House Nellens) are especially open to the practice, and the names of willing Dragon-Blooded pass through certain patrician circles. One need only know the right person to ask, and by tradition, the patrician should frame the question as a hypothetical one.

Debt slavery is looked down upon because it essentially consists of an Exalt and an unExalted conspirator forcing a debtor into chains. The Immaculate Order frowns on the practice, and devout Dragon-Blooded avoid it. The Exalt is ordered by the judge to convert defendant's person into property in fair compensation for the complainant and to supervise the matter as a service to the throne.

Without the legal wrangling around the Exalted and ownership rights, most other states have a much more straightforward approach. For permanent enslavement, the debtor's person and property become the complainant's, either directly or after being liquidated by the authorities. The Guild purchases a small but steady proportion of its slaves from such states.

CONTRACTUAL SLAVERY

Some nations, notably Great Forks and Calin, allow a freeman or citizen to sell himself into a temporary or permanent period of indenture. Such contracted slaves usually have special skills that make them extremely valuable but suffer from some exorbitant debt or other emergency. The owner gains a household expert who is constantly on call, cannot refuse duty and is cheaper than the hired alternative. The slave gains enough money to pay off his debts or other financial concerns and is guaranteed room and board for the duration of the contract.

Typically, a contract for voluntary indenture is more favorable than involuntary servitude. These slaves are usually given different marks or livery to indicate that it is illegal in certain capacities to treat them as full slaves. For example, in Great Forks, harming a voluntarily indentured slave is considered as serious as harming a citizen or helot. At the very least, this is the way it is *supposed* to work. In truth, contract slaves are generally a poorly-regarded lot, and many authorities look the other way when the owner breaks the terms of indenture. And, of course, should such a slave travel outside the nation that backed the contract, his owner might sell him when money is short or expand his duties beyond the bounds of the contract.

Payment consists of a lump payment that the would-be owner makes based on projections of the value of the prospect's work over the period of the contract, minus a hefty discount (since such arrangements are the mark of the desperate). The contract also spells out the living conditions that the slave will endure and any limitations on her duties (such as a ban on sexual or military service). Limited periods of indenture last an average of 10 years in Great Forks. Elsewhere, it is common for such arrangements to last up to 20 years and rare for them to last less than five years. Contracted slaves cannot be sold without the slave's consent.

In cases of permanent voluntary indenture, the lump sum is much greater and is passed on to whoever the slave designates as her heir. Alternatively, the slave is "rented," in the sense that her owner sends a regular payment to a heir. Upon death, the slave is returned to the family for burial. Unlike regular slavery, the children of contracted slaves are free persons. Indentured service is practiced throughout the Hundred Kingdoms, in Calin, in Gem and in Gethamane in the North. Both Gem and Gethamane make use of indentured miners to supervise other slaves. Nexus practices voluntary, temporary indenture, and no other kind is permitted, but the Guild has been very successful in stretching the law to include its own slaving operations.

In the Realm, contract slavery is illegal and impractical. Owning slaves is a mark of Exalted privilege, and limitations on ownership would constitute a challenge to that privilege. In addition, many commoners are, for all intents and purposes, chained to the service of a patrician. Forestry and mining operations often require workers to go into debt to pay for their shelter and meals, and many villages are, at this point, at the mercy of the Dynasts who pay their annual rents. As a result, actual slavery is hardly necessary. Finally, the number of slaves on the market ensures that any interested buyer can find the right slave for the right task. Anyone legally allowed to own a slave is hardly going to be interested in a contract slave when the real thing is for sale in any major city.

FLESH COMMERCE

Whatever their source, slaves normally enter the Guild's distribution system at a wholesaler's or trader's market. Since the majority of slaves are captured by barbarians, these markets are generally Guild trading posts put in place to serve the slave trade's needs. In addition, cities such as Nexus provide a place to transfer captives to Guild ownership. When a slave first enters the wholesale slave trade, the worst part of her experience since initial capture begins. Slaves are subjected to overcrowded, filthy conditions, and slavers use the opportunity to break their property's spirits.

The Guild maintains a monopoly on the wholesale slave trade wherever it can, but does not especially fear competition. Its trade network and vast experience makes it possible for the Guild to offer competitive prices compared to local outfits.

SLAVE CITADELS

The Guild and local raiding groups cooperate to build slave citadels and to clear routes to and from them according to a Guild architect's plans. Newly captured slaves are often put to work on these projects. The resulting fortress can hold hundreds of slaves, dozens of mercenaries and a merchant prince with retinue and guests.

These citadels serve as trading posts and distribution centers. A Guild representative pays raiders here, often recruiting them to guard the fortress as well. Since the looting of the establishment would cut off the supply of goods, tribal raiders are usually willing to defend a slave citadel. The Guild supplements these tribal fighters with mercenaries, including training cadres. Raiders who agree to this arrangement often learn more sophisticated military tactics, and the Guild frequently offers training in professional slaving techniques as well.

Various merchant princes rotate through command of these citadels. This way, a slave community cannot mark a particular merchant prince or caravan for easy harassment, since the subject of the slaves' ire will be gone in a few months, anyway. However, the merchant prince assigned is always familiar with local tribal culture, the area's geography and the particular qualities of slaves taken from the region, and in practice, this means that merchant princes often return to the same citadel five or ten years later.

LIFE AT A SLAVE CITADEL

A successful slave citadel becomes a meeting place for trade of all kinds, whether brokered by the Guild or not. Most long-term raider tribes institute regular trade fairs at the citadel, where livestock, hides and other local goods pass from one clan to another. The Guild benefits from the increased importance of the location and the ability to directly influence the crude local market. New drugs or





luxury goods are often discovered at these fairs. A merchant prince brave enough to speculate on a new type of herb, animal or tribal craft can reap immediate rewards, but his temporary tenure ensures that he doesn't build a personal monopoly, but enriches the Guild as a whole. These fairs also mark the highest volume of slave sales.

When a new group of captives comes to the compound, the merchant prince assesses their value and offers compensation after consulting with the fort's permanent staff. Slaves must be healthy and strong to survive the travel ahead and labor for their owners. After that, appearance and special skills are considered. Often, the merchant prince's advisors will handle all direct contact with the raiders on the strength of their knowledge of native customs and the local economy. The Guild pays raiders well. It can afford to, and it ensures repeat business.

SLAVERY AT A CITADEL

Slave quarters at a citadel are crowded but clean, as good hygiene is necessary to prevent outbreaks of disease. Slaves eat and exercise in a yard at the center of the stockade and are usually afforded a roofed outdoor enclosure to sleep in (except in the North, where tents are the rule).

A slave first sees the yard when she is sold to the Guild. A platform is erected in the center of the stockade, and the slaves are stripped naked, then marched before Guild representatives. A slave breaker or doctor checks for signs of disease or weakness, especially observing each captive's gait, the condition of his teeth and his muscle tone. The Guild representative haggles with the clan head or other representative before placing each prisoner into one of four groups.

The first group consists of the best potential slaves of the lot. These are few in number and possess tremendous athletic ability, expertise in a field, an unusual appearance or other exceptional, salable qualities. A given lot of captives will have, at best, one or two of these candidates.

The second group consists of normal laborers, suitable for any number of duties. These slaves possess a basic level of physical fitness and no visible deformities or illness.

The third group consists of older captives as well as those with minor disabilities, who cannot command the best prices at a slave market but are both strong enough to work and to survive the voyage to their final destinations.

Finally, certain captives are deemed worthless due to injury, illness or age. These are given back to their captors to do with as they wish or else killed by the citadel staff if the slavers won't take them back.



THE SAVAGE GUILD

To intimidate their captives, raiders often tell brutal tales about the fate they are to suffer at the hands of Guild buyers. Since the typical merchant prince is a foreigner who doesn't speak the language of his property, these stories play upon the prisoners' fear of outsiders and persist even after months of captivity. The most common rumor is that Guild officers and slave buyers are cannibals. Given the number of slaves that end up with the Fair Folk, this isn't an entirely inaccurate rumor. Other stories exist that describe the Guild as a tribe of soulless automatons or subjects of demonic possession.

The bodies are burned to prevent supernatural possession or reanimation.

Members of the first three groups are branded (on the shoulder or buttock) with a mark denoting their assessed value and locked in an iron collar inscribed with additional information, including the group they were originally captured with. To prevent insurrection, the Guild breaks up such groups, so that linguistic and cultural differences prevent an easy conspiracy. The merchant prince waits until several separate groups of captives are gathered at a citadel, then mixes them to break up preexisting tribal or social ties before ordering the caravan to move on.

In addition, slaves captured elsewhere stay at a citadel as the caravans transporting them stop to rest. If their eventual destination is a nearby city, bargain hunters will occasionally brave the journey to try and buy directly from the Guild. The merchant prince in charge assesses these offers on a case by case basis.

PROMINENT SLAVE CITADELS

A few citadels are better known than the rest, due to the high volume of slaves that pass through or their particular conditions.

THE AMBER POST

Located near the northwestern tributary of the River of Tears, the Amber Post is a squat, dour building of black stone named for the glow of the water at sunset. The Amber Post is well known for its slave-breaking techniques — the Cesta family perfected its cruel art over three generations. The family wields a disproportionate amount of power compared to its members' status as Guild custodians. Even though many of them have outgrown the practical economic advantages of raiding, local tribes and petty states alike send a constant stream of captives to the citadel because they are intimidated by the Amber Post's mercenaries and by seneschal Arguin Cesta himself. The fortress specializes in supplying unskilled labor and Fair Folk delicacies.

The factors believe that the Cestas have made the Amber Post into their own private fief that interferes with the economic potential of the region. Cesta has a strong personal cadre, however, leaving the Guild to determine the best time to kill him, rather than simply dismiss him. It is only a matter of time until the Guild intervenes.

ARGUIN CESTA: SENESCHAL OF THE AMBER POST

Arguin's cruelty comes as naturally to him as any of his other attributes, but his enthusiasm for slave breaking outstrips that of his predecessors. He can often be found standing ramrod straight with his back to the river, gazing down at slaves in the square below in search of hesitation or imperfection. Over the generations it has managed the Amber Post, the Cesta family has developed a number of internal traditions, such as the practice of torturing to death the first disobedient prisoner of a new group to demonstrate the master's absolute power over their lives. Arguin's shaved head, gray leather dress and pale stare create an image of mercilessness to match his attitude.

Arguin Cesta is devoted to a life of precision and routine. His methodical abuse of captives is part of a larger ethos that ensures that he is never lax with any of his responsibilities. Under his tenure, the number of mercenaries guarding the citadel has tripled. Their expanded mission includes securing territory around the Amber Post and administering to the small shantytown that has grown up around it. Arguin is exceedingly polite to visiting merchant princes, while leaving no doubt that he holds true authority here. Since his efficient practices and intimidation of the raiders allows him to fetch considerably lower prices for the Guild, it has taken years for reports from various caravans to gel into the realization that he is stunting the growth of the region. Arguin has also forced the raiders into several skirmishes with his own troops, then demanded tribute after his better-equipped soldiers won. Ultimately, he hopes to hold the Amber Post as his own personal fief, supplied by the Guild but permanently staffed by his own family.

THE PIT OF SIGHS

Located south of the Lap, the Pit of Sighs is the final stop for many slaves before entering the markets of the South. As nations such as Gem flourish, the demand for more slaves increases, overcrowding the Pit of Sighs. Unlike most citadels, it was dug out of a natural crevice. The underground chambers that once provided shelter from the heat now host a diseased miasma, as local and caravan slaves are crushed into cells. However, the



number of deaths is still too low to justify the expense of expanding the fortress.

The slaves kept here maintain a rough cult devoted to a plague spirit, praying that they will be spared the sickness that sweeps through the place. The Guild has attempted to stamp it out on several occasions, but the cult always reestablishes itself with new, hidden rites. No matter the variation, it's persistence is puzzling, given that captives rarely linger longer than a few months before joining a caravan. The cult is troublesome to the Guild because its members practice self-mutilation, lowering their sale price. The fact that the most scarred slaves never seem to contract diseases is not lost on the Guild. A little god or Fair Folk interloper is suspected of fostering the cult, but even with the aid of bright morning (see *Scavenger Sons*, pp. 32-33), Guild occultists have found nothing, and spies sent among the slaves have all died of horrible diseases.

OTHER WHOLESALE MARKETS

In addition to the Guild's network of trading posts, it is possible for raiders to take their captives directly to the cities, where both the Guild and independent merchants bid for prisoners. Agents of House Cynis also attend these markets, hoping to find a reliable supply of slaves outside of the Guild. The factors have little to fear from independent merchants, since most of them service an inefficient local slave trade. The Guild also makes a point of trouncing Cynis representatives at the auction block, to emphasize the inevitability of the Guild monopoly.

The Guild encourages the use of silver currency at wholesale markets. By entering a less competitive bid against merchants who offer silver, it sacrifices total control of the slave trade in exchange for the acceptance of silver — which is, in any event, best spent on Guild wares.

The following cities are notable for their wholesale slave auctions:

AZURE

Early trade with the Guild allowed Azure to develop the resources necessary to become a civilized nation, ready to take the reins if the Realm faltered. Now the supply of slaves has practically come to a standstill. The people of Azure have chosen conquest over trade and have been filling their wealthy households with prisoners of war, seizing what the Guild feels they should simply purchase and leaving nothing to fill slave ships headed east. The other fruits of war have been spent on festivals and games, so trade of all kinds is growing sparse. Of course, Azure's wealth was originally engineered by the Guild, partially in the form of several large loans to its current dictator. The Guild is on the verge of using those loans as leverage to contain the local political situation. Some merchant princes favor more forceful options, from crushing tariffs to assassination, but more conservative voices are arguing that the uncertainties of war make such options a bad investment.

HARBORHEAD

Harborhead needs slaves. Because its laws make slavery a nonhereditary condition, Harborhead encourages raiders to sell directly to it. When the vagaries of birth and death leave the city with fewer slaves than normal, the direct market shores up the difference. When slaves are abundant, the excess is sold to the Guild. Harborhead is also aware of its vulnerability to Guild subversion and strives to maintain a robust direct market in case the Guild ever decides to interrupt the flow of new slaves. Currently, the Guild and Harborhead are gearing up for the abundance of slaves soon to arrive from the upcoming Varangian campaign.

NEXUS

The Lawless City has served as a meeting place for slave-takers since before the coming of the Council of Entities. Since the Council claimed the city, trade has been even better. Despite laws that demand that it be circumspect about it, the Guild has a reliable place to acquire slaves, and raiders who might be pariahs in any other Scavenger Lands city have a place to sell them. Such is the success of the arrangement that Nexus' neighbors are sometimes raided along the way to market — an unlucky merchant may find himself returning to the city he just left under markedly different circumstances. Raiders are careful never to raid any place *claimed* by Nexus. The Council of Entities' severity about such matters is well known.

The fact that the Guild and the raiders don't have any legal recourse if a slave escapes is a minor problem, since there are a dozen mercenary bands willing to guard captives for a reasonable fee. If caught, would-be runaways are publicly tortured before the other captives or quickly sold to the Fair Folk.

BREAKING SLAVES

Slave citadels and other wholesale markets are the typical places where slave breaking begins. A slave breaker's job is a violent, disgusting one, since he is expected to destroy the slaves' desire to escape or disobey. To put it less gently, slave breakers are professional torturers. The Realm and other states promote the idea of a "slave mentality," which holds that their property would not come into their hands unless they lacked the will to be free. A slave breaker attempts to give truth to this fiction.

A slave breaker is an unacknowledged part of every merchant's retinue. Most often, slave breakers also work as teamsters, physicians or quartermasters and are referred to by those titles. Regardless of their culture, most people find the process of breaking slaves unpleasant, but the Guild, House Cynis and others have always been able to find someone suited to the task. In the Guild, slave breakers enjoy better pay, but they rarely advance within the organization. A few move into bounty hunting, but most remain at their jobs until they are too old to work.

While the process of breaking a slave begins at the market, it continues throughout the rest of the slave's life. Most Dynastic households have a slave breaker in their retinue, either as an assigned duty or an unofficial, occasional task. By the time slaves enter the houses or businesses of their owners, they are expected to be obedient and attentive. Dynasts of the Realm consider slave breaking beneath them. It's usually entrusted to a senior servant (as an honor) or an unExalted relative (as an unpleasant duty).

Slave breakers use hard repetitious labor to force complicity, adding other techniques where necessary. The lash is a useful tool because it can inflict terrible pain with little lasting harm. Beatings (the soles of the feet and palms are common targets, since they leave no disfiguring scars) and repeated suffocation to the point of unconsciousness are used at the slightest hint of disobedience or fatigue. This is complemented with verbal and psychological abuse in the form of periods of enforced silence, insults, sensory deprivation and threats that capitalize on the slaves' worst fears. Repeated promises to starve or mutilate the slave, along with threats to harm the rest of his family or tribe are used to force passivity. The Guild considers sexual assault an unprofessional way to condition slaves, and the Immaculates consider it immoral, but independent slave breakers often employ rape as well.

TRANSPORT

Once slaves have been sorted at the slave citadel, they are assigned to passing Guild caravans based on each caravan's destination. The highest quality slaves are usually destined for the Scarlet Empire, although a few major states in the Scavenger Lands also have promising markets capable of moving the most expensive slaves. The lowest quality slaves typically go to the Fair Folk, though captured wise men or artists occasionally join the lot to enhance the Fair Ones' diet.

In any event, the journey is the most dangerous part of a slave's journey, as they suffer according to the economic realities of the trade. The Guild strikes a balance between cheap transportation and the survival of its chattel. A slave may travel by ship, by riverboat or on foot — or all three — to get to the consumer market. Only the luckiest, such as those captured in the Scavenger Lands and auctioned in Nexus may forgo the journey. Each type of transportation has its own hazards.

Between the options of river, land and sea transport, the last is the most dangerous. All but the most exotic slaves spend most of their time locked in a cargo hold in order to prevent their rebellion or suicide, with only one daily exercise drill. Rations are thin, as the slaves must compete with the sailors for the ship's dwindling stores of food and fresh water. Disease and filth are rampant as human waste accumulates in rarely emptied tubs.

River travel is more merciful. A slave boat plying the Yellow River makes frequent stops for food and rest, and

slaves are able to share some of these benefits. Between a better diet and less confinement combined with swift movement on the water, river travel is the most survivable type of slave transportation. Nonetheless, conditions are as crowded or worse because a riverboat need carry no supplies and need not worry about its ability to survive on the stormy open ocean and, thus, can be far more heavily laden. Slaves in Guild river freighters also spend periods being sandwiched between other cargo. Security on riverboats is stricter because it's possible for escaped slaves to immediately find purchase on the shores of all but the greatest rivers.

Land travel is the most physically arduous because slaves must walk to their destination, chained together alongside the yeddim and the other pack animals of a merchant prince's entourage. Only slaves of the greatest potential value are allowed to take any rest for illness or infirmity. If an average slave can't keep up, he's cajoled or beaten by the caravan's slave breaker. A slave that cannot move even under the threat of torture is killed. Still, land travel lacks many of the hazards of a confined ship's hold. Lack of fresh water is only a problem in the South, and disease rarely plagues slaves on land the way it does those trapped on ships. Slaves who mostly traveled on foot to market stand out because of the scars along their necks and shoulders, acquired from the friction of the chains and collars they wore for the entirety of their march.

ON THE CARAVAN

Slaves en route to markets receive the heaviest guard: one for every 10 to 15 slaves. Fresh from slave citadels and points of capture, these slaves have yet to be cowed by the sting of the whip. On a slave caravan, weapons are kept under lock and key whenever they are away from the hands and scabbards of the guards. Slaves are searched daily for anything they might be able to use as a weapon, including sticks, stones, soup bones and lengths of rope. Slaves are forbidden to speak unless spoken to in order to prevent conspiracy.

Despite such precautions, caravans still fall to slave rebellion. In RY 752, the icewalker Grozh Sar used a flaked stone to amputate his left thumb and the large toes from both feet. This loosened his bonds, which he used to strangle a guard. Grozh used the guard's key to release a master chain which connected all the slaves to the caravan wagons. They found the caravan's arms and keys, but not before a quarter of them had fallen to guards. Wielding planks torn from the wagons and captured swords, they slaughtered as many of the caravan's company as they could catch and returned to the North. Although crippled for life, Grozh Sar's tribe allowed him to live as a hero. His Ashen Stags now plague Guild caravans bound for the Haslanti League.

Based on the testimony of survivors, the Guild changed its procedures. Slaves are no longer secured by a single master chain, and guards watch for prisoners who know the art of chipping stones into blades. This story underlies the importance of attending to every detail.



AWKWARD CIRCUMSTANCES

The Guild is aware that any given slave has a small chance of being the child of an outcaste Dragon-Blooded. A few merchant princes also realize that other Exalted might take the Second Breath in their chains.

Though it has been invoked on only a handful of occasions, Guild procedure is to apologize profusely and pay off the Exalt. The Guild is willing to offer the equivalent of a Resources ••• transaction but can be pushed to a Resources •••• transaction if the Exalt seems particularly talented, dangerous or angry. Of course, Exalted who receive the Second Breath as slaves are likely to be young, confused and unsure of how to manage their newfound wealth. The Guild is pleased to offer its services, helping the beneficiary to live a comfortable life as far away from Guild operations as possible. Naturally, the Exalt must agree to never interfere in Guild business. In all cases, a factor deals with the situation through an intermediary, and the incident is noted for future reference.

If negotiations fail, the Guild is willing to test the new Exalt's strength with hired killers, but this runs the risk of angering other Exalted as well as others within the web of supernatural powers that Princes of the Earth are enmeshed in. The Guild would like to have as little to do with the world of feuding gods, sorcerers and supernatural martial artists as possible. In cases where the Guild has accidentally offended a powerful Exalt, a satrap's fortune is a reasonable price to pay, and the Guild is willing to meet quite unreasonable demands to preserve itself.

Determined captives will make every effort and use any tool they can find to escape. When the opportunity for freedom arises, the supposed "slave mentality" dissolves.

DESTINATIONS

After their journey, slaves are allotted to the city slave blocks in hundreds of nations, to the trade savants of House Cynis and to the graceful torture of the Fair Folk. Additional merchandise is acquired at these destinations, some going back to the raiders, continuing the cycle of trade. Of the states and petty fiefdoms visited by Guild caravans, only a minority reject the slave trade completely. Shadowlands and nations that use the labor of the walking dead have no need for slaves, and a few less civilized communities either acquire slaves through direct warfare or depend on feudal indenture to till their crops.

THE REALM

Most slaves destined for the Realm end up in Pangu Prefecture, where the town of Konjin receives Guild freight-

ers. Konjin is a small, efficient port that sits on the southeastern shore of the prefecture, across the strait from the Imperial City. Almost entirely dedicated to the slave trade, its position allows it to ship slaves upriver as far as the foothills of the Imperial Mountain, but it isn't so far up the waterway that it can't attract vessels sailing around the Blessed Isle. The city is directly adjacent to one of House Cynis largest estates, so Guild envoys regularly visit to negotiate the price of slaves and other imports with the Great House.

House Cynis purchases slaves at Konjin and allots them to markets across the Blessed Isle. The house estate includes a slave camp, isolated from the rest of the prefecture's territory. Each block of slave tenements corresponds to a different Eastern prefecture (the western half of the Blessed Isle is served by other camps). The entire palace is surrounded by untamed woods, as thick as Cynis sorcery and the elemental aspect of the Manse can make them. Slaves are sedated for the duration of their stay.

Attached to the main estate is a small but richly appointed keep called the First House of Equitable Prosperity. Visiting merchant princes and proxies assigned to deal with House Cynis stay here, surrounded by slaves, couriers and elaborate artwork provided by the house. Paintings and sculpture showcase the house's military victories against barbarians, Anathema and little gods to intimidate guests with the Dynasty's might. The factors that this is supposed to impress have never been here because long-standing Guild policy discourages direct contact between Dynasts and high Guild officials. UnExalted Dynasts on business also stay at the First House, while the Exalted are housed at the palace itself.

House Cynis maintains a number of smaller camps organized in the same fashion as the one in Pangu Prefecture. Each of these has its own House of Equitable Prosperity (though none of them are as fine as the First House), and camps are sectioned off according to nearby markets. In the Western half of the Blessed isle, the Guild ships slaves directly to these camps. The Arjuf camp is, after the Pangu estate, the second largest in the Realm. Individual Cynis slavers and pleasure house owners pick up their property here and pass along the profits from previous sales, where it travels back through the network to enrich the entire house.

HARD BARGAINING

The waning hegemony of the Realm has forced House Cynis to make some damaging choices in its relations with the Guild. Discontent in the Scavenger Lands forced the Guild to look farther afield for slaves, and the legions have been turned back often enough since the Empress' disappearance that the house couldn't acquire cheaper slaves through the military. So, on three occasions since Realm Year 763, House Cynis purchased large slave shipments on Guild credit. Initially, the house believed that the Empress' absence would be temporary and that the severe terms it agreed to would be easy enough to wrangle out of after the

legions restored order. Five years later, the house cannot rely on intimidation to modify the terms of the loan.

House Cynis had always sold the drug bright morning to discrete clients. Persuading the Guild to regularly acquire and sell Cynis the drug in defiance of imperial law is another favor that put the house further in the factors' debt. In response to this, the Guild has again raised the price of slaves, while suggesting that House Cynis should make up for lost profits by accepting larger shipments of bright morning. Blatantly defying the Realm's law by creating a large market for the drug could land Cynis Dynasts in serious trouble, but the Guild would like larger access to what constitutes the most concentrated market for bright morning in all Creation.

House Cynis has considered starting a competing slave trade with its own mercenaries, but the massive cost of such an undertaking would cripple its short-term finances for an uncertain gain. This is especially true given suggestions that the Guild may respond by instituting levies or undermining the Realm's jade currency standard in Cynis satrapies.


CYNIS BUSINESS

To make up for the narrowing profit margin, House Cynis has invested more and more in rented slave labor and prostitution. Rather than sell slaves outright, Cynis rents them out at rates geared to the type of service they provide. This is the most common form of slave service in the Realm, since the slaves can be directed by unExalted clients without

breaking the law. Most slaves are leased and operated under at least nominal supervision — a Cynis Exalt is ultimately responsible for their actions and stays in shouting distance of whatever the slaves are working on. Thus, the house can earn several times a slave's sale price in a relatively short length of time. To promote this, Cynis has experimented with restricting direct sales in a few outlying prefectures. This reduces the number of slaves other Dynasts can loan out, forcing them to rely on rented slaves for parties, for construction projects and for other labor-intensive projects. The other houses are understandably incensed. In response, House Ragara is developing its own network to buy slaves elsewhere and ship them to affected regions, while House V'Neef is slightly increasing the number of slaves its legion officers acquire, closer to the limit of what would be considered acceptable without infringing upon official Cynis control of the trade.

In addition, House Cynis has invested more heavily in its slave brothels. Virtually every major city on the Blessed Isle now hosts a Cynis pleasure house, and the Imperial City has several. Despite the requests of many righteous Immaculate monks, the Mouth of Peace does not speak out against the brothels. Conservatives emphasize the doctrine that such illusory pleasures prevent the accumulation of Essence, but this has had little effect on their popularity. Occasionally, the monks quietly observe who is frequenting the local brothel, then deliver lectures and the occasional beating to those customers when they arrive at the temple for spiritual guidance and blessings.





One rapidly growing sideline to prostitution is the use of slaves to satisfy the murderous perversions of a growing clientele of Dynasts and patricians. The fees are exorbitant—up to several times the sale price of the slave—but the demand is persistent. Although slaves are routinely and openly used for things such as test cutting daiklaves and vivisection, this service extends far beyond that, attending to tastes that range from gang abuses to initiate a sworn brotherhood to treason against the throne. Hurting or killing slaves dressed in the scarlet panoply of the Empress or groomed to look like a the head of a Great House is a popular fetish. The most extreme of these services are consummated on the Cynis estate, and the woods there conceal the remains.

CYNIS INGENUITY

Of course, knowledge of the secret fetishes of the powerful is a valuable tool for blackmail. House Cynis keeps a staff of slave-scribes who have been sorcerously bound to secrecy to record these indiscretions by the house, region and profession of the clients involved. These records prove to be most valuable when House Cynis goes into negotiations or simply wants to ruin a rival. The house rarely employs long-term blackmail because even the most deviant victim eventually grows tired of the abuse. Even vices that are not technically illegal can injure a Dynast's reputation. These secrets are used to entice and frighten in measured doses. In many cases, a Cynis Exalt may discreetly let the secret out first so that the disgraced mark will come to the house for support. After all, House Cynis is nothing if not tolerant of its clients' eccentric tastes.

THE FAIR FOLK

The brave factors who negotiated the first sales to the Fair Folk left detailed instructions as to the proper protocols to use when dealing with these chaotic clients. The Fair Folk leave three sorts of payment: the dream-eaten, who go on to work farms, mines and factories across Creation; works of gossamer and precious materials; and artifacts and lore from the First Age, which the Fair Ones drew into the Wyld long ago.

A Guild caravan visits with precisely 150 personnel and slaves. The Fair Folk usually take about 100 of these, though they have been known to demand as many as 120. The merchant prince asks for permission to enter the Fair Ones' domain and is always spared, but otherwise, the Fair Folk do not always discriminate between caravan personnel and slaves.

TOWERS OF SPUN GOSSAMER AND JEWELLED BLOOD

There is one manor at each corner of Creation that receives Guild caravans, plus a wandering hill that appears wherever the Wyld's touch lingers. Their exact locations

change, but when a caravan travels close enough, one of the common Fair Folk invariably appears to guide it. These guides mutely appear, their bizarre form testimony to their origin. Occasionally, a guide arrives alone, but more commonly, an honor guard of gossamer-glass ships, shimmering worms, skinned selkies or other wonders out of faerie accompany her. Caravans that travel along certain roads or sea lanes (or in the case of the wandering hill, take a counterclockwise path around source of the Grey River) receive these escorts.

After formally asking permission to enter, every member of the caravan, slave or not, must do so. The Guild forbids its officials from sampling the exotic delights of the Fair Folk, as their food, drink and favors enchant the fools that partake of them. In spite of this, the Fair Ones always offer their refreshments. Caravan guards and the like are warned that they will be killed for indulging, but a few fall prey to temptation. Of course, slaves may satisfy themselves freely and find respite from the hunger and thirst they have endured to get there.

After several hours of dallying over these sweetmeats, the lord of the fortress arrives in splendor. Common Fair Folk secure manacles of gossamer on all who have partaken of Fair Folk hospitality as well as those who the merchant prince designates as slaves. So, if the Guildsman's staff partake of the Fair Folk's hospitality, they also find themselves chained. During the elaborate feast that follows (which the merchant prince refuses, despite endless invitations, cajoling and intimations of insult), the merchant prince and the Fair Folk noble discuss events in the world, fix the schedule of the next caravan and gently haggle over the price of slaves. The merchant prince discusses what he might value in abstract, uncertain terms. The noble, in turn, suggests other goods that might serve the Guildsman's needs or whispers a First Age secret as if in confidence to a friend. Twenty years ago, a merchant prince returned from the North with the location of one of a set of five orichalcum mirrors. When properly activated, they allow their users to see whatever is reflected in one of the other mirrors. Other bits of lore, such as the original plans of certain Scavenger Lands cities, have allowed the Guild to find hidden artifacts or simply to charge large fees to act as consultants to the rulers of those cities' modern incarnations.

Those Guild personnel who remain return to their vessel or caravan, where approximately 50 dream-eaten and a Ravager steward await them. The steward passes on her lord's salutations, explaining that precious "gifts" await the crew, already stowed for travel. As soon as they cross the border of the Fair Folk Demesne, the merchant prince runs to her new cargo and assesses the profit. The dream-eaten go to the drug fields and mines where they will live out the short span remaining to them or to the sorcerers, spirits and other clients that demand them.

FAIR FOLK HOSPITALITY

In their own Demesnes, the hospitality of the Fair Folk has an effect similar to the Glamour power listed on page 286 of *Exalted* (under the “Fair Folk Diplomat”), except that it causes a person rather than an area to fall prey to illusions. Inside the Fair Ones’ Demesne, a victim may interact with these illusions as if they were real, even to the point of hovering in the air, standing on a stairwell only she can see. In the five fortresses, the Fair Folk use their hospitality to prepare victims to live out their dreams and nightmares, refining their emotions for Fair Folk consumption.

The player of anyone exposed as a guest to Fair Folk hospitality must make a Willpower roll at difficulty 2. The player of anyone exposed as a prisoner must make a Willpower roll at difficulty 3. Those who fail are subject to the Beguile power (see *Exalted*, p. 286), which directs them to linger in the fortress and show no resistance to the Fair Folk. The beguilement has no effect on characters with a Wits + Essence of 7 or higher. This beguilement is a natural property of Fair Folk Demesnes, but it is the nature of such glamour-gifts to only function when freely chosen. Individuals who are forced to consume them are under no compulsion, and the Fair Folk will not tolerate abuse of their guests through force-feeding.

THE FIVE FORTRESSES

Although the noble Fair Folk commanding them change (or merely change their natures) at irregular intervals, the names and general appearance of the five fortresses that the Guild delivers slaves to remain relatively constant.

THE WREATH OF LASHES

The Ash Road runs straight south through the Southern desert until caravans meet the lions and fire-blackened scorpion children that will guide them to the Wreath of Lashes. The slowly writhing walls of this bronze tower are chill to the touch, defying the persistent beating of the sun. This fortress is a disturbing place for slavers to visit, for the Fair Folk forged much of it from the dreams of tortured chattel. The walls move with shifting bas-reliefs of long devoured slaves, reliving their past torments in slow motion. A maze of curtains made of whip-braids and chains leads the way to the reception hall. Visitors are offered wine with the aroma of burnt blood and raw, spiced meat. Merchant princes often leave with gossamer blades or gems carved into the shape of fierce, fantastic creatures.

THE EMBRACE OF ASH AND YEW

It is a testament to the unnatural existence of the Fair Ones that these two trees twist together, since the poisonous

yew is anathema to other vegetation. The result is as large as most human fortresses, dwarfing even the great Eastern forest that surrounds it. Interlocking chambers lie within the living wood, decorated with tapestries and webbing, whose soft music comes from the plucking of fist-sized spiders at their centers. Hanging fruits, candied insects of all sorts and nectars are served here. By avoiding these temptations, Guild representatives leave with bright bolts of gossamer cloth and the recipes for long-lost tinctures and medicines. Caravans to this fortress follow a series of twisting paths toward the rising sun until they are greeted by the carnivorous gray stags that escort them to their destination.

THE MOUTH OF WHITE SLEEP

Merchant princes reach the Mouth of White Sleep by taking their caravans North. The gate of this ice palace blows with a chill white fog. In this austere fortress, warmth is the hospitality offered to visitors, and slavers must refuse the fur cloaks and heated rooms offered to them. In return, travelers receive blocks of the never-melting ice of the farthest North, First Age maps and flying craft knitted from the dreams of gifted artisans.

THE SURGEON’S DEEP

This palace is cut from the body of a slowly writhing whale-behemoth. Great spears puncture its vital points and have closed the flow of living Essence its vital organs until these chambers have hardened to greenish stone. Slaves are exchanged for Wyld pearls, corals and shells, gossamer armor and other Western treasures. Merchant princes avoid the skewered, living sea creatures and heady rum offered them. Glass boats and Sea Folk in the shape of seals guide slavers who sail west, toward Mars.

THE FRAGRANT HILL

Wandering throughout the Wyld places in the world, this hill smells of the rare incense of the greatest Immaculate temples. Visitors must refuse the shining gems they are offered to navigate the darkness, using their own lanterns instead, and should not partake of the roots and legumes heaped upon platters for them. Scrolls depicting the devices of the First Age and precious metals worked with inhuman precision pay for slaves. Within the Guild, some speculate that this is a surreptitious trade undertaken by the Mountain Folk in order to conceal their appetites. Caravans take a widdershins route around the source of the Grey River until the hill appears, cloaked in mist.

MARKETS ACROSS CREATION

Slaves who avoid the Fair Ones’ attentions or the Cynis camps are delivered to one of the thousands of slave markets that flourish in the Second Age. Larger cities’ markets are staffed by the Guild, small towns by independent merchants. In between these extremes, the Guild promotes a thriving retail trade. These independent merchants promote the





GETTING THERE

The Guild originally handled its transactions with the Fair Folk on an ad hoc, improvised basis. The Fair Ones would occasionally devour entire caravans, merchant princes would ensnare themselves with the pleasures of glamour and the factors would respond with brief embargoes. The Fair Folk could hunt for themselves, of course, but business with the Guild was a far more efficient way of acquiring sustenance and presented far fewer dangers than the possibility of dream-starvation or attack by angry Exalts and spirits.

In RY 414, Fair Folk diplomats and Guild factors met in Nexus to resolve such outstanding issues. As a result, the five fortresses system evolved, and the Fair Folk gave the Guild its showstones, small gossamer talismans that merchant princes still carry. Showstones emit a subtle magical vibration that notifies the guardians of each fortress that the bearer (and, presumably, her caravan) approaches and warn other Fair Folk not to molest the caravan that a stone-bearer leads. The caravan still has to take the right road to the right area (an amorphous, roughly 200 mile square territory), and such regions are at the Bordermarches of the Wyld (see *Exalted: The Lunars*, Chapter Six, for information about Bordermarches and the Wyld in general). Caravans usually time their arrivals for the new or waning moon because the Wyld strengthens as the moon waxes.

A showstone's emanation can be sensed by supernatural powers capable of detecting Essence flows, such as the Charms All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight, Pulse of the Invisible and Measure the Wind. Chaos-Repelling Pattern can neutralize a showstone's emanation. Two successes using Wyld-Shaping Technique can actually produce a counterfeit showstone out of Wyld-stuff if the Exalt has previously examined the real thing with All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight.

Guild's interests by ensuring that healthy local competition is the rule. Furthermore, the Guild influences the economies of such small states by demanding particular payments for their slave shipments. When the Guild demands silver, the wealthy hoard silver. When merchant princes offer a trade discount for fine weapons, a city's forges crackle with the effort to fill subsequent orders.

MARKETS IN THE SCAVENGER LANDS

Calin, Great Forks and Greyfalls are all cities that can support wealthy local merchants, though each does so in its own particular style.

PORT CALIN

The wealth of the slavers is troubling to the Calinti. Slavers are members of a burgeoning middle class that under-

mines the authority of the shogunate. The families pass laws to "show merchants their place," restricting certain armaments and the right to dress in the state colors. Even farmers are allowed the leaf shaped blades and flame-orange heraldry of the city, so the merchants are reminded that, in the eyes of the nobility, they are less than peasants. Still, this doesn't keep them from being *wealthier* than the farmers and the aristocrats, and unless Port Calin can wean itself away from its economic dependence on cheap labor, the slave merchants will continue to increase their influence in local affairs.

GREAT FORKS

The slavers of Great Forks have a reputation for being the most humane practitioners of their trade. This isn't to say they don't beat and brand their property, but they do so with full knowledge that, by the laws of the city, a slave enjoys many rights and can, in some cases, buy back her freedom. The best slavers refuse to sell to clients who might abuse their thralls — for that reason, "a slaveless prince" is Great Forks' slang for a cruel, wealthy man.

Many of these merchants are treated as something akin to grandparents or uncles by the better-treated slaves of the city. Slaves often come to them for financial advice and loans as a part of their plans to buy their freedom. Once freed, many of these slaves become slave sellers themselves, though not necessarily with the Guild.

GREYFALLS

Greyfalls boasts a small number of slave merchants. All are Dragon-Blooded because the state emulates Realm law. Greyfalls is one of the few places where Dragon-Blooded factors exist, just to keep the Guild's hand in the trade. These outcaste Terrestrials sell slaves alongside their Cynis counterparts. The Guild's slaves are cheaper, but Dynasts who buy from anyone else are thought to be unpatriotic. Also, House Cynis rents out its slaves here, just as in the Realm.

Technically, mortals may not own slaves in Greyfalls, but the law forbidding ownership is often stretched. Human buyers "rent" a slave from the Guild for its purchase fee, then pay a trivial sum annually to keep the de facto sale legal. The Guild does not compete with House Cynis for actual slave rentals and pays regular bribes to River Province satrapy officials. Both tactics prevent the Guild trade from official interference, but local Immaculates regularly rail against the outcaste market in sermons.

LOOKSHY

Lookshy is one exception to the Scavenger Lands-wide tendency toward slaving. The city sees slaves as a security risk and is loathe to support a population that it cannot trust to bear arms against an aggressor. Its Dragon-Blooded lords try to keep the city as self-sufficient as possible and are cautious about allowing the Guild too much economic leverage. The handful of licensed slave

sellers report to the Vincular Warden. This official records all sales and keeps an exact census of the sparse slave population and imposes a hefty luxury tax on all sales to keep the numbers down. In any event, the demand for slaves isn't high. The odd footman or courtesan that complements the other property of ranking strategoi is almost always a prisoner taken on campaign. Otherwise, criminals and prisoners of war are owned by the government, who set them to the city's public works.

THE TRADE IN NEXUS

Though many cities impose some local regulation on the basic business of selling human beings, the bureaucracy of the slave trade in Nexus is in a class of its own. Situated in a city where any slave can run without consequence and where the trade is technically illegal, the greatest slave market outside of the Realm merits special attention.

Long ago, the Council of Entities made this decree:

None shall labor against their will except by order of the Council.

Like most of the Civilities (the proclamations of the Council of Entities — see *Scavenger Sons*, p. 107), the wording of this decree is somewhat vague. Like the others, the Council clarifies it with brutal magical punishments when required. The Guild was brave enough to test the law (or knew something of its true intent) when it first brought humans to the livestock pens of the Coffeeblock Market in RY 152. To assuage the nervousness of the neighboring ranchers, the reeves posted a bill claiming that these chained prisoners were not slaves but contracted servants, and the legal fiction upon which Nexus' slave trade rests was founded.

Before entering the city, all slaves sign or mark a contract declaring that they have sold themselves to the Guild for three days of indentured service. Typically, the caravan master gets the slave's handprint on two copies of the document per slave, but some slaves are made to sign theirs to indicate that they are literate. Nexus artisans print thousands of these contracts every year and forge hundreds of collars inset with three jade bits: the payment mandated by the contract. Slaves wear them as they stand in the Coffeeblock stalls, all the while clutching their copy of the contract. It doesn't matter whether or not the slave can read it; refusals to mark it are met with swift, harsh punishment. The legal paraphernalia of slavery spawned two pieces of popular slang. A "black hand" (derived from the stained hands of slaves who have marked their contract) is used to refer to a slave or to someone with a submissive attitude, while a "three-bit deal" is any arrangement characterized by fraud or excessive effort.

This means that the Guild must sell its slaves as quickly as possible, before the contract is up and their "bondsmen" are freed. Slave markets in Nexus are a frenetic affair. Laborers are sold in volume to slavers with ready transport out of the city, and prices are kept low so

as to encourage a rapid sale. News of exotic or skilled slaves is sent by mounted messenger, so that negotiations for the sale can begin before the slave arrives.

Slaves entering Nexus need the same sort of paperwork, lest they be freed (and the owner most likely murdered) by the Council of Entities and its mercenaries. The rules of slavery in Nexus are not simply paid lip service. The Council emphasizes that its city is a place of refuge for the disenfranchised and draws strength from the cult that formed to laud them (particularly the Emissary) as liberators and keepers of the peace. The documentation must pass legal muster, and slaves kept in the city overlong are likely to be impounded and manumitted by the Council's servants.

THE COFFEEBLOCK MARKET

The vast majority of slaves are auctioned off to local and regional dealers in the Coffeeblock Market alongside all manner of livestock, from bull yeddim to Wyld-touched peacocks. Roughly half of a new shipment is earmarked for internal Guild transactions, to be sent to the whip legions or to assist factors and merchant princes with various projects. The rest are sold to foreign merchants and others who intend to leave the city as quickly as possible.

During the auctions, naked slaves are paraded along a raised platform, then pose to display their health and anything notable about their physical condition, such as tattoos or Wyld mutations. A handler stands nearby to persuade any recalcitrant slaves to do as they're told. A Guildsman then extols each slave's virtues as a laborer, savant or other servant and names the minimum bid. A good slave hawker has a clear, booming voice combined with the ability to read the faces of the crowd and can adjust the minimum up or down based on their expressions.

SLAVES IN NEXUS

Slavery is illegal in Nexus. The Guild walks a fine enough line selling them, but keeping slaves in Nexus territory is a reliable way to get murdered, either by Council troops or through messy, sorcerous means. There are very few exceptions to this rule.

The first exception is when a mob decides to subject a criminal to a period of indenture for her crimes instead of killing her. The offender must be guilty of a crime heinous enough that a lynching would not normally be opposed by the Council, and the mob must agree to a particular labor that the criminal will perform. Typically, this sort of criminal slavery is inflicted on those who are young and would otherwise die as a form of mercy. The mob then contacts a Council representative and explains the situation. The response normally takes three to five days to arrive. The Council either orders the offender freed or killed, or it approves of the arrangement and tells the new owner to periodically report to the Council for a review, wherein it may again order the death or freedom of the criminal. The small number of bondsmen this process



creates cannot work at any skilled trades, so most of them are household servants or gladiators.

Secondly, while not technically slaves or bondsmen, apprentices for skilled trades must serve their masters in exchange for training. There is no penalty for running away from an apprenticeship, but a master artisan can inflict beatings, levies and brief periods of forcible confinement upon a disobedient apprentice without the Council intervening. Fortunately, apprenticeships eventually end, freeing trained artisans to work where they will.

THE FATE OF THE CHAINED

From their caravans, stalls and stages, slaves go on to do all manner of work. Most slaves work in unskilled professions such as farm labor or mining. The Guild tries to determine what a slave's assets are as soon as possible after acquiring her. Prisoners who are literate, attractive or possess some unusual skill command a higher price than a dream-eaten farmhand.

A slave purchased through the Guild is rarely a trivial investment except for very wealthy clients. Urban households can usually afford one or two domestic slaves, while large agricultural manors benefit from the cheaper cost of unskilled laborers and the rough chain of command that develops. In such areas, semiprofessional slave breakers, handlers and bounty hunters ply their trade. The Guild often provides favored clients with access to the best of its

own staff, while less prestigious households leave the job to family members or to personal retainers.

THE FAIR FOLK

The Fair Ones hold their slaves in Wyld-racked realms far from civilization. Handling slaves is a chore left to the commoners of their kind, who feed on the dregs of prisoners' dreams, herd them through games designed to provoke delectable emotions and drag their devoured husks back to the five fortresses to exchange for fresh supplies. The shimmering slave fields are vast; glamour courses through them, weaving illusions to provoke the slaves' emotions to the point of madness. The Fair Folk prowl among the slave population, hidden behind familiar faces or the masks of nightmares. Contrary to popular belief, the Fair Folk do not immediately drag their prisoners into the bizarre flux of their homes. The Fair Ones are aware of their corporeal strength and understand that human beings are quickly aroused by material stimuli. A slave who is drawn immediately into the Wyld risks losing her mind, leaving nothing but the thin, tasteless dream-fare of madness. Sustenance and entertainment demand games and rites, where slaves confront terror and desire on the shores of the Wyld.

GAMES OF THE HUNTED

At the edge of Creation, the Fair Ones have a great deal of control over the shape of the land, the



THE LIBERATING ONES

The Liberating Ones are a set of six statues of the Emissary that stand at Nexus' territorial borders. They take their names from the fact that they mark the point at which Nexus' Civilities take force, prompting runaway slaves to seek them out. Inside the territory marked by the statues, slave owning is punishable by death, and the Council makes a point of sending mercenaries to kill slave owners who recapture or march their slaves through any part of it. The Guild takes pains to ensure that all indenture contracts are marked before caravans are in sight of the Liberating Ones.

"The Liberating Ones" is also Nexus slang for political activists and former slaves who live in Nexus and see that the city's code of freedom is known and enforced. Some Liberating Ones pay individuals to walk up and down the streets of Nexus, shouting out the good news of freedom in their own languages, so that everyone in the city, regardless of extraction, will know that they cannot be made to labor against their will. This job is one commonly given to newly liberated slaves, who can simultaneously become familiar with the city and have a good chance of contacting communities of their fellow countrymen as they walk up and down the streets shouting in their native tongue.

Other Liberating Ones act as intervention teams, reporting abuses to the Council and publicly demanding enforcement or sending their own armed teams to free slaves. Even the guards of Guild caravans are especially alert near the boundary statues, lest a snap raid by a paramilitary abolitionist faction spirit the slaves across the border to Nexus. Only the semiformal Coffeeflock trade is off-limits to armed assault. The Liberating Ones are well known for rescuing the elfshot from Ravagers, and it is in this capacity that the Liberating Ones earn a positive reputation among the populace. The Liberating Ones play up their opposition to the Fair Folk and never tire of painting every slaver as a collaborationist who sells Creation out to the Hosts of Faerie.

The richest among the Liberating Ones are also sponsors of the caretaking society of the opulent Temple to the Liberating Council, where constant lavish rituals and costly libations honor the Council as freedom's caretaker. This is ranked as one of the city's most obvious ongoing bribes, but it seems to be working — few of the Liberating Ones turn up dead from Council-style hits, despite displaying a level of organization that generally draws the ire of the Emissary.

currents, the quality of light and other facets of the environment. This power is typically keyed to the faerie lord's elemental affinity (see *Scavenger Sons*, p. 132), so that prisoners in the North confront snow and ice that has been wind-chiseled into disturbing shapes, while braids of flame imprison Southern captives. The Fair Folk look into the minds of their prisoners and shape the Wyld in ways calculated to provoke their emotions. An Eastern slave sees friends and lovers twisted out of leaves, branches and shadows while fleeing the keening of hunting hounds he once trained. Commoners prowl these preserves, shapeshifting into roles calculated to twist a victim's heartstrings and to work their emotions to a fever pitch under the influence of Wyld-shaped blossoms that emit cloying psychotropic pollen. Nobles ride these fields for sport as their inferiors weave ideal hunting grounds from the stuff of chaos.

Then, the pursuit and the shifting of the land ceases for a moment, just long enough for the slaves to sleep and to draw the day's experiences into their dreams. This moment of peace is always brief, and its duration changes on each occasion, so that the slaves are worked to laugh, cry or fight with the phantoms of the land in a haggard, half-dreaming state. Their efforts are as exhausting as those of farmers or miners, except that they are, in the end, cultivating themselves for consumption.

While terror and rage are certainly easy enough to provoke, these are not the only emotions that the Fair Folk prepare for dining upon. While most slaves receive some preparation, only a few undergo the elaborate dramas demanded by the greatest Fair Folk nobles. The greatest Fair Ones pick slaves with the most passionate souls and ensconce them in twisted dioramas that recall their free lives. A lone child awakens in a replica of her former home, where her parents (commoners carefully sculpted for the role) nourish feelings of trust and false freedom. While there is usually some falseness to the scene (such as the dominance of the local Fair Folk's favored element), many slaves ignore these signs, desperate for the comfort or distractions that such illusions offer.

Over a span that may range from mere hours to years (and which, at the edge of the Wyld, does not always correspond with the progress of time in Creation), the Fair Folk devour their slaves. The Fair Ones enter the illusion, stealing the slaves' emotions after agitating them to a fever pitch. A warrior's Valor is cultivated over a months, as he conquers dream-monsters, until he becomes ripe with bravery. Compassionate monks tend Fair Folk in the guise of the wounded and wretched until their mercy matches those of legendary sages.

Then, the failures come. The warrior is beaten back by a Wyld terror, and the monk's patients betray him — all outward manifestations of Fair Folk's feeding. The wisest Fair Folk give their slaves time to recover their Virtues, but many are swept up by the ecstasy of feeding, quickly



reducing their victims to spiritless husks. Eventually, the cycle of feeding and spiritual recovery is too exhausting for the slaves. Fair Folk nobles devour the emotional treasures that remain and leave the paltry, common feelings for the commoners. Once their feelings and will have been entirely ravaged, the slaves become dream-eaten.

THE DREAM-EATEN

After her emotions and ambitions have been devoured, a slave is little more than a tottering husk of a person, but such dream-eaten are still useful. The Guild collects them after every delivery and sells them throughout Creation.

Until they become used to a routine, the dream-eaten do nothing unless they are ordered to. This makes them uniquely suited for hard, repetitive labor, especially since they care little for their own bodies. Bereft of the sense of violation that accompanies injury, they feel little pain and only react to a hazard with the most fundamental reflexes. A dream-eaten slave will flinch from the touch of burning coal or cringe under a falling rock but does not evade such hazards unless ordered to do so at the time of their occurrence. With these reduced reflexes, many dream-eaten begin to look like lepers after several years of labor, as their extremities are marked with sores and missing digits from untended injuries. They do not talk or cry out, though, in many, some wisp of their former life is trapped within them. This may lead them to repeat nonsensical phrases, such as their own name or the last thing they said to a good friend. This irritates most handlers, who are quick to cut the tongues out of these murmurers. The Guild's least-valuable whip legions are populated with the dream-eaten, who tend drug crops and other monotonous duties, always under the care of a handler. The Guild sells dream-eaten whenever possible, both to rid itself of the depressing effect that they have on morale and because their labor is less efficient than that of healthy slaves. Still, there is always a market for pliant, spiritless slaves. Many of them are sold as quick, disposable labor. The Guild dispatches a handler along with the lot to acclimatize them to their work with a few weeks of drill. House Cynis and other panderers purchase new, beautiful dream-eaten to serve as sex objects for the powerful. Warriors use them to test swords and martial arts techniques. Vast numbers work the Guild's drug fields, either directly or with a local drug farmer, sustaining another lucrative market.

It is not illegal to own dream-eaten in the Realm, but there is a moderate social prejudice against doing so. As with any slave, only Dragon-Blooded may own them. These wretches cannot seek enlightenment through the Immaculate faith and represent the influence of a power that threatens the Scarlet Empire. House Cynis is very discreet about offering the services of its "puppets." The Immaculate Order frequently preaches against the practice of using dream-eaten for vivisection or daiklave testing

on the grounds that it weakens the moral resolve of the Exalted. In deference to these wishes, most of these experiments are only undertaken in the service of the Realm, either to test new weapons or to train legion surgeons.

Spirits and sorcerers also use the dream-eaten in their work. They make convenient sacrifices and have no innate resistance to possession. In Great Forks, a worldly little god may keep a few dream-eaten in order to forego the bother of materializing. Some demons also enjoy having material form. Between this and their uses in the fields of alchemy and medicine, the Heptagram purchases a score of them every year (in defiance of popular disapproval, but the sorcerous academy doesn't care). Because they can easily be possessed, the dream-eaten often cause problems when they work in labor gangs. Local spirits may turn them against their owners, and so, most wear neck-rings with a talisman against possession set into them.

SLAVERY IN THE REALM

Although dream-eaten are unpopular, the Realm uses slaves for almost every conceivable purpose. Slaves are forbidden from acting as warriors outside of the gladiatorial arena. Otherwise, slaves can be found tilling fields, teaching young Dynasts and performing a whole host of other duties. A fiftieth of the Realm's population are slaves. No census records this, though a few knowledgeable members of the Thousand Scales and House Cynis are well aware of the importance of the chained to the Scarlet Empire's continued prosperity.

LAW AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Only Exalted Dynasts may own slaves. The Empress demanded this to prevent the empire from coming under undue influence from merchants and patricians. This is justified by the Immaculate faith because only the Dragon-Blooded possess the enlightenment necessary to guide the lesser races of humanity. Slave owners must shepherd their property down the Immaculate Path — a mortal cannot claim responsibility for those of equal Essence, disqualifying them from the privilege.

Slavery is not a controversial issue in the Realm. It simply exists. Some deplore it, and some justify it, but one way or another, it is viewed as a fact of life. Slaves born in the Scarlet Empire may have trouble conceiving of any other life. Organized opposition to slavery would be considered unthinkable if it had not happened at least once in the Realm's history, when country slaves joined the Unbroken Rushes Rebellion in RY 465. Most of them were tortured to death when the revolt ended, beginning the custom of killing slaves on the correction wheel.

SLAVE PRIVILEGES AND PUNISHMENTS

Slaves in the Realm have no rights per se, but a number of strongly ingrained customs effectively regulate the treatment of slaves. Harming another Dynast's slave is akin to

THE CORRECTION WHEEL

Slaves who murder, who aid treason or who commit other serious crimes are tortured to death on the correction wheel, a legacy of the Unbroken Rushes Rebellion. A condemned slave is chained to the edge of a large disk inscribed with phrases from the Immaculate Texts. A pair of young Dynasts rotates the wheel while chanting prayers for the Empress' continued health. Dehydration and suffocation from prolonged arching of the back eventually kill the slave. When not in use, a house's correction wheel is prominently displayed in the compound's largest courtyard. Manning the wheel is thought to build character in young Dynasts destined for military service.

damaging her property, but it is understood that some favored slaves may hold far more value to their masters than House Cynis would assess. Normally, the offender pays several times the slave's market value based on the slave's skills and position in the household. The amount of money needed to compensate a Dynast for a slain or mutilated concubine is easily enough to ruin most offenders or to turn their house against them for wasting money.

A slave's master may treat him in any way she wishes, but outrageous public abuse is normally considered to be a sign of poor breeding. Beatings and other punishments are usually delivered in private. On the other hand, parties and other occasions where it is acceptable for Dynasts to trust in their impulses remove the normal taboos. Although House Cynis is infamous for its treatment of slaves, members can honestly claim that they simply make a habit of the parties and entertainment that all Dynasts indulge in.

By long-standing custom, slaves are allowed to learn to read and write as well as to own private property. However, since they are not allowed to purchase anything unless on house business, slaves rarely have an opportunity to actually own anything. Generous households will occasionally allow a yen or two's worth of purchases to be made on the slave's behalf. It is considered impious to keep a slave working too hard to practice a few sparse Immaculate rites, but many households aren't very pious to begin with.

The Deliberative must approve any request to free a slave. A single Dragon-Blooded may only free three slaves a decade. This is normally routine, though the Deliberative has refused requests in order to chastise a particular Dynast or Great House. Most applications to free slaves are timed so that they will come into effect during Calibration, as freeing or rewarding slaves brings luck at a time when the eye of Heaven has the most merciless gaze.

It's illegal for a slave to hold a weapon for any purpose whatsoever unless he is fighting or training in a licensed gladiatorial arena. The punishment for doing so is a swift

death — or a much slower one if the weapon was actually used to threaten, injure or kill anyone. If captured, a runaway slave is subject to whatever punishment his master decrees: Hobbling (removing or crippling one foot at the ankle) and other forms of mutilation are standard. Aiding the escape of a slave is a capital crime for the unExalted. Dragon-Blooded are punished for insulting the Deliberative, with a sentence based on the number of escaped slaves and the offender's social standing. Only a handful of Exalted Dynasts have ever been accused of this crime.

THE IMMACULATE FAITH

In support of imperial law, the Immaculate faith claims that slaves are guided by the Exalted for their own eventual enlightenment. Since many slaves were once barbarian enemies of the Scarlet Empire, conservative monks claim that they have lost their freedom in punishment for their sins against the principles of enlightenment. The Immaculate Texts hold many contradicting passages about the role of a slave. One sutra (discovered after the Unbroken Rushes Rebellion) claims that slaves must be tempered by constant punishments from their masters. Another (currently favored by Regent Fokuf) consists of an erotic poem composed by a daimyo on the eve of taking her monastic vows. The author despairs because she will not be able to train her husband's concubine to be her equal in the arts of love.

Commentators interpret this as an allegory for the cultivation of Essence and claim that a slave's intimate relationship with his master brings a special opportunity for enlightenment and a special commitment on the part of a Dynast. The Immaculate Order does not purchase or own slaves. It has enough novices to do its work. Occasionally, pious Dynasts give their slaves as gifts to the Order. These slaves are usually treated better than their secular counterparts. Immaculate doctrine considers them to be lay followers, while monks are forbidden by their vows to use slave assistance to ease their labors. However, individual Immaculates may abuse a slave without many consequences in the same way that senior monks occasionally mistreat novices. Abbots employ the slaves as messengers and laborers, especially when the task at hand would, if given to a novice, strain her vows. The current Mouth of Peace allows monasteries to emancipate one slave per decade. Previous Mouths of Peace have cited the Immaculate Texts to justify freeing as many slaves as possible or none at all.

Most slaves in the Realm are either foreigners or criminals. According to most monks, foreigner slaves are blessed with a new opportunity to seek enlightenment in the heart of the Immaculate faith instead of suffering the spiritual blandishment of some barbaric cult. Enslaved criminals erred on the path of cultivating Essence to such an extent that the Realm, following the model of Heaven, assigned them stricter duties and closer supervision by





the Dragon-Blooded. Dissenting Immaculates point out that the Realm follows Heaven's example but its servants sometimes stray from their duties and prescribe a code for the treatment of slaves based on Immaculate austerities. Dynasts who follow this line of thinking order their slaves to chant the Immaculate Texts and to strictly moderate their diet and do not sexually exploit the slaves.

THE THOUSAND SCALES

The imperial bureaucracy keeps a large number of slaves. These are technically owned by the Empress and kept in trust. Most are bearers, messengers and savants with mathematical or literacy skills that suit them to the task. Senior bureaucrats are often rewarded with one or more personal slaves as well, though most suspect that these act as spies for their superiors. One of the attractions of life in the Thousand Scales is that an unExalted bureaucrat can earn slaves that are answerable to him rather than his house. A slave of the Thousand Scales typically leads a less strenuous life than those working in a household but can never be freed because he is the Scarlet Empress' property, held in trust until she returns.

Slaves of traveling magistrates have perhaps the best lives of those indentured to the Thousand Scales. On the road, a judge's attendant takes care of a multitude of minor tasks, from arranging lodgings to gathering information from local slaves. This comes at a price. The slave must be literate enough to assist the magistrate and loyal enough to forego the countless opportunities for escape that arise on the road. He also has to deal with peasants who despise him for living so well under the yoke.

LABOR FOR THE REALM

The Scarlet Empire employs slaves in countless nonmilitary pursuits. Most slave labor is invisible. Gems and jade come forth from the mines, the fields get tilled, and the bills get paid, and the Dragon-Blooded hardly worry about it. Generally, these chores only garner serious concern when they cost a lot of money. The price of slaves has been steadily increasing since the Scarlet Empress' disappearance, and House Cynis' new emphasis on renting slaves for major projects (such as canals and quarries) has caused some friction and increased favor trading as other Great Houses try to minimize their losses.

Agriculture

Farms in the Realm are tended by peasants, not slaves, with the exception of large personal or family estates. Slaves usually work a small plot of land to feed themselves and to provide an extra source of food for their masters. These resemble glorified gardens rather than farms per se, as the Dynasts' jaded palettes call for exotic vegetables and legumes. If a master absolutely needs to dine on meat that isn't raised in the area, it falls on the slaves to tend livestock along with any pets or mounts that belong to the estate. In many cases, a slave

THE VIRTUE OF LOYALTY

Loyalty is the virtue the Realm's masters value most highly in their slaves. Folk tales about loyal slaves following their masters into death (somewhat reminiscent of tales about faithful pets) are common and well-liked among slave-owning Dynasts. An experienced slave learns all the stories, from *The Tale of Trys* (who was burned alive bringing her Fire-aspected master out of deep despair) to *The Virtues of Dethrig* (a slave who killed his master's assassin, knowing full well he would be broken on the correction wheel for taking up a weapon) because many masters never tire of telling them.

In slave culture, these stories are often the butt of grim jokes. "Trys's kiss" is a common euphemism for sadomasochistic attentions from a particular Dynast, and slaves have their own cycle of stories about Dethrig. In them, the legendary slave is an idiot and a snitch who betrays his fellow slaves for greater and greater rewards from his master until the Dynasts punish him for his presumption. Lessons on how to keep secrets, to hide food and to master other survival tricks are worked into the stories as well.

Slaves who share a household tend to be quite loyal toward each other. Everyone suffers under an Exalt's capricious moods, so they do their best to make up for each other's shortfalls and give the appearance of a smoothly functioning household.

given such responsibility has special skills that suit her to these tasks, such as originally hailing from the region where the plant or animal is usually raised.

Occasionally, slaves are called on for more intensive efforts. If disease or revolt lowers the harvest yield, slaves are expected to make up for it. Peasants naturally resent this, but their chained counterparts are expected to work twice as hard. Overseers are particularly brutal, both in memory of the Unbroken Rushes Rebellion and because there are more opportunities for escape.

Civic Labor

Despite the decline of recent years, the Realm still pursues the most ambitious civil engineering projects in all of Creation. Slaves keep the roads repaired, construct aqueducts and rebuild after fires and other disasters. Previously, the Empress "borrowed" labor from any house that needed to be taught a lesson, making up the difference from the Cynis camps. The Regent would never be permitted to be so presumptuous, so now, each house is responsible for maintaining the roads and works in its immediate territory. Each Dynast tries to cut costs as much as possible, especially since the price of slaves has increased. When boundaries are unclear, it's customary to leave it to one's

neighbor. The result of this is that the Realm's roads and infrastructure are beginning to become a little ragged.

This kind of maintenance requires more than slave labor. Skilled artisans work with overseers to ensure that masonry is properly laid and that bridges remain strong. Botching a job in such a fashion as to endanger trade or lives is punished with a painful death for the work gang responsible, so slaves have to combine attentiveness with backbreaking labor.

Mining

Most of the Realm's mining is done by slaves, since they have no cause to pilfer jade and precious metals when everything belongs to their masters. Mining is dangerous work. Household slaves live in constant fear that they will be sent to a house mining operation if they fail to attend to their duties. Aging concubines and obsolete tutors work alongside the dream-eaten to extract gems and ores. Desperation often drives these slaves to revolt or suicide, so overseers are particularly heavy-handed with them.

Household Servants

Upon entering a Dynast's home, the first people a visitor is likely to see are the household slaves, ready to take her cloak, guide her to an antechamber and offer her refreshment and diversion until the head of the household arrives. A hierarchy exists in most households, where the slave responsible for answering the door is the informal head of the estate's indentured staff. Underneath her (door slaves are usually women), chamber slaves and servants who have direct contact with the Dynastic residents and guests hold the most status. These slaves have livery or tattoos indicating their connection to the household. The door slave often functions as the estate's taster, preventing poisons or spoiled food and drink from touching the master's lips.

In the kitchens, basements and storage rooms of the manor, low status slaves toil under the informal direction of the cook. Many cooks are, in fact, free commoners, but such a servant learns that, in the household hierarchy, he stands firmly under the door and chamber slaves. He may have his freedom, but he knows nothing of the household's struggles, the comings and goings of guests and the temperaments of the Dynasts. In some households, the cook and the door slave (as well as the kitchen staff and the chamber staff) have some rivalries, but for the most part, their fear and loyalty toward their household overrides any differences. Most Dynastic households assign an unExalted family member or free servant the responsibility of watching over the slaves. The household staff tries its best to ensure that he never has any reason to enter the kitchen, relying on chamber slaves to relay rumors and warnings about the master's temper.

Concubines

Sex slaves are segregated from the household hierarchy. The formality of this category varies from Great House to Great House and from household to household. Regardless of their duties, many slaves will face sexual

PETAL

This lithe, frowning Northerner is the door slave for a Mnemon Manse in Ayreon Prefecture. She's a 20-year-old woman whose blonde hair hangs in dozens of small braids, and she wears Mnemon livery with a thick collar to hide the ritual scars she received as a child among the icewalkers. If it weren't for the Essence that flowed through it, her home would be a sleepy little place, barely occupied by an unExalted family. As it stands, her master, Mnemon Lilad, spends most of her time here, along with a constantly changing retinue of savants and sorcerers. Lilad is an adept sorceress and something of a misanthrope. Under her lead, Petal has become an efficient, distant servant, devoted to quickly greeting guests, serving them and then sending them out the door.

Despite her coldness toward outsiders, Lilad's passions were such that she took Petal for sexual release five years after she was made door slave of the Manse. Petal's intimate duties now interfere with her ability to manage the household's slaves, who have grown to resent her unwanted relationship with the master. The chamber slaves are lazy about cleaning up and don't present the model of swift, uncomfortable efficiency that keeps visitors from wanting to linger. Petal no longer has the time to beat some loyalty into the rest of the slaves, much less see to the proper management of the household.

Lilad's bedchamber play has become more violent lately, and she has taken to striking Petal whenever guests stay for longer than she'd like. The last beating left Petal's right knee dislocated. As door slave, she wasn't permitted to even limp. Her deteriorating relationship with the rest of the staff has delayed the opportunity to receive treatment, and when she walks by Lilad, the Exalt gives her a long, frowning look, as if she knows that her "favorite" is suffering but considers it fair punishment.

exploitation at some point in their lives, but only a few slaves are dedicated playthings for their masters. Dynastic culture discourages unExalted scions from using household slaves this way, especially if the head of the estate is a devout follower of the Immaculate faith.

Concubines are expected to be pliable, educated and well spoken. Keeping a concubine is not considered to insult a marriage, so long as the Exalt in question has done her duty to the Realm by having children with her spouse. Same-sex consorts are considered to be an excellent way to balance one's family duties and sexual tastes. Consorts often accompany their masters in public, serving as hosts, escorts and performers. Even more so than for other slaves, concubines are expected to be unswervingly loyal to their masters. An ideal concubine can keep his master's secrets





and never divulges what occurs in the bedchamber. For this reason, concubines are never shared, except among members of sworn brotherhoods.

Because they are slaves, normal taboos do not apply to consorts. While great differences in age are frowned upon in opposite-sex pairings, same-sex pederasty is common — many concubines are very young. Torture is also accepted — so long as the slave has no visible marks, his master doesn't lose face.

Their privileges and supposedly comfortable lives tend to cause resentment among the rest of the household's slaves. At the same time, a concubine usually has the most accurate news of a master's current concerns, so the door slave often takes pains to strike up something of a friendship. A concubine's close ties also make her a favored point of leverage in Great House politics. Concubines are occasionally murdered to upset their master, but it is more common to press them for secrets using drugs and torture.

Keeping a proper concubine is fairly expensive. With soaring slave prices and the worsening economic state of the Realm, House Cynis seized the opportunity to provide slave-staffed brothels. Aside from their appeal to patriicians, Dynasts who'd rather not be bothered with the expense or mess of household sexual service can rent time with a Cynis slave for anywhere between an hour to several days (during which time the slave travels with the Dynast).

The Menagerie

One custom that is unique to the Scarlet Empire is the keeping of a menagerie, a private zoo for the amusement of a Dynast and her guests. These menageries are displays of wealth and power, as creatures from across Creation are gathered for internment at the Dynast's estate. Aside from exotic animals from the periphery of the Realm, many households also keep exotic slaves, usually Wyld-touched barbarians who were seized from their homes as children. Surgically altered slaves and barbarians who were noted as performers and storytellers in their free lives also spend their time here, languishing in chambers designed to roughly emulate their homes — or at any rate, anything about their homes that the Dynast thought was particularly noteworthy. The slaves are taught enough of the Realm's tongue to tell stories of their homelands. Fantastic embellishments and reinforcement of stereotypes about the world beyond the Realm are well received.

Most menageries are sad affairs. The animals and slaves are sickly, miserable things, tended by slaves and commoners who rarely know how to treat them properly. In lean times, the inhabitants are sold to interested sorcerers and savants, and aged or sick menagerie slaves are assigned to manual labor once their novelty has worn off.

Gladiators

A recently acquired taste for the inhabitants of the Scarlet Empire, gladiatorial games range from on the spot wagers between two slave combatants to elaborate skirmishes in the Theater of the Bright Panoply in Arjuf, the

EXOTIC SLAVES, MUTILATION AND SURGERY

Some sorcerers and savants cater to a specialized market in modifying the bodies of slaves. Some of these changes (such as giving the skin a strange hue) are temporary. Other adjustments are permanent, such as the blinding (without disfiguring, making it a specialized art) of children destined to act as masseuses or masseurs or the application of brands and tattoos.

Generally, the more radical the surgery, the more dangerous it is to the slave. While amputations and the like are relatively safe, more specialized changes carry the serious risk of death. Unfortunately, the low success rates of some procedures only enhance their demand, as a successfully altered slave becomes something of a status symbol. For example, a technique called the Juche Reed allows a slave to sing in three distinct tones simultaneously by loosening certain vocal cords and carving fleshy chambers into the throat and abdominal cavity. There are about a dozen survivors of this procedure out of three times as many failures.

Sorcerous changes are often spectacular but considered to be in rather poor taste. Spells exist to twist a slave's body in any number of ways. As the slaves rarely survive with their sanity intact, these are often displayed at gatherings where a Dynast wants to make a dramatic statement, regardless of what her friends might think.

Realm's largest gladiatorial arena. Other such arenas exist in Juche and in Eagle's Launch. The Empress expressed disapproval for such a structure gracing the Imperial City itself, but since her absence, makeshift battles in open-air markets and on private estates are on the rise. Gladiators are owned by individual Dynasts, but they are managed, housed and trained by patricians. These businessmen are usually veterans of the legions or of an Immaculate education. They use their knowledge to turn slaves with an athletic bent into warrior-performers. The art of training and promoting gladiators in the Realm is in its infancy. As such, managers use all sorts of exaggeration and gimmickry to increase interest in the games.

Among slaves, only gladiators are allowed to carry arms — and then only in an arena or other performance space. Managers pay a licensing fee and sign an agreement stating that they understand that they will be executed if any of their charges ever harms a free citizen of the Realm.

A prospective gladiator's first priority is to survive. Novices are released into the arena with clubs, daggers or nothing at all. They may face tigers, better-armed and experienced gladiators or another, equally desperate gang of neophytes. After a few fights thin the ranks, the survivors receive intense training in the gladiator's trade.

Equal parts showmanship, faked theatrical combat and deadly serious fighting, the curriculum takes up most of the slave's free time. Managers look at the slave's homeland, physique and temperament to develop a unique arena personality, including signature weapons, costumes and even a catchphrase to utter at a downed opponent. Slaves born in the Realm are usually costumed in homage to their owners. Barbarians are popular gladiators because of their ferocity and outrageous appearances, exaggerated by a fighting harness and arms that rarely match their native weapons but capture the imagination of the audience.

Once a gladiator is trained and outfitted, her job becomes considerably safer. At this stage, most fights consist of demonstrations or of cutting down a new lot of hapless wretches. Aside from decimating newcomers, most

GLADIATOR TRAVELS

The games are a recent import to the Realm. Local gladiatorial schools have quite a bit of contact with managers in the Realm, and a fighting slave may travel far, fighting and performing for her owner. Some regions have no taste for staged combat, so these tours are often hazardous. Other cities have frenzied fans who fight amongst themselves while the slaves clash below.

Nexus has one of the largest arenas in Creation, but it's difficult for managers in the Realm to arrange for Nexus talent to travel to the Blessed Isle. Nexus' gladiator companies chafe under the Realm's restrictions, and the distance is formidable. Great Forks (where fighters may face spirits and Fair Folk in the arena) and Greyfalls both host large arenas as well.

In the Scavenger Lands, free men and woman occasionally take to the profession. It's an especially popular way for traveling barbarians to make money because the crowds love their aggressive spirit and strange appearance.

For a fee, the Guild will provide transportation for a gladiatorial company, providing security to keep the slaves in line as well as swift transit through its network of trading posts and caravan routes. This is a Resources •• transaction for a single fighter, his manager and entourage and a Resources ••• transaction for a group of five. The most famous gladiators have larger entourages and more expensive needs such as special diets or protection from thugs who would cripple or poison them to fix wagers, so transporting these fighters requires an additional level of Resources above and beyond the above costs. For the most part, the Guild provides this service to maintain its reputation with managers who come to them for fresh meat, but individual merchant princes have also profited from wagers laid based on what they've learned about the fighters on the road.





gladiatorial fights are a matter of flashy techniques and fake blood. A successful gladiator must take care not to soften on a steady diet of fake combat because her manager or owner will eventually arrange a real fight with another slave warrior, and she has to be ready to win.

Dynasts will sometimes sublimate rivalries by using their slaves as proxies, and managers are keen to arrange real fights that will draw large audiences and wagers. These fights are typically planned months in advance, so that word of the impending duel reaches as far as possible. The fighters' owners must attend or send a representative to these fights. The owner or her representative is responsible for deciding whether or not her fighter should accept a surrender and ensures that the fight and all associated wagers were fairly placed. Silk flags with the standard of the owner's house are used to convey commands. Generally, refusing the surrender of a fallen gladiator is an insult to her owner. Maiming the fighter and then letting her live is a sign of mortal enmity.

SLAVERY IN THE THRESHOLD

In the Threshold, slaves range from an ostentatious luxury to the lifeblood of a community's well-being. Slaves sold by the Guild are moderately priced (conforming to the Resources costs listed on pp. 324-325 of the core *Exalted* rulebook) but still beyond the reach of most city-dwellers. Rural communities rarely use slaves to any extent, though there is often a system of serfdom in place that makes the agricultural peasants the effective property of a local lord. Most people view slavery as a fact of life. It isn't a matter of liking or hating it but, rather, accepting that human property is as fundamental to the way the world works as war and taxation. There are exceptions however. Numerous cults, would-be utopias and extended clans claim their own lands. To these folk, slavery is usually alien to their culture or ethical code or a trade that has seriously injured its citizens and leaders.

BARBARIANS

Despite the vital part they play in the Realm's slave trade, barbarians have little tolerance for slave societies. This may seem hypocritical given that most settled tribes have field and house thralls of their own, but these captives are fairly won in battle or feud, not purchased from an honorless merchant. With the wilderness all around them, there is little need to chain and supervise these prisoners. A minority are ransomed to neighboring clans who have the same sense of honor and propriety. These slaves act as poets, advisors and even bodyguards (a hostage is reluctant to stab his hosts in the back, as he voids the right of hospitality) until their cousins pay their ransom or the chieftain tires of them. Most hostages prefer the former, since their hosts technically have the right to kill them at any time. Otherwise, prisoners of war can face anything from adoption to torture, depending on the customs in force.

Hostages are exchanged between tribes with similar customs. They are either known for their wisdom or battle

pro prowess, or they are relatives of the chieftain. Since their value is well known, they will not readily be killed, for fear of wasting talent or of stirring up a blood feud with the hostage's tribe. When fighting between two tribes gets out of hand, voluntarily exchanging hostages is sometimes used to quiet things down. In other cases, a hostage is taken on the battlefield or in a swift raid and a messenger returns to the captive's tribe with demands. These can be anything from a demand to halt feuds to marriage proposals.

THE NORTH

The harsh climate of the North breeds self-reliance. As nations fatten or starve on the fortunes of the hunt, slaves are a sign of luxury, a gesture of confidence that, no matter what occurs, the owner can feed his property. The Haslanti League is the largest purchaser of slaves in the North. The Oligarchs are keenly aware that southern nations consider them to be half-barbarian at best, and imported slaves, drugs and fineries symbolize culture and ambition. With these accouterments, the elite of the League hope to be taken seriously as princes. Fortunately, the Guild only asks for mammoth ivory in return, a commodity that most Haslanti use for construction or idle whittling.

The League thrives on the mammoth hunt, and slaves don't improve the productivity of its sparse farms, but personal servants are in great demand among the gentry. The farther south the slaves' origins, the more they are desired. A pair of concubines from the markets of Gem (hair braided with the glittering wealth of their home) is the sign of a cosmopolitan Oligarch, fit to lead the nation.

Whitewall also has its share of slaves, but the people are disinclined to host more than the minimum needed to satisfy the wealthy and the local Dragon-Blooded. Slaves are cautioned about the presence of the dead and the Winter Folk that surround the city, but a few always try to strike out on their own. These unfortunates are usually devoured in less than a day, but a few are used as quislings. Their soul-dead husks return to trick their owners into letting the city's enemies in. The Syndics who rule Whitewall treat this as an act of treason on the part of the owner, and the sentence is exile into the hands of the dead or the Fair Ones, so only the most confident or foolish gentry own slaves. Accordingly, the Guild charges an exorbitant fee, both to reinforce the role of slaves as a status symbol and to recoup the cost of trading in such small lots.

Ice Miners

In Gethamane and the Haslanti League, slaves mine the hearts of glaciers for two kinds of treasures. First of all, the deepest layers contain veins of the blue, imperishable ice of the uttermost North. This ice radiates a killing chill and must be handled through several layers of fur. True ice (as it is called) never melts except through the application of Charm or sorcery and continues to cool its surroundings even when it is transported to more temperate regions (though there, it loses its deadly potency).



Slaves also chip away tunnels where savants believe First Age artifacts lie buried. This is usually a safer job than mining for true ice, unless the slaves find some ancient device or tomb with its own lethal powers. The creatures that haunt such ruins are also a hazard. Gethamane is best known for offering ice miners a cruel, inexplicable death, even though expeditions dig away from known hazards.

Ice miners work in gangs of up to a dozen led by an overseer who, among other things, keeps a supply of torches and coals at the ready. Despite the precautions, frostbite and collapsed tunnels constantly threaten the whole operation. Still, the potential rewards are enormous. In the South, true ice is worth its weight in jade, and First Age artifacts are valued as curios, even if a more practical use for them is never deciphered. The Guild values the steady stream of both commodities and sells slaves to ice mining ventures at a discount.

THE SOUTH

At the other end of the world, slaves toil in mines and vast fields. Slavery is a popular institution here, and the Guild trades slaves for the gemstones, forged glass and fire-dust of the South. Only Paragon resists the trade. The Perfect holds all residents as his slaves, magically subservient to his will.

In Gem, this intensifies the slave trade, as more miners are needed to win the trade war with Paragon. There is some discontent, as, before the trade war, mining was always an honorable trade for the state's poor. The Despot of Gem is unwilling to bend on the need to conquer the region's gemstone market and wants miners who will work under the whip as efficiently as Paragon's. Lacking the god-king's power, the only solution is to buy more slaves. These diggers often die in the choking heat of the tunnels. Most are worked to death, as mining slaves are typically those too disfigured and unskilled to retire into household labor.

Harborhead both buys and sells slaves. In times of war, the city sells its excess prisoner population, and the children of Harborhead slaves are free. The turnover that results quickly bleeds away the indentured population. The city tops up its supply from Guild trade, warfare and just about any other supply that it can find. Accordingly, the slave markets of Kirighast are among the largest in Creation. As Harborhead prepares for war with the Varang City-States, janissaries and slave-savants are in demand.

Harborhead's ranches and farms are worked by slaves, the most skilled of which are in the cattle trade. Their free children learn the profession at their parents' knees and often work alongside them as free hands when they grow older. These slaves began a tradition where the children of slaves buy their parents. Harborhead law forbids the freeing of slaves, but many do live as commoners after their sons and daughters acquire enough money to buy them.

The Clever Slaves of Gem

As a wealthy nation, Gem has always made great use of slaves. The clans that rule the city use savants purchased from the Guild to run their markets and track their wealth.

It's not unusual to see merchant-slaves haggling with Guild traders. Many of these slaves were originally Guild property and enjoy making their former masters pay a little bit more for goods and services. Unlike the miners, skilled slaves are especially trusted. In addition to trade, mathematics and sex, Gem uses slaves for combat. These janissaries are trained from childhood to guard the members of a particular house. Fashion favors slaves of foreign extraction, so janissaries often have a pale or golden complexion that contrasts with the swarthy natives. Aside from bodyguarding, these slaves are used as proxies in duels between houses.

The slaves doomed to the mines have nothing but hatred for the "golden collars" who manage the markets and the security of their owners. Their masters know this and intensify the rift by using skilled slaves to oversee the miners. Thus, anger that might be directed toward a slave revolt is channeled toward fellow slaves on both sides of the hierarchy.

THE WEST

Slaves may come from the West, but very few of them go there, unless they are destined for the larders of the Fair Folk. Wealthy islanders value exotic slaves in much the same way as their Northern counterparts, since it is especially expensive to ship slaves across the sea lanes, but this minor market cannot compare to the continental trade.

The Guild serves as a go-between for the Lintha pirate clan. The Lintha regularly trap prisoners on barren islands, awaiting Guild ships. Normally, these slaves are destined to meet the Sea Folk at Surgeon's Deep. Water breathers sometimes fetch a high price on the mainland, so the pirates chain as many Wyld barbarians as they can find to these desolate spars of rock. When intra-clan tensions run high, Lintha with brilliant-green skin and gills may find themselves joining them, serving the Family with their body-price.

The Coral Archipelago supports a small but thriving slave trade. Murderers sentenced to lifelong indenture end up in the Guild's hands, as do chronic debtors and prisoners of war. In return, the Guild provides skilled slaves to assist Coral's military bureaucracy and dream-eaten laborers to build its triremes and docks. Otherwise, Skullstone enslaves the dead, and Wavecrest lacks the inclination to buy or sell slaves. The Guild picks up whatever captives it can among the islands as ships travel toward the Far West, where the Fair Folk await their shipments.

THE EAST

The bustling East is prospering, thanks in no small part to the Guild's support of trade and skilled labor throughout the Scavenger Lands. Slaves are in demand, and Nexus' Coffeeblock Market serves hundreds of merchants down the Yanaze River. Farther East, whip legions tend bright morning crops in the shadow of Mount Metagalapa. Sometimes, several caravans will meet. The result is a sea of humanity, walking to the markets that will bear them.

Greyfalls apes the lifestyle of the Realm and supports the legions but doesn't suffer from the Cynis monopoly.



OTHER JANISSARIES

Even though janissaries (used here to mean slaves trained and dedicated to war and fighting) are illegal throughout the Realm, the Guild does find it profitable to trade in them. Gem, Calin, Coral, Nexus, Halta and, occasionally, Lookshy buy military slaves, though in Lookshy they are made helots and sent to teach at the city's various martial arts schools and military academies.

Janissaries are usually enslaved as children, though a few adults who can be counted on to obey due to drug addiction or disability act as trainers. Factors hire Nexus mercenaries to put these youths through their paces (and to take them as apprentices so that they cannot refuse), instilling both martial skills and obedience to the Guild first and to their prospective masters second. The expense of the training is passed on to the buyer. As a result, most janissaries can only be purchased for Resources •••• or greater. Most individuals who use janissaries just buy child-slaves and raise them in their own military camps.

When they are not being trained, janissaries are treated very well indeed, to emphasize the Guild's generosity and to keep them from turning into runaway apprentices. The factor sponsoring their training provides them with good food, prostitutes and finery. Janissaries are sold through private meetings rather than in the stalls of the Coffeeflock Market. A client's needs are matched with the talents of a particular janissary. The slaves are moved in scale or talon strength, as part of light shipments, so that they will reach their destinations as quickly as possible. Most are young adults at this stage, between the ages of 16 and 18.

Most janissaries serve as elite forces or personal bodyguards. A few janissaries are trained in a military specialty that they can pass on to their owners' troops, such as firedust munitions or mounted archery. Free troops are sometimes skeptical of the young slaves, but janissary training quickly erases doubts and rebellious smirks.

Aside from the profit they generate, military slaves also allow the Guild to disseminate and control battlefield technologies. And because they are trained to be loyal to the Guild, the factors gain an upper hand in any future conflict with their clients.

For this reason, the Guild watches the city closely, as this would be the ideal place for House Cynis to sidestep it. Great Forks and Nexus are other notable centers of the trade. With fertile land caught in a web of rivers, there is always a pressing need for slaves to till the soil. Great Forks' farms rely on slave labor, and the herbs and drugs they harvest enrich the city and the Guild. Most of the Hundred Kingdoms also use slaves. The Guild allows

independent merchants from small communities to take their purchases back to whatever petty fief they came from. The factors have already earned their margin, and in many cases, sending a merchant prince around would be more trouble than it's worth.

Northeast

To the Guild, the Linowan are a troubling people. Although they constantly take slaves in their endless struggle with the Haltans, their tribal customs bar them from selling to the Guild, as captives are a symbol of a chieftain's prowess. To part with one would be like parting with the owner's honor.

Meanwhile, the Haltans have no interest in the slave trade. Their Linowan captives are sacrificed to the Fair Folk who live in their midst. Still, the Guild makes a profit from Haltan drugs and crafts, and Haltan merchants are known for their skill with plants and animals and are often targeted for recruitment.

The Guild would like to develop the Linowan's economic potential, but not in any way that would allow them to claim victory over the Haltans. Linowan carving and weaving are known throughout the East. Their great canoes set out from Rubylak to trade for metalwork and engage in opportunistic piracy. The Linowan are a stubborn people. Cutting off the flow of trade and increasing the price of steel may impoverish them, but it won't make them gather slaves. The situation is at an impasse, awaiting a clever solution or some new, radical influence to seize the lives of the Linowan.

FREEDOM

Manumission is a rarely granted privilege. The Guild has no particular position regarding it. Freed slaves simply create an opening to sell replacements. Attitudes regarding slavery are another thing entirely. Factors and merchant princes are quick to point out the economic advantages of slavery as well as the fact that, as most slaves are former barbarians, a life in chains grants them security, an education and other civilizing influences. More pragmatic clients are reminded that so long as the barbarians are hunting each other for profit, they are less likely to turn to storming cities.

Slaves earn their freedom in a number of ways. Some may buy their own freedom or win it for exceptional service. Slaves who are held because they committed a crime may sometimes eventually make restitution or simply complete their sentence of indenture. Then, of course, slaves escape or seize upon opportunities to revolt.

MANUMISSION AND ESCAPE

One of the most important parts of breaking a slave is convincing her that captivity is inevitable, that any attempt at escape would be futile but, nevertheless, punished by torture. While this is meant to create an aversion to escape, the "slave mentality" that the Guild and slave owners would like to believe exists is a rare thing. Still, many

A MATTER OF BODIES

The shadowlands have their own tireless labor: the dead who shuffle along, serving the Deathlords and their lieutenants with surprising efficiency. The supply of dead never ends. Each new corpse can work until it falls apart. Slaves are not entirely useless. Necromantic rituals and the need for servants who can easily travel through the living world support a small market.

Undead labor is gruesome but tempting to the inhabitants of communities on the periphery of shadowlands. The dead of Thorns tempt the living, offering macabre labor in exchange for nominal loyalty to the Mask of Winters. Not all of these servants are rotten and hollow-eyed. Cold, pale courtesans have, from time to time, swayed the living into supporting the Deathlord's expanding influence. The Mask of Winters' ambassadors promise further gifts and reiterate his desire for the River Province to remain independent from the Scarlet Empire.

Even though it's hardly likely that people will embrace deathly toil throughout the East, the Guild stands against the expansion of the shadowlands. Aside from the dread individual factors may feel, the Deathlords represent a threat to the economic security of the Scavenger Lands. Their territories no longer obey the laws of supply and demand, and their fields are barren except for grave blossoms and the sickly gardens tended by the living minority. The shadowlands are also more self-sufficient, with their own soulsteel production and arcane industries. As they bloom into nations of their own, trade suffers.

The Guild has yet to plan a definitive response to the problem, and as of yet, the impact on the slave trade has been minimal. Through their respective emissaries, the Guild and Thorns have come to an agreement: Respecting Guild interests, the dead will not be used to mine or tend drug fields. Meanwhile, merchant princes make more frequent stops by the shadowlands, to sell their slaves at reduced prices (especially skilled laborers, which the dead cannot easily match) and to study the local markets. Otherwise, jade, steel and luxuries comprise the bulk of Guild trade there.

slaves do feel a sense of loyalty toward masters who have moderated their abuses with rewards. The decision to escape is made very cautiously, but many slaves feel enough kinship with their fellows that, even if they themselves would never try for freedom, they will rarely report such plans to a master or overseer. Snitches are hated and socially ostracized in most slave camps or households. More often, a slave's companions will refuse to hear anything about an escape plan. This enforced ignorance keeps them from being implicated when an overseer comes to investigate.

EARNING FREEDOM

In Great Forks and in other nations where a slave may own property, it is possible to buy one's way out of bondage. Usually, the slave must pay his own value plus a penalty determined by the value of the service he will no longer provide. This amount is adjusted downward for older slaves because of the shrinking period of future service they must offset. A valued slave and his master often struggle for control of a slave's finances. As it is difficult for a slave to accuse a master of stealing or cheating, slaves usually hide their valuables, trading bulky coins and uncertain scrip for gems and jade. The final transaction (including haggling over the slave's market value) is usually mediated by a civil authority. Contracted slaves (who have accepted a fee for their indenture period) may sometimes pay a hefty fee to leave the agreed indenture early.

Enslaved debtors and criminals are freed at the end of their sentences. In Great Forks, it is possible to buy one's way out of further bondage for minor crimes. Sometimes, this takes the form of a fine paid to reduce the period of indenture.

Freed slaves face uncertain prospects. Families they offended may seek revenge, they have no money to speak of, and they bear the double stigma of being former slaves and foreigners or barbarians. Most eke out an existence at the bottom of the social hierarchy unless they have families willing and able to help. This rarely occurs. Most former slaves were never highborn to begin with, and they are thousands of miles away from their families. Ex-slaves often end up as poorly paid employees of their former masters, doing the same work they did while they were wearing the collar.

Other slaves may not be able to buy their freedom, but they can win it. Usually, the greater public visibility a slave has, the more likely social pressures will motivate her master to free her. This was the case for the Nexus gladiator known as Panther, whose unbelievable string of victories and massive popularity earned him freedom. In addition, some prisoners of war are ceremonially freed at the cessation of hostilities in a custom adhered to by Lookshy and several surrounding states.

In the Realm, freed slaves face better prospects than in many other places. They were, after all, released by the Dynasts in a rare gesture of compassion, so it is assumed that they have somehow earned their new liberty. According to the Immaculate faith, they have graduated to a spiritual condition where they can seek enlightenment without constant Exalted guidance. As a last gesture of kindness, the slave's former owner is expected to provide a small amount of money (Resources ••) and kind words to potential employers and landlords.

Unless they are deported after a war, freed slaves are usually given a document or mark indicating their freed status. Without it, they can be summarily recaptured and resold. This is the law in the Realm and in most larger Scavenger Lands nations.



ESCAPING THE REALM

Dressed in rags and often branded or tattooed by their household, slaves who try to escape Dynastic masters face an incredible challenge. Fortunately, lone slaves are a common sight on the Blessed Isle and are usually assumed to be running an errand for their masters. However, a slave in the Realm has a tremendous journey ahead of her if she wishes to escape. On the other hand, the Realm has its underworld, where commoners and patricians will offer to hide a slave and smuggle her to freedom for an exorbitant fee. Slaves are often privy to the location of household wealth, so they can sometimes pull off a large enough theft to pay that fee. Sometimes, the slave's criminal accomplices reward her with a knife in the back. Sometimes, she is reenslaved outside the Realm. In no case, however, do they turn her in because the free conspirators face torture and death if caught.

Once she leaves the Realm, a slave has to avoid legion patrols and nearby satrapial authorities, who will recapture any known escapee. Few slaves on the Blessed Isle succeed in escaping. Recaptured slaves are remanded to their former masters or to House Cynis, depending on the point of arrest.

BOUNTIES

In addition to buying and selling slaves, the Guild also offers its services in recapturing them. Outside the Realm, slave bounties are numerous. The Guild records all slave escapes from its own operations, giving its bounty hunters

a superior education on how to track and anticipate a runaway's movements. Guild bounty hunters are usually slave breakers with military experience that is kept fresh by training with mercenary companies. Slave-holding states such as Harborhead also keep their own cadre of bounty hunters. Adventurous Cynis Dynasts may pick up the trade as well, using their experience as slave masters to track their quarry. Guild-trained bounty hunters are expensive to hire but more reliable than their independent counterparts. To encourage the prompt capture of slaves, local kingdoms will sometimes offer a bonus on top of any privately offered bounties.

Bounty hunters cultivate a fierce reputation, combining the determination of a hunter with the brutality of an overseer. The Guild's bounty hunters are supplied with drugs to pacify runaways. Blowguns and small bows with envenomed ammunition are common weapons.

BOUNTY PROFITS

A slave's bounty will usually have a Resources cost of one level less than the slave's purchase price. Guild-trained or very reputable hunters can demand fees up to and including the slave's original Resources cost. The Guild demands half of a bounty hunter's fees but offers steady work. An independent must deal with dry spells and competition. Bounties offered to Guild hunters are not put on the open market.



REVOLT

Revolt is riskier than escape, but the potential rewards are that much greater. Thousands of slaves joined peasants in the Unbroken Rushes Rebellion with the full knowledge that if they failed to sway the Realm they would pay with their lives. Slaves keep an oral tradition of this and other such events. In the Realm, slave culture is particularly prolific. Slaves from all over the Blessed Isle frequently find themselves working together and able to exchange stories.

Revolts usually take place under a single leader and his immediate circle. In some cases, the leader may not be a slave, but finds common cause with them or feels a sense of sympathy or moral outrage. Former slaves often take this role, and as a result, the Realm's All-Seeing Eye watches ex-slaves for signs of treason, an effort duplicated by the security services of other slave-holding states. The Guild periodically mixes paid informants in with the slave population. Originally, they tried the same tactic by promising good treatment to slaves, but such agents were less reliable and often deliberately misled their masters.

AGAINST THE MASTERS

Revolts in the fields and households of slave owners are carefully planned affairs. Successes have relied on a cell structure, where one mobile leader and her representatives mingle with the slave population to coordinate plans. Each cell is ignorant of the activities of the others, so only the leaders can give away the full extent of the revolt. The Realm has been fortunate in that a large revolt has never occurred. Even when slaves joined peasants in the Unbroken Rushes Rebellion, they did not turn on their masters so much as run away, joining farmers' committees and rogue Immaculates who arrayed themselves against the Empress or founding camps in the wilderness of the Blessed Isle. In most cases, the power of a Great House's Dynasts makes insurrection a difficult prospect.

Slaves revolting against the Fair Folk face similar problems. Despite the thousands that languish in the Fair Ones' hunting ground, their powers of glamour and illusion are difficult to contest. Amazingly, slaves under the Fair Folk of the East succeeded in RY 546. A concubine-thrall known as Iron Mandala visited hundreds of slaves with the excuse that he was selecting a meal for his master. He armed them with iron weapons and told them to rise up when he gave them a signal.

In the midst of a caress, Iron Mandala wounded the Master of Ash and Yew. The glamour faltered, and the slaves had their sign. They struck at the commoner overseers and laid siege to the Embrace of Ash and Yew. Survivors staggered west to the Scavenger Lands, harried by Fair Folk warriors.

Despite the supernatural powers of the enemy, the Iron Mandala Revolt shares the characteristics of most slave

rebellions. The revolt's leadership coordinates several cells, all awaiting a prearranged signal. According to legend, Iron Mandala often quoted the Immaculate Texts and had the aura of monastic discipline about him. This is not unusual either. Rebel leaders often use faith to strengthen their movement's resolve. As a result, the Guild takes care to discourage religion among its slaves. It does not sell priests, and holy men who rise up among the slaves are separated from their flock and given to another caravan.

THE WILL TO EMANCIPATE

Even though the existence of slavery is deeply ingrained throughout Creation, culture has never completely stifled moral sense. However, a world without slaves is difficult for most denizens of the Second Age to even conceive of. Slavery is an unfortunate part of life. To someone from the Second Age, escaped slaves are simply fleeing out of self-interest, rather than in an abstract defense of their freedom. Revolts occur for political reasons or as the result of collective grudges, not in response to the slaves perceiving the system as unjust.

As a result, organized emancipation movements are almost nonexistent. In the world of Exalted, individuals may feel that slavery is unjust and ought to be eradicated, but most people see it as an unfortunate economic necessity. People think of protecting their family, tribe or nation, not humanity as a whole. That's why this chapter doesn't describe any antislavery movements — there are none.

However, just because this is the way it is right now doesn't mean that your characters have to subscribe to that. An organized emancipation movement doesn't exist, but it could, if the protagonists of your series so desire. The Exalted are exceptional — they have a broader view of the world than most. They need it to survive and to realize their destinies. The Sidereal Exalted took that broad view when they purged the world of the Solars, and the Solars of the First Age took it when they ruled Creation. Even the Dragon-Blooded have a global ideal for humanity, united under the Scarlet Empire.

Linked to emancipation, all-encompassing ideologies such as these could serve as a major force, but nobody's applied them to the problem yet. In your series, a Circle of Exalted, a company of righteous monks or even a cabal of principled mortals could become abolitionists. It is also perfectly acceptable to play a character who stands for the status quo and accepts slavery as normal (though probably not in a game about abolitionist activists), but doing so isn't necessarily the sign of better (or "more realistic") character portrayal.





APPENDIX MONEY AND FINANCE IN CREATION



The child in a Patrician school in the Realm thinks in terms of piles of jade obols, while the peasant toiling in the fields outside thinks of a new house and 20 koku stashed in the cellar. The merchant prince's son, on the dusty caravan trail, imagines a fortune in silver. The cabin boy on a Lintha Family pirate schooner waits for his chance at a triple string of cowries, and the goatherd in the mountains around Gethamane hopes for two wan-bracelets to give the shepherdess as a dowry. Money means different things to different people. Some love to amass wealth in order to achieve certain goals. Others love money for its own sake. At heart, money is desired by all, and understanding it is critical to understanding Creation.

MONEY IN THE REALM

In the Realm, money takes two forms, one currency overlying the other, and one substantially more valuable than the other. The more valued and valuable form is the jade standard, formally established by the Empress in RY 134. Later, in RY 185, the Empress supplemented the jade standard with the jade-scrip system, in which deposits of jade are returned to the depositor as substantially greater sums of jade scrip.

The system has functioned properly for more than 500 years, with jade and jade scrip each circulating successfully, in their own stratum of society. With the

Empress gone, however, the monetary policy of the Realm is unraveling, and some fear the whole of the Realm's economic system may come tumbling down.

IMPERIAL FISCAL POLICY

At its heart, the Empress's fiscal policy had been quite sound. In an effort to control the sorcerous power associated with jade, the Empress made a specific effort to concentrate raw jade exclusively in her own hands and in the hands of more trusted companions and institutions. Her confiscations led to an artificial scarcity of jade and a corresponding rise in its market value. The rarity of jade, combined with her own controls over that scarcity, gave her the ability to introduce jade as the new legal standard for financial transactions in the Realm. Her choice had precedent, since a few coins and even some hoards of First Age jade coins occasionally came to light.

Over time, the Empress concentrated more and more jade in her own hands and sought to control the stone more thoroughly than ever before. In RY 185, she introduced the jade scrip, a fiat currency that helped to regulate social class differences and to solidify her own control on the monetary system. Through regular but limited disbursement of jade to the Great Houses, the Empress kept a tight rein on the Dynasty and the ambitions of its factions. She set up a stipend plan to pay for

the costs associated with the Realm's education program and religion and assumed total and complete control over the land and the tax-rents collected on that land. By keeping the Realm's factions on a tight leash financially, the Empress maintained her power over the Realm and its growing hierarchy of bureaucrats and nobles.

The question of whether she succeeded or not is a complex one. The histories her censors approve for the education of young Dynasts say she succeeded. However, the whole system required the Empress's continuing presence and attention. At present, the Empress is gone, and the structure of money in the Realm has almost paused, as if unsure whether to keep going or to collapse. The Treasury is having difficulties maintaining the flow of jade to the appropriate factions in the legally mandated sums. The Great Houses are beginning to suborn the Empire's tax collection system in order to enrich their own treasuries. Perhaps worst of all, the jade-scrip system relies upon the trust of the people in its basic security, and that trust is eroding. The vast and sophisticated financial system of the Realm now balances on a knife-edge.

THE CENTER HOLDS

Not everything is bad for the Realm's economy. The loyal Threshold nations still send in their tribute. The peasants pay their taxes on time or become disenfranchised. The imperial monopolies still pay their license fees, and the markets are full of goods. People still have money to buy things, both the nobles with their purses of jade and the peasants with their strings of yen. The prefectural towns are not getting wealthy, but neither are local economies collapsing because of the strains on the national economy. The government pays out stipends and salaries on time and fulfills its obligations to its contractors. By all superficial appearances, the financial apparatus of the Realm appears healthy.

THE ROT SPREADS

However, little cracks have started to appear in the structure of the Realm's prosperity since the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress. Slowly, the Great Houses are getting used to the idea that the Empress is gone and that she is not coming back. Someone, of course, will eventually wind up on the Scarlet Throne, yet it is unlikely that whoever winds up there will wield the same degree of financial control or hold the whole of the Blessed Isle as her personal property. In the face of such jarring economic reality, the Great Houses are beginning to get greedy.

The avarice of the Great Houses takes three major forms. First, some of the houses are working to claim actual territory on the Blessed Isle. When the Empress ruled, all land belonged to her, and everyone paid rent on it, Great House and peasant family alike. All of the

COUNTRY LIFE

For the last 600 years, the peasants of the Realm have enjoyed a greater degree of health and prosperity than anyone else of the same economic background anywhere in Creation.

The source of this prosperity was the Empress. Her magic increased the fertility of the Blessed Isle and worked ancient First Age weather machines, and her power kept the isle's gods in line. Peasants now reap three harvests a year from the land, producing corn, wheat, barley, rice, beans, sugar cane, millet, squash and peas. Villages also grow flax for linen, hemp for rope and cotton for canvas and clothes and tend orchards for fruit and nuts or plantations of mulberry trees for their silkworms. The average village is able to plant three fields for food and a fourth and fifth for fiber crops and still keep two fields fallow for animal pasture.

The Realm's villages are densely settled, with the flatlands supporting one village every three miles and the intervening countryside thoroughly developed. Almost every acre not part of the vast swaths left as land preserves is under heavy cultivation. These villages are inevitably crowded. Since the land produces so much food and the wilderness is so dangerous, lonely farms are a rarity.

This massive agricultural apparatus supports regional market towns in each prefecture. By law, certain businesses must operate only from the market towns: brewing, milling, pottery production, papermaking, silk weaving and more must be located in these market towns. A very few of these businesses manage to work their way into the patrician and even Dragon-Blooded consciousness. The rough black-ware pottery of rural Winter Blossom Prefecture was popular for a time as a substitute for golden tea sets, for example.

In the present climate, however, many of these businesses and farm villages are being squeezed for more tax revenue, and that revenue is going into the coffers of the Great Houses, rather than the Imperial Treasury. Even a casual observer can tell that there is weariness in the villages, as the honest villager is gradually being broken to his new role as a serf.

Great Houses are currently working to claim the land they held leases on at the time of the Empress's disappearance. Not all of the houses are happy to do this. House Ledaal, for example, recognizes that the creation of house fiefdoms is a prelude to civil war on the Blessed Isle, which it still hopes to avoid. However, with all the Great Houses seizing territory, even Ledaal cannot stay out of the great land game. Fiefdoms are the Blessed Isle's future. Hand in hand with the seizure of the land



has come the seizure of Scarlet Throne-owned businesses that might aid the houses in the coming conflict: Transport lines and fleets of merchant-marine ships, weapons manufactories and armories have all slipped into the hands of the Great Houses.

Second, the Great Houses have sought to increase their control over the peasantry of the Blessed Isle. By raising taxes and tariffs on peasant land and goods, the houses have begun to force the poor but independent peasantry into a state of servitude. Prefectures under the control of Houses V'neef, Peleps and Cynis have been the hardest hit in the last two years, but other Great Houses are imitating their methods. Their tactics are extremely unsubtle — the bribed local tax assessor doubles the expected tax for the year, and when the village cannot pay at harvest time, the assessor threatens its inhabitants with disenfranchisement. An elder of the Great House then comes in and pays the tax in the nick of time, but she seizes half the stored food in the barns as a “reward” for her “generosity.” By the second time this happens, the village is prepared for the pattern and simply accedes to the demands. If the Great Houses want the land but not the villagers, they simply double the assessment but don't bother to pay for the villagers, instead turning them out onto the roads as disenfranchised.

Third, the priorities of the Great Houses now drive the Realm's economy, both overseas in the satrapies and

at home in the prefectures. Currently, the Great Houses are not concerned with consumer goods or with maintaining healthy markets in the Realm. Prices have begun to rise as the houses shut down manufactories that seem to offer no advantages in the quest for the Scarlet Throne. And there are unexpected shortages here and there of important materials and goods as the houses divert trade caravans to serve their own interests and properties. The Empress' balanced, if self-centered, economic policy has been replaced by eleven competing economic policies, each of which seeks to advance only one family at the expense of the other 10. Squeezed between them like fruit in a jam-making press are the middle class of the cities and the rural peasantry. Shut out of the political process and forbidden to enter the larger economic markets, they are left staring at empty stalls in the marketplaces and ever-growing tax bills they cannot hope to pay.

The behavior of the Great Houses is like a kind of cancer eating at the roots of the Realm. All the high families recognize that no one is going to be quite as powerful or controlling as the Empress was. However, none of them wishes to be the victim of the others in the same way that Iselsi was dismantled by the Empress. These new princes of the Blessed Isle recognize that control of land, naval power and reserves of money is the only way to secure power in the political reality following the disappearance of the Empress. As each Great House

makes its bid for power, the peasantry and the middle class get squeezed a little harder to pay the expenses of the houses' schemes.

JADE COINAGE

Imperial coinage is based on the jade standard. Because of its magical nature, jade has an exceptionally high value to start with. The Empress's decision to create an artificial scarcity of jade increased its worth on the market still more. Now, many ordinary goods on the market are worth mere fractions of the smallest jade coin available. A peasant family can make the equivalent of two jade obols a year, pay an obol in taxes and still live in relative comfort. The peasants might never leave the village of their birth or wear silk robes, but they wouldn't lack for new clothing or food on the table.

On the other hand, if a Dragon-Blood tried to live on 20 obols a year, she would starve. The requirements of her rank and status dictate that she cannot eat like a peasant. She has to have a suitable house or suite of apartments, elegant furnishings and wall hangings to decorate it and servants or slaves to take care of it. She has to write invitations and letters on good mulberry paper and not on rag linen. She has to give parties and has to be suitably dressed when she goes to them. All this takes money — and lots of it.

TALENT

Officially, the standard unit of jade in the Realm is the talent. Weighing in at 68 pounds, a true talent is a gigantic slab of jade. In talents that come from the Treasury, the slab is roughly scored to form the shape of eight rectangular bricks, each of roughly the same size, and the Imperial Treasury's seal is lightly scored into each of the resulting facets. The minting date and an identifying number are also carved into one of the sides.

Some blocks, particularly illegal ones, are not marked at all because the penalty for owning an unmarked talent of jade is confiscation and a hefty fine, but the penalty for forging the Treasury's marks is death.

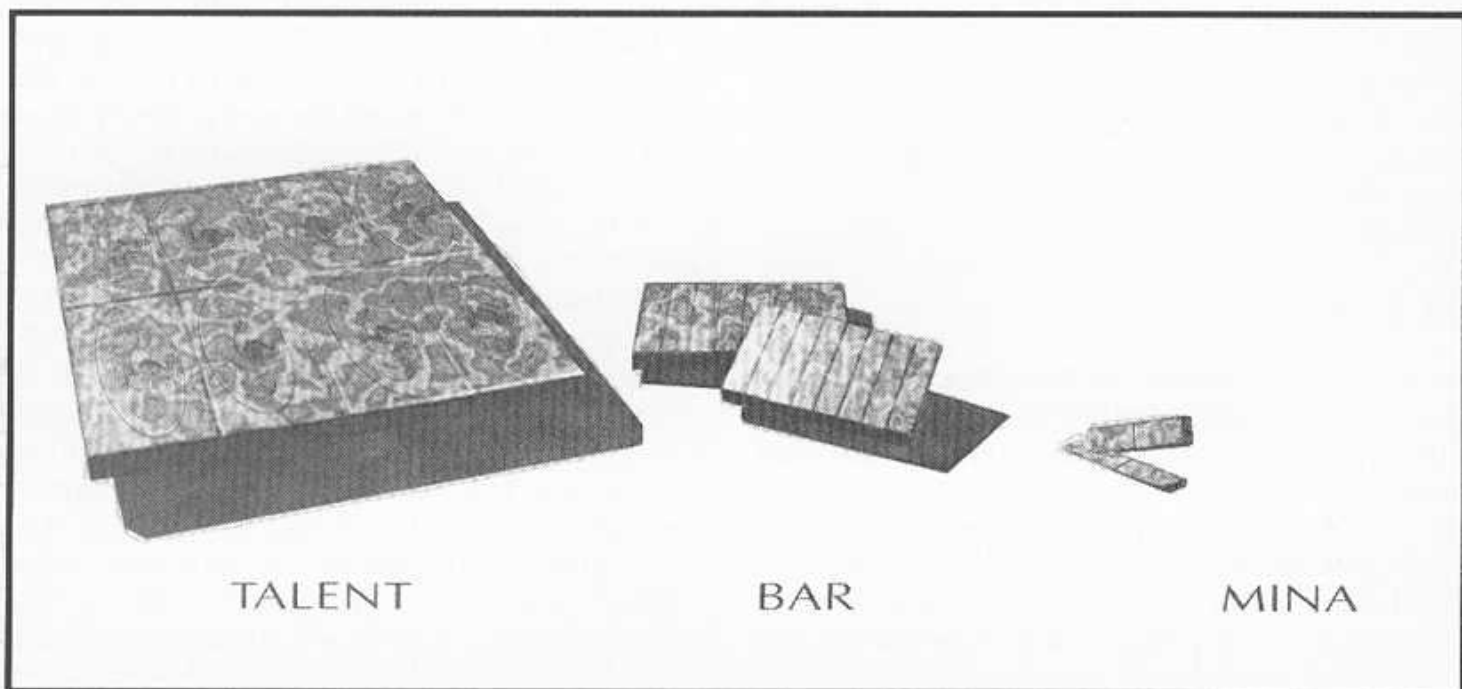
The true talent is becoming increasingly rare in the Realm, since it is difficult to transport and since so few things are as valuable. More frequently, the talent appears merely a column in a bookkeeper's ledger, where it is used as a money of account. An actual block is not in storage somewhere. Recording "one talent" is simply an effective way of keeping track of 1,024 coins without having to write 1,024 so many times. This so-called ledger talent is actually worth less than a true talent of jade because the ledger talent contains eight bars, where the true talent contains 12 bars by weight.

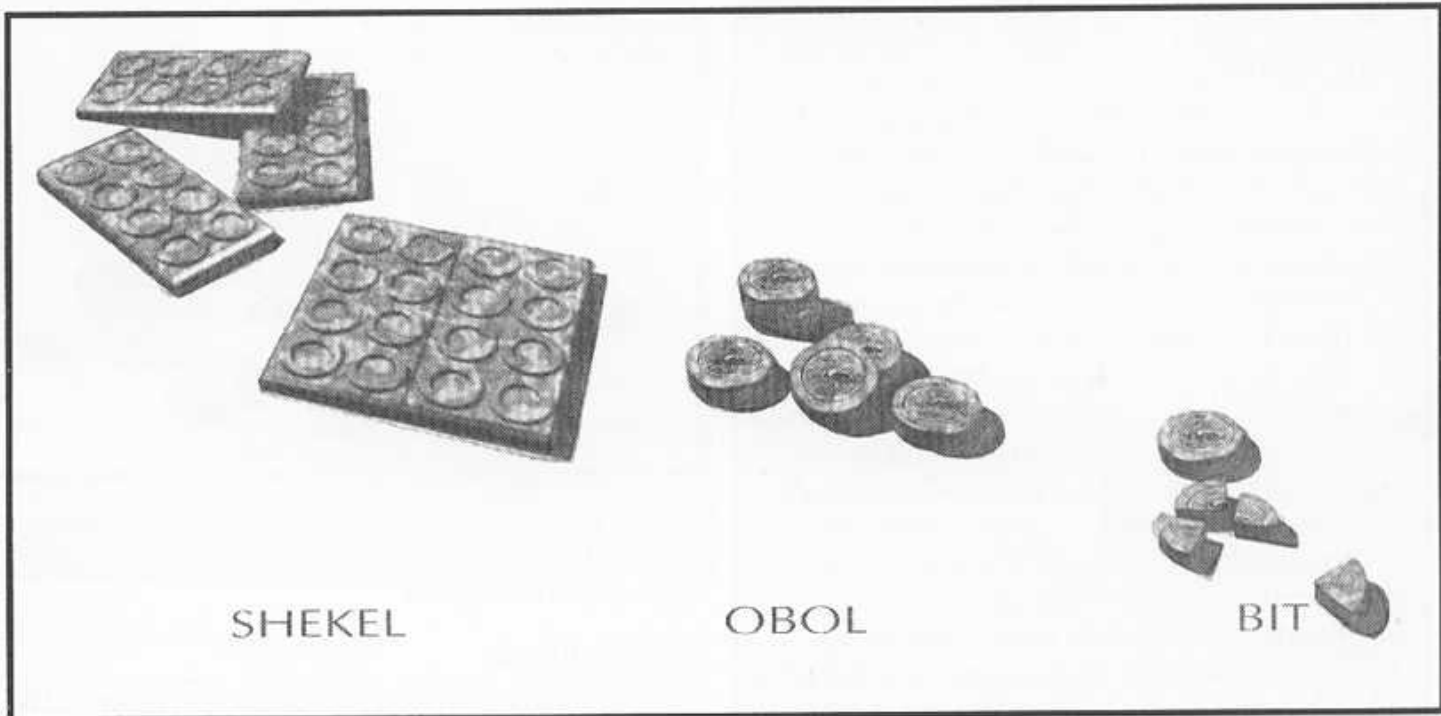
The reason for the discrepancy is that when a true talent is carved into coins, approximately four bars are ground into dust. The dust can be mixed with metals and smelted into jade-steel alloy, but that is still 32 more minae that that cannot enter circulation. Formerly this dust, sometimes referred to as "imperial boot polish," was the exclusive property of the Empress and was used to make jade-steel-alloy weapons for her personal guard and the armories of the Scarlet Dynasty. In the present day, the Treasury has been retaining it under tight security at the mint in the Imperial City, since jade-alloy weapons have been disappearing from the Realm's armories in alarming numbers.

A ledger talent is worth 8 bars, or 64 minae, or 128 shekels, or 1,024 obols, or 4,096 bits.

BAR

Like its companion the talent, the bar is rarely seen in physical form, and is more often a money of account. In true bar form, it is a brick-shaped block of jade with the seal of the Imperial Treasury lightly scored on each





face. Like the talent, it is further scored to represent eight smaller slabs and is labeled with a carving date and a serial number to discourage fraud. It weighs about eight and a half pounds and is worth about eight and a half minae, depending on its exact weight.

A ledger bar is worth one-eighth of a talent exactly, or 8 minae, or 16 shekels, or 128 obols, or 512 bits.

MINA

The true mina weighs slightly more than a pound and is a slab of jade about three inches wide, six inches long and a quarter-inch thick. A score line divides it into two square halves, and each half has been further scored into eight closely spaced circles, making 16 circles altogether. The Imperial Treasury seal is scored inside one circle on each half, all on one face. By weight, a true mina is worth about three shekels.

A ledger mina has a specific value of 1/64th of a talent, or 2 shekels, or 16 obols, or 64 bits.

SHEKEL

A true shekel is a thin square slab of jade graven with eight circles on its square side and milled around its thin edge to discourage jade shaving. Each circle has the Imperial Treasury seal scored on it, all on one side. A true shekel weighs about nine or ten ounces, with a corresponding variation in its market value.

The ledger shekel used by accountants represents 8 obols, or 32 bits and is worth 1/128th of a talent.

OBOL

A true obol is the most common coin seen in the Realm, so much so that one will likely see hundreds of obols before seeing a single true shekel and thousands of them before encountering a true mina. An obol always

weighs an ounce, and indeed, the sellers of herbs and drugs use them as balance weights to demonstrate accurate measurements. The obol's a round coin about an inch in diameter and about three-eighths of an inch thick. One side is graven with the Imperial Treasury seal. The other side, shockingly, bears an image, scored in quick, fine lines. The age of the coin can be determined by what image it is. The oldest obols bear an icon of a woman in a doorway, representing the Empress entering the Imperial Manse. Slightly more recent coins commemorate the recognition of each of the Great Houses, the creation of the Deliberative and various battles that imperial forces have won. The most recent coins continue to depict the lightning bolt from the Battle of Mishaka in RY 754. So far, no one has taken the step to change the design on the obol, though some wags have suggested a design depicting an empty throne.

BIT

Bits are an unofficial addition to the currency of the Realm. A bit is simply a section of an ordinary obol piece that has been chopped into fourths. One can identify the original coin's image after the division, and often, it is possible to tell which four bits came from the same coin. In the Unbroken Rushes Rebellion, it was made illegal to carry bits because messengers between rebel cells apparently used them to identify themselves to one another. However, the currency modification was simply too useful to be suppressed. Though the law against bits is still on the books, it is not enforced except where other circumstances suggest guilt without proving it.

One common modification to bits is based on the magical nature of jade. Peasants and others are not above burnishing off the remains of the Imperial Treasury seal and the image off of a bit and carving a character into it,



JADE SCRIP

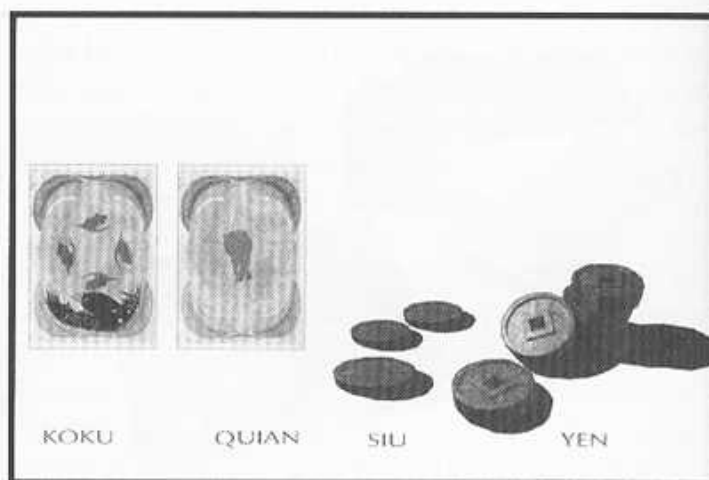
Below the bit, imperial currency ceases to be made from jade, and jade scrip takes over. Jade scrip was created in RY 185, when the Empress realized that the manufactories of the Realm could produce all kinds of consumer goods for a fraction of the value of the smallest jade coin, and yet, the peasantry of the Blessed Isle could buy none of them.

The Treasury issued koku and quian first. Two years later, it introduced the copper coins, the siu and the yen, when the koku and quian proved to still be too large for most day-to-day business. At first, the Treasury bought jade for one-and-three-fourths its value in scrip. Over the first 30 years of the new currency, this was gradually reduced to a one-to-one-and-an-eighth parity. Jade and jade scrip were completely interchangeable until RY 540, when the Deliberative fixed the jade-buyback ratio at 2 obols (scrip) to 1 obol (jade). In RY 650, the Empress organized a new department of the Treasury, the Jade Sniffers, whose duty was to ferret out unauthorized caches of jade and to seize them, returning half the cache's value to its owner in jade scrip. In RY 755, the Deliberative again changed the rules regarding jade buybacks using scrip, making the ratio three to one and limiting buyback transactions to certain times of the year and only under specific conditions.

such as "wealth" or "protection" or "love." A drilled hole and a lanyard makes the bit into an impromptu amulet. Dragon-Blooded commanders made a point of collecting them as trophies during various peasant uprisings, which suggests that their effectiveness is limited.

PAPER MONEY

The koku was the original base unit of the scrip system, and it has a face value of one-eighth of an obol, or one-half of a jade bit. The koku is printed on a mulberry paper rectangle shot through with gold and purple silk threads to form a pattern of flying cranes. Stamped on one side is a black-and-green ink print of eagles nesting on the Imperial Mountain. On the reverse is the legend "In the Scarlet Empress's name, one-eighth of an obol of jade." The paper also carries a watermark depicting the Imperial Manse. The quian is also printed on the same type of paper, but it features lions instead of cranes. The front bears an image of the Imperial City skyline, while the back bears the inscription, "In the Scarlet Empress's name, one-sixty-fourth an obol of jade." These paper bills were never exceedingly popular, both because their values were unwieldy and because



faithful Immaculates consider them possibly idolatrous, and many of the very faithful avoid using them for fear of worshipping the Empress.

COPPER COINS

The siu and the yen are two small coins of copper. The siu is about the same size as a jade obol and has the Imperial Treasury seal on the obverse and a stylized portrait of the Empress on the other. The coin is chemically treated to make the copper stay brown. The yen is twice as large, has a hole through the middle and is stamped with characters that say, "Scarlet Empress" on the obverse and "She Reigns Forever" on the reverse; the copper is treated to make it turn green. The siu is worth 1/128th of an obol, and a yen is worth 1/1024th of an obol.

Jade scrip was issued in the Empress' name, rather than under the Realm's aegis. It is her personal fortune that backs the jade scrip. For this reason, there is much concern in the Realm as to whether or not the Realm will make good on any buybacks of jade with jade scrip. Bal Keraz and other officials at the Treasury have deliberately left matters vague. They fear a run on the central bank on the one hand and the collapse of the scrip economy on the other. Most officials have been enforcing the regulations on buybacks with scrupulous attention to the letter of the law.

The Empress and the Deliberative have placed specific legal limits on what jade scrip will and will not buy. It will not buy weapons or armor of any kind from any Realm-based manufactory, for example, nor can it be used to buy luxury goods of any kind or ships or items of sorcerous power. All such items must be paid for in true jade, rather than scrip funds. On the other hand, food, raw materials and most manufactured goods such as pottery and cloth can be bought with jade scrip. Neither the koku nor the quian enjoyed widespread use. The imagery on both paper bills was seen as bordering on heretical, and both proved too large for most individual commerce. Fortunately, the yen and the siu have proved to be successful, with both copper coins being chopped into halves, quarters and eighths for still smaller change.

1 Talent (T) = 8 Bars (B) = 64 Minae (M) = 128 Shekels (S) = 1,024 Obols (O)
 1 Bar = 8 Minae = 16 Shekels = 128 Obols
 1 Mina = 2 Shekels = 16 Obols
 1 Shekel = 8 Obols*
 1 Obol = 8 Koku (k) = 64 Quian (q) = 128 Siu (s) = 1,024 Yen (y)
 1 Koku = 8 Quian = 16 Siu = 128 Yen
 1 Quian = 2 Siu = 16 Yen
 1 Siu** = 8 Yen#

* Obols are divided into quarters to form bits.
 ** Siu are divided into halves and quarters.
 # Yen are divided into halves, quarters and eighths.

PURCHASES IN JADE SCRIP

A jade obol is about an average farmer's annual earnings, after taxes. But you can't pay a farmer for his crop in jade. He's not allowed to own jade, and it won't buy most of what he needs. So you pay him in jade scrip. What does that buy for him?

A koku is more than a month's wages for a peasant. He can buy a new plough and oxen team for this much or start a cottage industry such as breeding silkworms, cultivating an apple orchard or making cheese. For 1 to 2 koku, he can renovate his house and outbuildings or hold a wedding. For 3 to 4 koku, he can set up a child in a house of her own with a plot of land to farm or pay his annual contribution to the village's tax fund.

A quian is a week's wages for a peasant. He can increase his flock by a dozen sheep for this much or buy a couple of milk cows. He can hold a feast for his neighbors or help build a temple with them.

A siu puts meat on a family's table for a week or buys a coop full of chickens ready to lay eggs or feeds an extended family on feast days. It buys a farmer's whole seed stock for planting or a couple of fruit or nut trees for his house plot.

A yen is a day's wages for an extra man at harvest time. It means a new suit of plain clothes of linen, cotton or wool or meatless meals for a large family for a day or meat for a family dinner. It will buy some new farm tools or a new set of pottery for the kitchen.

A half-yen will feed a childless couple for several days, without meat, or provide meat for the same couple for a day.

A quarter-yen will buy a loaf of bread, a quart of milk, a small round of cheese and a dozen eggs or a pint of cider and a smoked fish.

An eighth-yen buys a berry pie and a pint of cider or wine or tea at the inn.

THE REVENUE OF THE REALM

Not even the personal military and sorcerous might of the Scarlet Empress herself could convince bureaucrats, priests and soldiers to do their work for free, and so, the Realm has taxes. These taxes take three major forms: taxes on the licensed use of cultivated land and Realm-owned businesses, taxes on goods and materials coming in or going out of the Realm and tribute collected from overseas satrapies in the Threshold.

LAND TAXES

All the land of the Realm belongs to the Empress, particularly in the Blessed Isle. Through her gracious decree, that land is lent out to groups of peasants in village-sized lots, and in turn, the villagers pay their taxes as specific villages, with all of them together responsible for meeting the village's debt to the Empress. If the peasants fail to meet that debt, the penalty is disenfranchisement — they become refugees from the land. If they pay, they can stay for another year. The Empress also owns all the businesses and manufacturing facilities in the Realm, at least officially, and so, their operators pay licensing fees to the Treasury for the privilege of running them.

VILLAGES

No villager pays her own taxes directly to the collectors. Instead, she contributes to a village tax box that she and her neighbors run. In some towns, the box comes around every week, and in some villages, it only makes the rounds at the full moon. The peasants are free to choose how to collect the tax, knowing that failure to pay means disenfranchisement for all. The tax collector usually makes two visits to any village, once in the spring to lay down the assessment and then again immediately after the third harvest to collect the money.

The tax averages out to slightly less than a half-obol every year per family in the village. However, this must be paid in jade, rather than in jade scrip. Since most jade never makes it out to the countryside, much less into the hands of the peasants, the peasants must raise *three times* this amount in jade scrip. This usually amounts to half of any family's income in any given year. The tax collector then goes through the motions of accepting the jade scrip, figuring the proper amount of jade to return and then handing over jade pieces of the appropriate amount. The village elders then pay their taxes with the only jade they likely see in their entire lives, which is in and out of their hands in 10 minutes or less. Every village is careful to get a receipt, on a specific kind of mulberry paper with the Imperial Treasury seal woven into the paper in orange and purple thread, and a watermark of its own prefecture's seal.



Sometimes, a peasant cannot afford to raise enough money on his own to meet his family's tax obligation to the village. Other peasants often chip in, since the failure of one means disenfranchisement for all. The inequity this generates causes a lot of resentment and tension in the villages, and this resentment, in turn, leads to occasional strife and bad blood between families. Now, these stresses are on the rise, a sign of the disintegrating economic fabric of the Realm.

BUSINESSES

Businesses pay their taxes in a different way than villages. Technically, businesses have belonged to the Scarlet Empress since RY 242, and their operators are merely paying a fee to the Empress to run the businesses for her. Unlike villages, which pay a flat rate based on the number of families living on the Empress's land, entrepreneurs pay a tax based on two different calculations. The first calculation is based on the profit they return to the operation, assessed at one shekel per full talent reinvested. The second is based on the profit taken out of the business, assessed at one shekel per bar. The Empress hoped to keep money invested in the Realm's economy and to stimulate small businesses, while retaining enough clout to divest a political opponent of his investments without much difficulty. Since her disappearance, however, the tax assessors have begun to overlook businesses associated with their own houses

and to squeeze independent businesses. The money they collect rarely reaches the Treasury.

Further, House Cathak and House Nellens successfully argued in the Deliberative and with the Treasury that businesses founded in the Empress' absence belong to their founders and can be taxed only on their profits and not on their capital. While the other Great Houses have been slow to pick up on the advantages of this system, Cathak and Nellens have invested in starting new manufactories of weapons, ships and consumer goods as a way of keeping their sinking fortunes afloat.

EXCISE DUTIES

In addition to collecting taxes on land and businesses, the Imperial Treasury agents collect taxes on goods entering and exiting the Realm. These are relatively easy to police with the naval fleet or with a harbormaster reporting directly to the local prefect and his staff. A maze of regulations govern what may be imported or exported, with weapons and sorcerous materials topping the "banned from export" list, and a whole hierarchy of officials helps merchants sort out what they can and cannot ship. In general, however, goods are divided into four major categories and taxed or regulated accordingly.

Raw Materials covers timber, stone, mineral ores, metal ores, cotton, wool, flax, hemp, raw herbs and spices and any other product that can be further



IMPERIAL AND HOUSE PATENTS

The Empress recognized that where she bought goods, the rest of the Dynasty, and indeed the whole Realm, would follow. It made sense, then, to issue imperial patents to certain businesses, allowing them to put the Imperial Seal beside the door and explain to other customers that these were the same products that the Empress used. The heads of the Great Houses followed her example, not only in the Imperial City, but also in the prefectural capitals. The heads of major lines imitated their elders, as well, allowing their seal to be placed on shops in towns and even some larger villages near their major holdings.

The best shops and manufactories in major towns and prefectural capitals will display one or more seals from the Great Houses. This almost guarantees a 10 to 20 percent markup of prices on goods and services from that establishment. If the Imperial Seal is present, this represents a 40 to 50 percent markup in prices.

The penalty for misusing the seal of the Empress or a Great House for business fraud is death.

processed but has not been. In general, these items are taxed lightly or not at all, except where a given port has unused processing capacity. There, raw materials are heavily taxed. For example, Ventus Prefecture has a large distillery capacity for deriving essential oils from plants, so shipping Ventusian herbs is taxable. At the same time, Ventus has large seams of coal and sulfur, but the prefecture has no processing facilities for these materials, so shipping them elsewhere is not taxed.

Manufactured Goods covers pottery that is not porcelain, cloth that is not silk, metal goods that are not weapons, carved stone that is not jade, paper of various kinds, ink, furniture, musical instruments and more. Items made in the Realm are never taxed when they are transported to another location in the Realm. However, they are all taxed when they leave the Realm, at a rate based on their assessed quality: one obol per bar of the shipment's assessed value for low-quality goods, and one obol per mina of the shipment's assessed value for high-quality goods. A similar tax is levied on goods imported to the Realm, equal to one obol per mina on low-quality goods and one obol per shekel on high-quality goods. Some goods are subject to even higher import duties, to protect the Realm's own manufactories.

Foodstuffs covers any kind of product that can be eaten or added to food to make it taste or look better. Wine, spices, smoked fish, smoked meats, rice, squash, beans, flour and vegetable oil are all foodstuffs and all covered by the import and export duties on them. The Realm's tariff regulations make the importation of staples

such as rice and beans expensive, unless the food is destined to be the main component of legionary rations. Even with this high protectionist policy for the farmers, however, the Realm still imports massive amounts of food, as well as transporting it all around the Blessed Isle.

Luxury Items covers silk, porcelain, jade and jade-alloy products, weapons, armor and even certain kinds of food and drink, such as caviar, fine wines and spices. A complex tax code covers luxury goods in minute detail, with taxes often doubling the cost of luxuries on the open market. This, of course, has led to an elaborate series of smuggling operations, which Treasury officials are finding more difficult to discourage, much less prevent.

TRIBUTE

The third major source of wealth for the Realm comes from its collection of tribute payments from the satrapies and semi-independent kingdoms of the Threshold. Nominally, over 500 towns, cities, provinces, autocracies, and principalities pay tribute to the Realm. However, in the best of times, the Empress rarely got everyone to pay on time or in the correct amounts. Much of the Threshold's leadership knew that the Empress could deal with any large-scale rebellion easily enough, but they suspected she would have a harder time dealing with genial delays and minor setbacks. In any given year, even during the height of the Empress's power, the Realm was able to collect the owed tribute in only four satrapies out of every six.

For a long time, the Empress's administration bore little of the cost of collecting the tribute. Instead, the tribute-collection rights were farmed out to the Great Houses on a high-bid system every eight years. An official of the Humble and Honest Assessors of the Imperial Tax calculated the estimated minimum revenues from a satrapy, and then, that territory's tax-collection duty was put up for auction at that price per year. Some territories were required to pay in jade, some in goods and raw materials. Most satrapies had to pay a combination of jade and goods.

In the interest of balancing the Great Houses against one another, the Empress usually appointed a satrap to an area who was not of the same house as the tax collector. The tribute-agent and the satrap would then be diligent about monitoring one another and reporting irregularities. In the best of times, the Treasury still collected only four-tenths of the expected amount, with two-tenths winding up in the Great House's pocket and three-tenths lost to graft. One-tenth was often not collected at all.

In the present crisis, the Deliberative has insisted upon changes to the Empress's policy. Now, satraps and tribute-agents both come from the same Great House. The house may legally keep two-thirds of what it collects, and the system of auctions has been abolished completely.



MOUNTAIN TRIBUTE

There is one tribute payment the Treasury never worries about in public. The Mountain Tribute, amounting to 100 talents every year, arrives promptly on the seventh day of Ascending Fire — and has since the third year of the Empress's reign. This tribute is the backbone of the Realm's fiscal policy, since it pours more than 100,000 obols into the economy every year and has provided enough jade dust over the years to back the jade scrip — at least in theory. Bal Keraz privately worries about how long the Mountain Folk will continue to pay this tribute, but he is very cautious with whom he discusses this fear. If they ever stop paying, he knows the Treasury will likely not be able to meet its payments to the Great Houses and the Immaculate Order.

TAX COLLECTION

With the exception of the Mountain Tribute, the Imperial Treasury has functionally ceased to collect taxes of any kind since the disappearance of the Empress. Imperial tax collectors remain in the field, assessing and collecting tribute. However, that money now flows into the pockets of dishonest officials or into the private treasuries of the Great Houses. Perhaps a tenth of what the Realm used to collect in majesty is now grudgingly bestowed upon it.

The Empress had substantial reserves of jade, of course, and the Treasury has been making use of these judiciously, to balance out the loss of other revenue. While this vast surplus is in no danger of drying up anytime soon, there are limits on its use. Some of it is locked away in Manses that only the Empress knows how to open safely, while some officially backs the jade scrip, and if it is withdrawn, it might cause the scrip economy to collapse. Bal Keraz and his advisors know that very hard decisions about budget-cutting are only three years away.

IMPERIAL EXPENDITURES

The Realm's budget makes expenditures in four basic areas. Since RY 764, the Deliberative has spent three days out of every five in session wrestling with budget priorities and deciding how to spend the Treasury's funds. Although most members of the Deliberative know that the revenues of the Realm have declined to a trickle, they insist that the Treasury continue to meet its financial obligations. Most particularly, the Deliberative insists that the Treasury pay out the Stipendiary Disbursement for the Work of the Imperial Families, otherwise known as the Dynastic Stipends. After these payments to the Great Houses, the Treasury is expected to pay out the Disbursement of Charity to the Work of the Immaculate Order (the Religious Subsidy). Then it pays the Salaried

Disbursements to the Work of the Thousand Scales (the Bureaucratic Salaries) and the Disbursements to the Honorable and Loyal Commanders of Land and Sea (the Army and Navy Expenditures).

Bal Keraz has been playing a delicate balancing act. The Great Houses intend to empty the Imperial Treasury's reserves and to drain the Empress's personal coffers, as a prelude to open civil war. In the present crisis, he sees it as his duty to prevent this at all costs, while retaining the Realm's financial integrity as much as possible. Therefore, he resists opening the Treasury's reserves or the Empress's coffers to increase the Dynastic Stipends or the payments to the Immaculate Order, while trying to keep salaries to bureaucratic officials and active military officers intact. "If the Realm cannot afford to pay its servants, then it cannot expect their loyalty," he regularly declares in his speeches before the Greater Chamber.

By and large, his pleas fall on deaf ears. The Deliberative has voted two major increases in the Dynastic Stipends. It paid for the first increase by freezing the construction of new equipment for the Realm's own legions and by deferring any new warship construction. Though Keraz pleaded for the maintenance of the navy, the Greater Chamber overruled him, citing the Great House legions and the V'neef fleets as a more effective defense of the Realm. The second increase came through halving the number of tax collectors and decimating the Knowledgeable Advisors under Ledaal Arnis. Keraz released some of the Treasury's reserves at the last moment to keep another 200 junior tax assessors in the field, but he dares not open the floodgates too widely.

Of late, the Deliberative has been discussing 14 minor departments in the Thousand Scales and whether to dismantle them. The savings would be used to augment the Immaculate Order's disbursement, making it closer in size to the Dynastic Stipends. Five of the departments are responsible for policing the imperial highways of the Blessed Isle that connect the prefectures and keeping the roads in good repair. Again, Keraz is debating whether or not to release more funds to keep the departments from being dismantled, to suggest other ministries for elimination or to accede to the inevitable. The gutted army and navy worry him greatly, but he is also concerned about maintaining the transport network within the Realm.

THE RELIGIOUS SUBSIDY

Officially, the Immaculate Order is not part of the government of the Realm, and so there is no reason why the Order should receive any stipendiary payment from the Realm's treasury at all. However, the Order plays a large role in maintaining order in the Realm, by providing sufficient justification for the rule of the Empress and

the Dragon-Blooded and by helping to uncover and suppress the worst abuses of the Realm's individual agents and institutions. Further, the Order is responsible for operating many of the services for the poor and the disenfranchised that they would otherwise not have: hospitals for the dying and hostels for the disenfranchised, monastic establishments in major towns and itinerants on the roads. In exchange for performing these services, the Order has received gifts of land rights from grateful peasants, gifts of goods and services from the Great Houses and an actual disbursement from the Realm's treasury.

The Order has never requested the disbursement, but it has never refused it, either. The money goes toward helping people all over the Realm and provides a wide variety of free services where there would otherwise be nothing at all. The Order provides the Realm with an accounting of how its money is spent. Since the Empress's disappearance, the Order has continued to receive the money, if only by constantly shaming the Great Houses into recognizing how much distress they are causing in the world. The Mouth of Peace recognizes that the Order is not likely to continue receiving funds after civil war breaks out, and he and Bal Keraz have had more than one tense conversation about it. They both expect that if the "minor" departments are collapsed and the monies plowed into the Religious Subsidy, then when the Deliberative next raises the Dynastic Stipends, the Disbursement of Charity will suffer. Neither of them has made a decision about what to do when that moment arrives.

THE BUREAUCRATIC SALARIES

The Salaried Disbursements to the Work of the Thousand Scales, otherwise called the Bureaucratic Salaries, is the government's third basic area of financial responsibility. There were over 37 ranks in the Thousand Scales when the Empress still reigned, with different salaries at each grade and in each department or group of departments, and in theory, all of them were necessary to the functioning of the Realm's administration. Every single one of them was indispensable. Now, the Deliberative is finding that more and more of the functionaries of the Thousand Scales are disposable. The Deliberative first swept away the entirety of the Chamber of Florid and Fluid Masters of Pen and Brush in but a single half-hour of debate, thereby eliminating most of the scribes skilled enough to copy out imperial decrees. Having done away with the Thousand Scales' ability to issue new regulations or to make changes to the old ones, the members of the Greater Chamber have been proposing new departments for personnel and equipment budget cuts every day. Discouraged by the loss of good friends and close colleagues, officials are retiring in record numbers and turning to life in the

country. Their former power and connections with the Great Houses turn them into little princes lording it over petty villages and towns. Many of these former officials seem to take delight in pestering those who remain in the Thousand Scales.

THE ARMY AND NAVY EXPENDITURES

Of all the areas that the Realm supports financially, the most heavily savaged by the budget debates in the Deliberative are the army and the navy. House Peleps has taken over nearly all of the Realm's naval powers and receives extra funds for building up its own navy at the expense of the Realm's fleets. The dockyards of Arjuf and other towns of the south are filled with new construction on the V'neef fleet, while the older vessels of the Realm's navy are hulks rotting in harbor. Newer imperial ships are still no match for the best new ships in Peleps' squadrons, and there have been no new vessels other than dozen trimaran scouts added to the imperial fleet in three years. In addition, the naval accountants have made a point of delaying payment of salaries up to three or four months. In the intervals between, the talented officers often resign from the Realm's service to sign up with the Peleps, transferring their allegiance to where they are paid. The crewmen, similarly short of pay and often in more desperate straits, jump ship when they can. A whole generation of midshipmen has had no opportunity to enter naval service with the Realm at all.

The Deliberative is also stripping the legions stationed in the Blessed Isle of the funds necessary to pay both troops and officers and to maintain a state of battle readiness. What army would dare threaten the Realm on its home soil, the members wonder aloud? Yet, in the absence of the Empress, any general with his own troops is suspect and a danger to the legitimate authorities, meaning the Great Houses. The Deliberative has functionally disbanded one legion a year since the Empress disappeared, sending the troops home to their farms and towns and recalling their officers to the houses in which they began. The funds thus freed are distributed among the Great Houses and now pay the salaries of new house legions the old imperial officers are expected to raise.

BANKING IN THE REALM

In the First Age, there was an elaborate banking network that allowed everyone access to their money almost all the time. One could deposit one kind of money in the morning and draw out another kind of money before sunset. There were complex financial instruments called Walls of Creation War Bonds. The Great Southern Mutual Support and Communication Society used money to build magical defenses against the fey, and the Northern Bulwark Personal Fortune Fund made deals worth billions of talents of jade — these structured



financial and commercial arrangements buttressed the fabric of reality in whole regions.

Almost all of that sort of banking is gone, at least in the Realm. Banks serve few individuals these days and reserve most of their energies for institutions, corporations and organizations. The Empress was considering plans to renew the old concept of personal banking and to create the necessary systems to run a banking network for individuals. Then, she disappeared, and Bal Keraz is not strong enough to push through the necessary reforms himself. The Imperial Treasury and the Credit Houses of the prefectures do business with businesses but not with any but the most extraordinary individuals: heads of houses, imperial governors and senior bureaucrats and the holders of imperial monopolies. To these individuals, the privileges of bank membership are open. Otherwise, banking is available only to groups: organizations and agencies of the Realm's government, companies and the Great Houses.

THE SALT RATE

Banking in the Realm depends upon the salt rate. Prior to the introduction of the salt rate in RY 314, there was no serious banking at the national or international level in the Realm. However, in that year, the Empress turned her formidable powers against the various minor gods and spirits known as the salt gods. These beings watch over shorelines, coastlands and marshes and some mines — anywhere that salt can be gathered from ocean evaporation or dug up from the ground. The Realm alone has 736 salt gods watching over long stretches of its coastline and monitoring the collection and use of their product.

Normally, these gods were jealous of their prerogatives and forbade the extraction of salt except after very large sacrifices. Since salt is a vital commodity for preserving food and preparing other raw materials for use, this divine interference with salt collection was hindering agricultural production and economic stability.

The Empress forced the salt gods to set one low rate of sacrifice throughout the Blessed Isle: 18 jade obols or the equivalent value for every quintal of salt gathered. This amounted to a two percent tax on the price of salt throughout the Realm. This became the prime rate to which the Realm's banking establishment pinned its own lending and borrowing rates.

The salt rate has fluctuated over the centuries since then, usually between 12 and 21 obols per quintal of salt. The Empress has made these changes herself, though she has gone through the motions of consulting the salt gods by traveling to their main temple in the Imperial City and offering a sacrifice at the new rate. Forced to accept the new rate, whatever it was, the salt gods throughout the Realm complied with her request.

In the Empress's absence, however, the arrangement she made with the salt gods has come unglued. Over half of the salt gods continue to honor the present sacrificial custom of 21 obols, a four percent salt rate. From the Heptagram east and south around the coast to Arjuf, that standard applies. However, in the western parts of the isle, some of the gods lowered their rate to 18 obols or less. Eleven obols is the lowest known rate at present. Other gods have raised their rates to 28 or 35 obols. The results are chaotic, at best. Instead of dealing with one prime rate, branches of the Treasury and other financial institutions now have to pin their salt rate calculations to whatever the local salt god demands.

Where before the same lending and borrowing rates applied throughout the Realm, now a different climate prevails. The whole prefecture of Eagle's Launch has been effectively cut out of the banking network because of the demands of the local salt gods for a sacrifice of 84 obols per quintal, or a salt rate of 16 percent. Towns and villages experience the same difficulties on a smaller scale when their salt gods begin their old extortion rackets.

The breakdown of the compact with the salt gods means that, in some places, it is very easy to get a loan or to give one. In other areas, particularly in the west of the Blessed Isle, it is very hard to borrow money or lend it. The salt gods don't particularly care about mortal monetary difficulties. They just want sacrifices, and it makes them petulant and greedy but also likely to change their minds about acceptable sacrifices on the spot.

In addition, of course, the salt gods are attacking the salt collectors themselves. Now that they are no longer bound to any sort of collective agreement, the gods patrol their territories with increasing aggressiveness.

SOURCES OF LOANS

Should a person or institution wish to negotiate a loan, there are four major sources of finance in the Realm. The first and most reliable source has always been the Bank of the Scarlet Throne, which operated as an extension of the Empress's fiscal policy. Following the Throne Bank, the Imperial Treasury and the Great House 'banks' were the next best options. The worst option was to consult the Guild about a loan at usurious rates.

THE BANK OF THE SCARLET THRONE

At present, the Bank of the Scarlet Throne is making only the most stable and fiscally sound loans it can find and is charging high prices for its money. Every loan category is bumped up two places on the risk table, with low-risk loans being charged high-risk interest rates. The bank's officials are reluctant to risk more of their mistress' capital than necessary during her ex-

LEVELS OF RISK

In negotiating loans, the officials of any bank are likely to take into account five things. First is the length of time before the loan is to be repaid. Second is the profitability of the business to which the loan is to be applied. Third, the officers consider the likelihood of repayment. Fourth, the banking heads consider how much the bank has invested in ventures with a similar rate of risk. Lastly, the bankers consider what the applicant owns that can be seized in the event of a failure to repay. They then offer the applicant a loan rate based on these five factors, which corresponds with one of six levels of risk.

Low-Risk loans are made out in small sums of money to businesses with high profitability and a high likelihood of repayment and are relatively short-term loans. The loan-seeker must also have a piece of property that is relatively easy to seize, such as a caravan route on the Blessed Isle or a manufactory or legal rights to a prefecture's tax revenue. Many Realm banks offer low-risk loans at the present salt rate plus an additional four percent interest.

Medium-Risk loans mean a small or medium sum of money lent to businesses with acceptable profitability and a high likelihood of repayment and are typically mid-length loans of 3 to 15 years. The loan-seeker must have a piece of property that is easily seized as collateral or must be reasonably easy to find in the event of a failure to pay. Medium-risk loans are given at the salt rate plus 10 percent interest.

High-Risk loans mean a riskier venture with a larger sum of money lent, such as those made to businesses with uncertain yields or to companies that may not be profitable for some time. High-risk loans run to 15 or 20 years for stable businesses or for shorter periods measured in months for riskier plans. The collateral may be easily hidden or taken away, such as family heirlooms or a ship. Such businesses receive loans at the salt rate plus 14 percent interest.

Very High-Risk loans are made only in exceptional circumstances. The bank does not really expect to get all its money back, and so, it charges the salt rate plus 26 percent interest on loans of this type. The loan applicant may be considered a flight risk or a person so important and prestigious that he believes he can get away without paying his bills. The collateral may be very difficult to seize, such as an heirloom weapon or property in the Threshold.

Enormous-Risk loans involve enormous sums of money with uncertain returns. The collateral's value is subject to enormous fluctuation and may be illegal. The applicant is not a wanted criminal, yet, but is under suspicion of high crimes. However, the intended purpose of the loan must be expected to pay out handsomely. Enormous risk loans are assessed at salt rate plus 31 percent interest.

Insane-Risk loans involve enormous sums paid to people who do not ever seem to pay their bills and offer no serious collateral. The loan applicant is a known criminal and a definite flight risk, is engaged in shady or outright illegal operations, threatens the security of the Realm in a real way and places the bank's personnel in real hazard of their lives. The loan's purpose must be enormously attractive in its own right to be considered at this level, and the collateral must be both spectacular and in the bank's possession at the time of the loan, to be returned upon repayment of the principal and interest. Insane risk loans are granted at salt rate plus 48 percent interest, which is the Realm's highest legal maximum rate.

tended absence. As a result, the Bank of the Scarlet Throne is making very few loans of any kind these days, since most people prefer not to borrow money at such exorbitant rates.

With the Empress gone, the Bank of the Scarlet Throne is blinded to many political machinations. The Imperial Household previously approved all loans, and despite repeated urgings from officials in the Treasury, the bank has yet to establish any sort of investigation procedure for determining which loan applications are legitimate and which are coming from the front organizations of the Great Houses. The Bank is making some loans to groups who have no intention of ever repaying their debts, particularly fronts for House Nellens and House Peleps, who intend to drain the Empress' private bank of capital, if they can.

THE IMPERIAL TREASURY

With the Bank of the Scarlet Throne increasingly conservative in its fiscal dealings and management strategies, a good many more loan applications have come directly to the Treasury, and a small army of accountants is kept busy sorting out which applications are from legitimate commercial concerns and which requests come from companies that are merely fronts for the Great Houses. The various branches of the Dynasty are after extra cash in any way that they can get it, and by flooding both the Empress's private bank and the Treasury with requests for funds, at least some are getting through. Bal Keraz has assembled several teams of agents to go and examine businesses in the field, at various places around the Realm, in order to determine which kind of business



is which. In addition to the usual risk assessment, however, the Treasury also makes loans based on how good a particular loan looks at helping to maintain the integrity of the Realm. For example, the Treasury is currently financing the construction of a large number of warships for House Peleps, on the theory that such ships will help defend the Realm against invasion before they are put to use in any civil war.

THE GREAT HOUSE "BANKS"

While they are not officially banks, as such, the Great Houses run their own lending systems, to pump investment into their own businesses whenever a particular market looks promising. These semiformal arrangements lend only within their own houses. Reduce the risk level by one place on the chart when determining the interest rate, with low-risk loans fixed at salt rate plus one percent. These dynastic lending institutions are also looking for ways to bleed the Treasury and the Bank of the Scarlet Throne, and they have created several companies and trading houses specifically to draw monies out of the imperial reserves of capital.

GUILD INVESTMENT

When all else fails, a citizen of the Realm can always borrow money from the Guild. The Guild charges heavily for its services but, at present, not so heavily as the Bank of the Scarlet Throne. The Guild is also the only institution in the Realm that will lend to an individual rather than to a commercial entity such as a company, a trading line or a manufactory.

Note that borrowing money from the Guild is considered a political act. The Guild is not kind to the Realm's commercial interests in the Threshold. The only reason the Guild is allowed to do business in the Realm at all is as part of a settlement to a long and bitter economic war. However, borrowing money from it invites the Guild's influence in the Realm's internal affairs, and most people in the Realm find the idea itself offensive.

In order to borrow money from the Guild, one must contact a branch of the Guild Bank in one of the six port cities where the Guild is allowed to land cargoes. Then, one must contact the Guild's officials and persuade them of the propriety of the loan and leave a suitable collateral. The Guild's policy in the Realm forbids loans of money without collateral, since Guild agents cannot recoup any losses in court and are forbidden from traveling very far from their licensed ports.

INSURANCE IN THE REALM

Insurance is a complicated business, and the Empress used to handle it with her own money and her trusted servants in the Bank of the Scarlet Throne. The

LETTERS OF CREDIT

Any of the Realm's banks or banking establishments can issue what is known formally as a letter of credit, or informally as "flying money." Simply put, a letter of credit is a letter announcing that the bearer or an agent of the bearer has deposited a sum of money in jade or scrip with that bank in one place. That amount of money can be withdrawn at a later date from another branch of that bank in any city of the Realm, simply by surrendering the letter to an official of the bank. Some letters can be written in such a way that the bearer is able to withdraw from two or more branches, and the officials at each branch mark the letter of credit to prevent double withdrawals.

essence of the transaction was simple, and an individual merchant, a shipping line or a Great House could all afford insurance until very recently. The party in question would pay the throne a percentage of the value of a caravan or a ship and its cargo, in exchange for complete reimbursement of the value of transport and goods if they were destroyed by disaster. Common disasters covered by insurance include loss to sea, the acts of gods or monsters and fire. Not only could merchants buy insurance on caravans and ships but also warehouses, manufactories and specific objects.

There is no such thing as a "standard" insurance package anywhere in the Realm. Each individual insurance contract is negotiated separately, based on what is being insured against loss, where it is going and who owns it. For example, a ship is usually protected against rain and hailstorm, lightning, lesser gods, monsters and mutiny, as a matter of course. But depending on its planned route, it might be insured against an attack by a specific spirit or a greater god. For example, ships passing between Arjuf and Paragon regularly encounter Thalassov, one of the gods of the Southern Inland Sea. Thalassov is famously difficult about granting passage, and so, buying insurance against him is an absolute must.

BUYING INSURANCE

In the Realm, buying insurance requires an assessment of value by an appraiser and an accountant. The appraiser and the accountant check out the goods and materials to be insured very thoroughly and then make a report to their superior, a gongfang, or actuary, who is either a servant of one of the banks, of the Treasury or one of the houses — or is in private practice for himself. The gongfang assimilates the information about the materials to be insured and where it is to be transported and develops a risk-plan. The risk-plan offers the owner three basic options of insurance: partial coverage, complete coverage and special coverage.



Partial coverage insures the owner against half the replacement value of the insured item or items, when they are lost to ordinary natural disaster: storm, flood, fire, earthquake, volcanic eruption and typhoon. If gods, spirits or monsters are involved, no payment at all is made in the event of loss. Partial coverage is the cheapest form of insurance and usually begins at a price of salt rate plus six percent of the insured item's value. Additional risks can raise this figure to as high as 10 percent, depending on such factors as the time of year or the planned transport route.

Complete coverage is not complete by any means, since it only insures an item or cargo against natural disasters of all sorts. However, it does restore to the owner of the insured items the replacement value of the goods destroyed. Complete coverage prices begin at salt rate plus 10 percent of the assessed value of the insured objects.

The insurance business in the Realm becomes most complicated when special coverage enters the picture. The Society of the Precise and Punctilious Gongfangs has collected almost 700 years worth of data on all kinds of disasters, natural and unnatural. These tables add on percentage points and tenths of a percentage point to provide coverage from specific threats: the irascibility of gods and the migrations of animals, the regular appearance of certain wind spirits or irregular eruptions of the Southern volcanoes. If a special coverage is recommended, then the partial


and complete coverage policies specifically do not cover that specific type of disaster. For example, a complete coverage policy might cover storms, yet if the gongfang's tables note that storms of the Western Ocean during the month of Descending Earth are particularly severe, then the complete coverage policy does not insure against loss due to storm in the Western Ocean during Descending Earth. For these matters, special coverage is required.

The insurance buyer may then select from the list of special coverages the ones she wishes to accept, and then, the gongfang calculates the final cost of the insurance policy. The buyer hands over a sum in cash or kind and receives elaborately calligraphed insurance papers for her goods. In the event of a loss, she simply presents the insurance papers and collects the money owed.

A GONGFANG'S SPECIAL RISK TABLE

Risk tables are a vital part of any gongfang's business, and they are often the result of dozens of years of careful assessment of risk, if not centuries. Gongfangs frequent taverns and seek out travelers, merchants, pilgrims and soldiers to get their first-hand accounts of disasters and threats to travel, and they also compare information frequently, to keep their business running smoothly. Risk tables are passed from master actuaries to their juniors. They are also traded, bought and sold at high prices.





Insurance usually lasts for a specified period of time, usually set at either eight months or seven months and Calibration. In particularly high-risk businesses, such as arms dealing or the transport of jade tribute, the insurance period is usually four months or three months and Calibration. An insurance rate is usually locked in for a period of four years, and adjustments to the cost of the insurance are only made at the end of that time period. The insuring agent usually reserves the right to cancel a policy at any time, if he suspects reckless endangerment of insured goods or deliberate intent to defraud.

Traditionally, people buy insurance only on items that cost an obol or more and expect to be reimbursed in jade in the event of a loss, as well. There are no laws against insuring something with jade scrip, but it is rarely done.

From time to time, a gongfang or a bank will be sufficiently concerned about an insurance policy that it will reinsure the policy against loss. Reinsurance in the Realm is a complicated business, and the gongfangs are reluctant to discuss it with anyone outside their own profession. The essence of the deal is that the risk is syndicated (shared out) among a larger group of gongfangs or bank branches, with each one accepting a share of the insurance policy's price and absorbing a proportionate share of the payout in the event of a loss. Since the Empress's disappearance, reinsurance has been a dwindling business because losses have been multiplying faster than the gongfangs can adjust their risk tables adequately, and fewer gongfangs are willing to take on the risks of other agents and banks.

COLLECTING INSURANCE

Once a ship or caravan is lost, the owner or owners usually attempt to collect the insurance money owed to them. Most of the time, this is a simple process. The owner simply presents the insurance papers to the appropriate agent of the insuring bank or to the independent gongfang, and the claim is usually paid off within a season.

After an insurance payout for lost or damaged goods is made, the lost property belongs to the gongfang or to the agency that issued the insurance. While in some cases, any effort at recovery is deemed useless, many agencies will, in fact, go to some effort to recover their new property. Such effort has at times included hiring divers to locate and salvage a wrecked ship or mercenaries to hunt down a bandit or pirate. When a specific threat begins to do more damage than a risk table suggests that it should, the gongfangs are not above putting pressure on a kingdom or even a god to curtail its activities. Dumuiz, the patron god of the gongfangs, has even brought suit in the courts of the Celestial City on behalf of his mortal worshipers.

In addition, a gongfang or his associates or superiors will sometimes suspect that a specific case involves a deliberate effort to commit fraud. In such cases, the gongfang will delay payment of a claim while sending investigators to determine the truth of the matter. These missions are usually hair-raising and fast-paced, for an agent has little time to determine the truth or dishonesty of a claim — three months is the legal limit on such investigations. Larger agencies, such as the Bank of the Scarlet Throne, have their own investigation teams. Smaller, independent gongfangs will usually hire a team when they think there is a need for one.

INSURANCE IN THE THRESHOLD

While normally the business interests of the Guild and those of the Realm are at loggerheads, the gongfangs of the Threshold actually see eye-to-eye with many of their independent counterparts in the Realm. A god's threat is usually the same to a Guild caravan as to one led by a servant of the Realm, and the same holds true of storms and dangerous animals. While pirates and bandits sometimes have specific targets in mind, most of the time, the Realm and the Guild can share their risk tables easily and simply. It is a professional courtesy to buy, sell and trade risk data across the Inner Sea, and the insurance agents thus also provide a series of backdoor channels for communication between the powers of the Threshold and the factions of the Blessed Isle.

While the business of insurance is much the same in its generalities between the Realm and the Threshold, insurance and reinsurance are both much more competitive and cutthroat in the Threshold. The gongfangs there have not had the same kind of rigorous schooling and in-the-field training that those on the Blessed Isle have had, and there are no large-scale agencies with offices in a dozen cities, as there are in the Realm. The small and independent gongfangs of the Threshold also tend to go out of business suddenly and unexpectedly. At least, some of them do. Others go out of business so that the gongfangs do not bankrupt themselves paying out a claim. Usually, such a gongfang also skips town and moves into a new profession, preferably out of the public eye.

In the River Province, the Guild has a fairly tight hold on the insurance business, and its own insurance group, the Energetic and Illustrious Association of Risk-Buyers, has agents operating in most cities and in many towns. The Guild maintains one primary list of risk tables and distributes copies of it from Nexus once a month. This means that the fringes of the Guild's business often suffer from late delivery, but this is more than compensated for by the Guild's ability to make uniform insurance policy over a wide stretch of territory. The Guild's rates are frequently lower than any individual or local agency can set them, and the presence of so many

agents and offices means that a claim can be settled immediately instead of at the end of a long journey back to the original insurer's offices. However, the Guild has not had much opportunity to penetrate the family-based and tight knit insurance businesses of the North, South and West. Here, one must do business with local sources, rather than with the Guild, and it is here that insurance buyers are likely to experience the most difficulty, both with buying insurance and with making claims upon it in the event of loss.

ACCOUNTING

Money is valuable, and while it seems a waste of words to say so, anyone who possesses money goes to great lengths to keep it protected from thieves and scoundrels. Strongboxes, safes, hidden caches, secret compartments and money belts each protect money from robbers to some degree. However, another type of thief, the embezzler, relies on stealth and lackadaisical counting to increase his own fortune. The embezzler does not take everything. He takes only a little and makes things appear as if all is in order.

To defeat this kind of thief and his relatives, the con artist and the spendthrift, businesses in the Realm and in the Threshold rely upon accountants and account logs to keep their wealth safe from predatory financiers. Accountants in both regions are expertly trained in mathematics, particularly arithmetic, and are able to perform large, multi-step calculations in their heads. However, accountants usually make a point of putting their work on paper, since they are paid to show their work to their employers.

IN THE REALM

In the Realm, accounting is not only an honorable profession, it is a suitable career path for a child with an aptitude for numbers. Training of the Realm's accountants takes place at a number of schools. The most significant and important academy is the Shining Garden of Calculating and Counting. The training lasts six years and is as thorough and intensive as any other career path in the Realm. Once their training is complete, some go into private practice, to be hired by a business or a Great House to keep track of its funds and investments. After three years of real-world practice, an accountant may sit for the Counters Examination in the Imperial City. If he passes, he may be appointed as a *kaja*, a prefect's counting official. A *kaja*'s official role is to ride circuit between a number of villages or to reside in one larger town and audit the records of the villages or the town. Since individual village households are forbidden from keeping financial records, the *kaja*'s duty to the peasants is very important. Without his help, they rarely know how much tax they owe or who owes what (though, unofficially, many villag-


ers do keep their own records, since they are so useful). The *kaja* is responsible for the quality of his bookkeeping and the elegance of his calligraphy, and he also presents the records to the local tax assessor on a regular basis, to show how his villages are doing. After eight years as a *kaja*, the accountant may take a second examination on the recommendation of three tax assessors and attempt to enter the ranks of the Humble and Honest Assessors. Some *kaja* take a different examination to become a *gongfang*, an actuary in service to one of the insuring agencies of the Realm. Some of the new Assessors are tapped to work in other departments of the Thousand Scales, while others leave public service and enter service with the Great Houses, with imperial corporations or with the Immaculate Order. Still others, after a further eight years of practice, apply to take the Imperial Counters Examination, in order to enter the highest ranks of the Thousand Scales. The Realm has an elaborate and complex code of behavior for its accountants, down to styles of clothes they may wear and the proper posture to be assumed around various other officials, and the work is demanding in more ways than simple addition and subtraction. An official can find herself demoted back to a village examiner for an incorrect bow as much as for a miscalculated *koku*.

THE JADE SNIFFERS

Somewhere in the Thousand Scales, between the Humble and Honest Assessors of the Imperial Tax and the Imperial Treasury, is a small ministry called the Righteous and Perfect Examiners of Illicit Scents, otherwise known as the Jade Sniffers. With their officials drawn from the individuals scoring highest on the Imperial Counters Examination, the Jade Sniffers hold a charter from the Scarlet Empress herself to search out and seize caches of illicitly acquired jade. As part of their mandate, they break up hoards of jade that have grown large enough to destabilize the economy. For 400 years, the Jade Sniffers operated with ruthlessly efficiency to find hoards of jade and prosecute their holders. Sometimes, they have worked through stealth, infiltrating businesses and organizations that have good reason to hoard jade. Sometimes, they have swept in to examine a set of books and nosed out the existence of a secret jade hoard from subtle clues in the records.

Excellent Chrysanthemum, the head of the Jade Sniffers, was assassinated by an operative of House Ledaal in late RY 767, and the remainder of the department is slowly being murdered or suborned or blackmailed by the other Great Houses. A few agents remain in the field, but everyone knows their days are numbered.





In the present political climate, however, the accountants have been more and more lax about their behavior in public and the accuracy of their counting in private. Many persons of patrician rank or higher have been appointed out of turn or without taking the examinations, and the Great Houses often appoint persons to accounting jobs in imperially owned businesses who have not been certified as imperial accountants. These new men are more inclined to fudge the books they keep or to turn a blind eye to irregularities. "As honest as a kaja" has ceased to be a praising phrase since the Empress disappeared.

IN THE THRESHOLD

Eight years ago, Guild auditors in the Lap seized Stunning Smile Wang, a merchant prince, and his accounting team on fraud charges after discovering three meticulous account books for Wang's caravan. The accountants had been sending a doctored set of records to the caravan's sponsors, showing that business was not good, but not bad enough to shut down the caravan. The accountants showed a second set of books to Wang, demonstrating how miserably his caravan was doing, so that Wang would not report on his progress to the factors too often. The third set, for the accountants themselves, showed how the caravan was really doing and how much the accountants could split between them. Of course, Stunning Smile Wang and his counters now serve as gruesome signposts on the Southern Way. Their skeletons, stripped clean of flesh by carrion birds, stand chained to stone pillars with their bones wired together, their arm bones pointing east and west along the road.

While the Guild regretted the loss of four trained accountants and an otherwise competent merchant prince, everyone who heard of the crime agreed with the punishment. The Guild thrives on profits from marginal businesses. Doctored books prevent the Guild from recognizing which lines of business are profitable and which are not.

On the other hand, no one knows what happened to the money the accountants hid away before they were caught. At least, no one who's telling, and the four accountants' families wisely went missing. As a result of these financial shenanigans, Guild officials in the relevant district have had to make up losses of almost 400 talents of jade, sustained over a six-year period. The temptation clearly exists for dishonest record-keeping and sending false information to headquarters. The Guild has debated how to solve the problem for many years but reached no satisfactory conclusions. Adding more accountants, guards or spies decreases overall profits. Reducing the number of accountants sacrifices accuracy and sane workloads. For the moment, the Guild has increased the number

of auditors at the level of the hub cities and the districts and punishes whichever infractions it can find, while hoping that most of its counters are not lying to their merchant princes and factors. It is, at best, a fragile solution.

MONEY IN THE THRESHOLD

While the jade standard and jade scrip work well in the Realm, neither holds complete sway in the Threshold. Tribute payments to the Scarlet Empire have depleted jade reserves everywhere, and there is simply not enough jade in circulation to keep trade flowing around the Inland Sea, out to the Western Isles and back again. The Threshold has needed a new standard of money for almost 100 years, and it is only in the last 30 years or so that a new standard has begun to emerge on unsteady legs.

THE SILVER STANDARD

The new standard is silver, and the Guild is behind its appearance. Tired of constantly paying out its small jade caches to gods and demons for tribute and passage rights, the Guild began promoting silver as a medium of exchange. Simply put, silver has relatively little value other than as personal adornment. It is not a particularly useful metal for anything other than jewelry, mirrors or decoration, and it cannot be made into weapons or armor. Nor is it as rare and costly as jade. However, while silver is more common than jade, it is less common than iron, copper or tin, it can be easily minted into coins, and it can be transported long distances without alerting gods, spirits and demons with its presence.

Silver has not been entirely successful as a new standard. Its lack of magical value makes many people initially suspicious, since money has been based on a magical standard for so long. Moreover, the Realm has made a point of snubbing the new currency, such that it is only useful in the hinterland, away from the satrapies of the Realm and the coastal territories that do business with them or with the Realm directly. Indeed, choosing silver as a standard is a political act as well as an economic one. It is unlawful in many satrapies to do business in silver, and the penalties are severe: heavy fines in jade, public incarceration and, sometimes, mutilation.

In some Threshold communities, however, particularly in the Scavenger Lands, the opposite holds true. Here, it is jade which is viewed as threatening and dangerous. The presence of the magical stone twitches the senses of gods and spirits and monsters and can attract them from a long way off. A hostile deity striding into town to seize all the jade does not make for a positive business climate. In the Realm and its satrapies, the gods are tame or, at least, not vicious.

In the hinterland of the Threshold, they are neither tame nor kind. Silver provides an alternative to tricky barter arrangements, and it does not attract the powers of Creation in the same way that jade does.

THE DINAR AND THE DIRHAM

The Guild mints its own silver coins at several locations in the River Province, always with heavy security and under the direct control of the Directorate. These coins have the highest silver content of any coins in the Threshold, with their weight set at a half-ounce per coin and with the metal itself set at 97 percent pure silver.

This coin, called the dinar, has a slightly oval shape to it and is milled around the edges to discourage shaving for extra silver. The obverse is stamped with an image of the Guild's main building in Nexus and the legend "One Dinar" in Riverspeak. The reverse bears the Guild's sigil, the year in which the coin was minted and an initial that designates which mint it came from. As with obols, yen and sui, dinars are halved, quartered and, sometimes, even cut into eighths.

In addition to creating the dinar as actual money, the Guild also created the dirham and the silver talent as monies of account. The dirham represents 16 pounds of silver, and four dirhams make a talent of silver. The Guild has never yet minted any dirhams, since coins made of 16 pounds of silver would be difficult to transport. Officially, the dirham contains 400 dinars, though the same actual weight of silver would contain 416 dinars. The 16-dinar discrepancy pays the mint workers and funds the Guild's banking operations. The Guild does pour some dirham-value ingots for easy transport, but these are not often seen. Some enterprising silversmiths have also started making belts of 16 one-pound plates and bracelets of pound and half-pound weights, and these are popular in the South and the extreme North.

As the Guild's fortunes rise and fall, the value of the dinar against the jade obol has risen and fallen. In RY 768, this rate stands at five talents of silver to one of jade. Though this suggests a strict conversion rate between silver and jade, in real life, many merchants deal exclusively in either jade or silver, and transfers of goods between the two will usually be arranged by barter rather than as cash transactions.

The Guild also runs several minting operations for other cities, city-states and principalities, with the same weight of metal but at a lower purity, between 80 percent and 90 percent silver content. The Guild discounts the value of these coins against its own, usually treating them as if they contained 10 percent less silver than they actually do.

THRESHOLD CURRENCY CONVERSION

The following chart explains how the silver standard stacks up against the jade standard in RY 768. These numbers are subject to variation as the Guild's power rises and falls. The Realm is considerably more stable in people's minds, and so the jade standard remains rather more stable as a result.

1 Talent (jade)	=	5 Talents (silver)
1 Talent (silver)	=	64 Pounds = 4 Dirhams = 1,600 Dinars = 1/5 Talent (jade) = 204 1/2 Obols
1 Dirham (silver)	=	16 Pounds = 400 Dinars = 51 1/4 Obols
8 Pounds (silver)	=	200 Dinars = 25 3/4 Obols
4 Pounds (silver)	=	100 Dinars = 13 Obols
2 Pounds (silver)	=	50 Dinars = 6 1/2 Obols
1 Pound (silver)	=	25 Dinars = 3 1/4 Obols
1/2 Pound (silver)	=	12 1/2 Dinars = 1 3/4 Obols
1/4 Pound (silver)	=	6 1/4 Dinars = 3/4 Obol

THE COWRIE

A third type of currency exists in the West, among the islands. The rare red cowrie shell can be used as a medium of exchange among the islanders, and the islanders set a rate of exchange with outsiders of three dirhams to the cowrie and six cowries to the obol. Thus, they rate silver very high and jade very low, and the cowrie remains one of the best intermediate investments to date. However, they are not accepted anywhere else in the Threshold or the Realm, and so, the cowrie's usefulness and resale value is somewhat limited.

BANKING IN THE THRESHOLD

Whereas banking in the Realm is stale and institutionalized, banking in the Threshold is much more of a personal service — and an adventurous one at best. There is no overarching body that safeguards depositors in the Threshold, and the banks are not backed by the faith of families as wealthy as large nations. Even the Guild, with its vast network of trade and its holdings in silver and jade, assumes no responsibility whatsoever for the loss of a part or the whole of a depositor's funds. Putting one's money in a bank is a gamble. There is always the chance that the local Guild operation will collapse or that the banker will run off with one's money, and there will be no one to complain to when it does.

Even so, banking is much easier for individuals in the Threshold. Anyone can open an account with a bank, and indeed, anyone can start a bank. While some principalities and kingdoms do have banking laws that govern how a bank may operate, there is no overarching set of rules or overseers, just as there is no guarantee against a bank's folding.



Where the Realm has a specific salt rate that is, or at least was, common to the whole of the Blessed Isle, the Threshold banks operate off of the local salt rate closest to the bank. This means that, in some areas, banks are few and far between. In the River Province, the Guild has been negotiating with the salt gods for almost 60 years for a low salt rate. At present, an intermediate arrangement has set a Yanaze River Basin-wide salt rate of seven percent. This rate has lasted almost a year and a half so far, but the upstream gods are impatient with the agreement, and they will probably break the deal in the near future.

TYPES OF BANKS

All Threshold banks work in more or less the same way. A group of investors puts in a substantial amount of money usually balanced in some fashion between silver, jade and jade scrip. These investors then become the board of the bank. They accept money from individual depositors and provide a low rate of return, usually salt rate plus one percent interest per year. Businesses may also deposit money in the bank and receive a slightly higher rate of return, salt rate plus two percent interest per year. The bank's board then lends out the money to various parties at a minimum of salt rate plus three percent interest per year. The bank board's initial investments and the difference between what is paid to depositors and what is returned in loans are all used to keep the bank afloat when depositors want money that has not yet been returned from loans.

THE GUILD BANK

The largest of the Threshold banks is the bank the Directorate itself operates, the Bank of the Guild of Nexus and the Great River, usually called the Guild Bank. The Guild Bank accepts deposits from anyone but invests only in Guild enterprises. Its savings accounts return dividends of two percent over salt rate, and it offers a range of financial services above and beyond the usual individual accounts to businesses, including letters of credit and letters of debit. The Guild Bank offers special savings clubs for Calibration, and it is one of the few institutions in the Threshold to exchange jade for silver and jade scrip in the whole Threshold.

However, the Guild Bank is primarily an investor in Guild activities, and it owns at least a nominal percentage point or two in every caravan in the Threshold that the Guild operates. The Guild Bank invests in every Guild-run business over 50 dirhams in value, and it loans money at an attractive rate to every Guild-run business of any kind.

The Guild Bank maintains 26 major offices with staffs of 10 or more in the biggest cities around the Inner Sea, and many other cities and towns will have a Guild

factor that is empowered to represent the Guild Bank to some degree. Some factors operate with more responsibility and negotiating power, others operate with considerably less, but most of them begin with the power to accept deposits of up to 50 dirhams and to make a number of loans of up to 20 dirhams on behalf of the Guild Bank.

The Guild Bank also holds responsibility for issuing the Guild's coinage and keeping it at a high level of silver content. The bank runs the mints and issues the coinage through Guild caravans or provides raw silver to the national banks and mints. The Guild Bank sends out operatives to investigate alleged problems with Guild currency and oversees the financial management of Guild operations in hub cities. It also audits the books of the various caravans whenever they pass through hub cities and sends auditors into the field to find caravans in the hinterland.

The Guild Bank's operating capital dwarfs that of any of the national or district banks in the Threshold, but the Empress's holdings in the Bank of the Scarlet Throne are larger still. Moreover, the Guild Bank cannot absorb any large losses. If one caravan is destroyed, the Guild Bank will survive. However, with the destruction of Thorns, the Guild lost one major hub city at the periphery of its trade network, and its operations suffered a massive blow. The Guild Bank's board of directors keeps trying to figure out ways to survive the loss of one or more such cities, in the event that the Deathlords, the Realm or the Fair Folk act against the Guild. So far, they have not found an adequate solution.

NATIONAL BANKS

Operating outside but often alongside the Guild Bank are the various national banks of the kingdoms, principalities and city-states of the Threshold. Each issues a coin that has a rough value equal to 80 percent of the dinar or thereabouts. They offer individual and business depository services, and they offer loans, just as the Guild Bank does. National banks usually have a headquarters and one or two branches in their outlying districts, and in addition to running a mint to produce coins, they also regulate fiscal policy for their kingdoms. There are a limited number of national banks, since they are restricted to those Threshold kingdoms that are strong enough to have commercial economies and not be subjects of the Realm — but not so strong that the Realm has made a deliberate effort to smash them.

DISTRICT BANKS

At an even more basic level, there are district banks. Where the Guild Bank operates on a multinational level and the national banks operate at the level of a city-state or a kingdom, the district bank operates at the level of a municipality or territory, and in highly developed cities,

at the level of the neighborhood. Usually, district banks only have one location, though a very ambitious one might have two. Their existence is usually restricted to the major cities of the South that remember something of the banking institutions that existed before the Contagion and to the cities and towns of the River Province.

Almost all of the district banks are partly created with the Guild Bank's approval and investment. Once a community reaches a certain economic size, the Guild Bank sends in a search team to find a group of likely investors. The investors pony up half the money to capitalize the bank, and the Guild Bank puts up the other half. The district bank then provides an office for a local factor to work from and pays a percentage of its profits to the Guild Bank, but in exchange, the district bank receives a substantial degree of autonomy.

The district bank is an investment in a community. It provides loans for local businesses to get started and helps individuals and small cartels save funds for a rainy day. It provides a safe storage space built of stone and metal to hold important documents such as ship's papers and legal contracts, and it usually provides contract witnessing and notary public services. It acts as a collector and focus of a community's capital, and it loans that capital out to likely moneymakers in the immediate area. It can respond to crises much faster than the Guild Bank can, or even a national bank, and it can serve individuals much better than any other bank in Creation.

In the last several hundred years, the Guild Bank has helped to create thousands of district banks, in places as widely spread as an outback silver-mining town in the Far North to seven interlinked neighborhood banks in the city of the Lap.

LOAN PROTOCOLS

All of the Threshold banks accept deposits from individuals and make loans to them, unlike the banks of the Realm. Anyone at all can open a bank account or can apply for a loan. The banks usually require that a person be known at the level of bank to which he applies. A fur trapper from the outback can't get a loan from the Guild Bank, but he might be able to get one from his local district bank, especially if he can find a partner in town to go into business with. As in the Realm, the interest rate is tied to the risk level and the salt rate. Interest rates are somewhat higher in the Threshold than in the Realm, as well.

BANK FAILURE

Among the Guild Bank's directors' fears, fear of bank failure tops the list. Failure of the Guild Bank would almost certainly bring down the Guild as a



unified entity. There is no one thing that could cause the Guild Bank to go belly up. Yet, a series of very bad months, or a couple of bad years, could cause some distinct difficulties. The sack of another major Guild city such as Thorns by the Deathlords could bring the Guild Bank down. If the Realm started to attack and sink Guild ships in the Inland Sea and to attack Guild caravans on land, it could do enough damage to cause confidence in the silver standard to collapse. It has taken the Guild Bank a good 30 or 40 years to get people to trust the silver standard at all, and that trust could vanish much more quickly if the Realm took an actively hard line against the Guild. The last trade war, beginning in RY 416, proved that the Realm was a potent force in the economy of the Threshold. No one believes things have changed that much in the intervening centuries.

National banks rarely fail except when the nation collapses. It does happen from time to time. For example, the Bank of Thorns failed when the city was sacked.

Little district banks come and go with alarming regularity. It's hard to get a bank started and hard to keep it going even without fraud or embezzlement. Almost none of the money in the Threshold is imaginary. All of it exists as a piece of jade or as silver dinars or as the copper siu and yen of jade scrip. As such, it is susceptible to fire and flood, damage and loss, as well as theft or embezzlement. All of these are regular occurrences. When an investor or a clerk runs off with a bank's total capital and deposits, the bank is done for. When angry monsters or vengeful gods destroy a bank, usually the bank's holdings are lost, as well as the building itself.

PRICES

Nearly everything in the world of *Exalted* is hand-made. There are many manufactories where goods from pottery to bolts of cloth are made, yet these are made by human hands rather than with machine labor. Artisans' hands create nearly any item a character might wish to buy, from bolts of silk and cotton cloth in the marketplace to weapons on the battlefield.

The following tables indicate rough prices for things in three columns — what they cost in Resources dots, and how those dots translate into actual cash, in jade and jade scrip and silver. These prices are somewhat inflated and represent prices on the Imperial City high street and in the Little Market in Nexus. In many places, prices on ordinary goods will be lower — but more expensive objects will not be available.

These pages closely follow the Wonders and Equipment tables on pp. 324-346 in the main *Exalted* book, but there are some minor additions.

GREATER WONDERS

Greater wonders, are almost never available for sale. They belong to the Great Houses or to the major powers of the Threshold, or they are stuffed away in some secret place at the very edge of the world. No one is ever in desperate enough straits to sell one of these artifacts to someone who might very well turn it against the seller — either immediately or in the future.

TRADING DOTS FOR CASH

Players and Storytellers alike will at some point wish to convert a character's Resources dots to actual cash. It is difficult to translate Resources into specific amounts of cash; the system was not designed to make such a translation easy. The levels of financial capability between one dot and the next highest are not linear; they represent substantial gradations of wealth and power.

For each character in her series, the Storyteller should make a judgment about whether that character's wealth is in jade, silver or jade scrip. The division is primarily one between the Realm and the Threshold. Characters in the Realm use jade (or jade scrip if of a lower economic class). Characters in the Threshold use jade, silver or barter; they also tend to have some jade and some silver. This book assumes that characters with four or five dots in Resources are not going to be using jade scrip, but you may make other decisions about how jade scrip is used in your *Exalted* game.

The following correspondences of cash with Resources dots are offered as a guideline.

Resources Cash Equivalent

X	<i>Jade</i> : less than 2 obols a year <i>Jade Scrip</i> : less than 16 koku a year <i>Silver</i> : less than 20 dinars a year
•	<i>Jade</i> : less than 1 mina a year <i>Jade Scrip</i> : less than 64 koku a year <i>Silver</i> : less than 60 dinars a year
••	<i>Jade</i> : a shekel or less a year <i>Jade Scrip</i> : less than 128 koku a year <i>Silver</i> : less than 100 dinars annually
•••	<i>Jade</i> : less than 1 talent a year <i>Jade Scrip</i> : less than 8,000 koku a year <i>Silver</i> : less than 5 talents a year
••••	<i>Jade</i> : 4 to 6 talents a year <i>Jade Scrip</i> : 16,000 to 50,000 koku a year <i>Silver</i> : 20 to 30 talents a year
•••••	<i>Jade</i> : 12 to 20 talents annually <i>Jade Scrip</i> : 96,000 to 160,000 koku a year <i>Silver</i> : 60 to 100 talents a year

CLOTHING AND JEWELRY

Item	Resources	Jade	Silver
Peasant clothes	•	1 obol	8 dinars
Fine clothes	••	1 mina	50 dinars
Fancy clothes	••	2 minae	150 dinars
Courtly clothes	•••	4 bars	2 dirhams
Royal raiment	••••	5 talents	19 talents
Noble jewelry	••••	6 bars	3 dirhams
Royal jewelry	•••••	7 talents	33 talents
Imperial jewelry	••••••	15 talents	70 talents

SLAVES AND ANIMALS

Item	Resources	Jade	Silver
Unskilled slave	••	5 shekels	370 dinars
Skilled slave	•••	4 minae	600 dinars
Concubine	••••	3 bars	750 dinars
Keep for a slave per year	••	1 shekel	70 dinars
Domestic Animal	••	1 shekel	60 dinars
Fine camel/horse	•••	6 minae	950 dinars
Elephant or mammoth	•••	1 bar	3 dirhams
Fodder for horse per month	•	1 bit	2 dinars
Fodder for elephant per month	••	2 obols	14 dinars
Stabling for work horse per week	••	3 bits	5 dinars
Stabling for fine horse per week	•••	6 bits	10 dinars

SHIPS AND PROPERTY

Item	Resources	Jade	Silver
Buy an estate	••••	7 talents	35 talents
Build country or town house	••••	6 talents	30 talents
Staff a country villa or townhouse	•••	7 bars	1 talent
Furnish townhouse or villa (Spartan)	•••	4 bars	780 dinars
Furnish townhouse or villa (posh)	••••	2 talents	10 talents

Build a grand palace	•••••	15 talents	75 talents
Staff a grand palace for a month	••••	3 talents	15 talents
Furnish a grand palace (Spartan)	••••	5 talents	25 talents
Furnish a grand palace (posh)	•••••	18 talents	90 talents
Lavish feast for two dozen	•••	6 bars	1,450 dinars
Grand banquet for 200	••••	2 talents	10 talents
Erect a Manse (rating • to •••)	••••	8 talents	45 talents
Erect a Manse (rating ••••• to ••••••)	•••••	20 talents	100 talents
Passage across the Inland Sea	••	12 obols	80 dinars
Buy a yacht or ship	••••	1 talent	5 talents
Crew and provender for a ship for a month	••••	6 bars	1,300 dinars
Crew and provender for a yacht for a month	•••	3 bars	650 dinars
Rent a mercenary company for a month	••••	2 talents	10 talents
Rent a crack mercenary company for a month	••••	4 talents	20 talents

REALM EXPENSES

Item	Resources	Jade	Silver
Commission price (field command)	•••	4 minae	500 dinars
Commission price (legion command)	••••	2 talents	8 talents
Donatives necessary to be named an imperial prefect	••••	5 talents	25 talents
Donatives necessary to be named an imperial satrap	•••••	3 talents	15 talents
Donatives necessary to have a child accepted at a good school	•••	3 bars	600 dinars

Raise a new legion	••••	4 talents	20 talents
Keep a legion armed, fed, paid & in the field for one year	••••	3 talents	15 talents

WEAPONS

Item	Resources	Jade	Silver
<i>Blades</i>			
Chopping Sword	•••	1 mina	100 dinars
Great Sword	•••	2 mina	220 dinars
Knife	•	2 obol	4 dinars
Short Sword	•	1 obol	8 dinars
Slashing Sword	••	4 obols	30 dinars
Straight Sword	••	7 obols	60 dinars
<i>Impact Weapons</i>			
Axe	•	1/2 obol	7 dinars
Club/Staff	•	1/4 obol	3 dinars
Great Axe	••	8 obols	80 dinars
Hammer	•	1/2 obol	6 dinars
Mace	•	3 bits	9 dinars
Poleaxe	••	10 obols	75 dinars
Sledge	••	7 obols	60 dinars
<i>Spears</i>			
Lance	•	1 obol	9 dinars
Short Spear	•	1 bit	5 dinars
Spear	•	3 bits	7 dinars
<i>Brawling Aids</i>			
Cestus	•	2 obols	20 dinars
Fighting Gauntlet	•	10 bits	35 dinars
Khatar	••	5 obols	45 dinars
Tiger Claws	••	8 obols	60 dinars
<i>Martial Arts Weapons</i>			
Hook Sword	•••	4 mina	480 dinars
Seven-Section Staff	••	7 obols	75 dinars
Wind-Fire Wheel	••	12 obols	115 dinars
<i>Bows</i>			
Self Bow	•	3 obols	35 dinars
Long Bow	••	7 obols	70 dinars
Composite Bow	•••	4 bars	950 dinars

<i>Thrown Weapons</i>			
Chakram	•	1 bit	2 dinars
Hatchet	•	2 bits	6 dinars
Javelin	•	1 bit	4 dinars
Throwing Baton	•	1 bit	2 dinars
Throwing Knife	•	1 bit	3 dinars

ARMOR

Item	Resources	Jade	Silver
<i>Light Armor</i>			
Breastplate	••	12 obols	130 dinars
Buff Jacket	•	3 bits	8 dinars
Chain Shirt	••	10 obols	95 dinars
<i>Medium Armor</i>			
Chain Hauberk	•••	4 minae	240 dinars
Lamellar	•••	6 minae	11/2 dirham
Reinforced Buff Jacket	••	5 obols	40 dinars
(Concealed Plates)	••	7 obols	60 dinars
<i>Heavy Armor</i>			
Articulated Plate	•••••	3 talents	17 talents
Plate-and-Chain	••••	2 talents	11 talents
Reinforced Breastplate	••••	1 talent	7 talents
<i>Superheavy Armor</i>			
Chain Swathing	••••	2 talents	10 talents
Superheavy Plate	•••••	6 talents	30 talents

HELMETS AND SHIELDS

Item	Resources	Jade	Silver
<i>Helmets</i>			
Masked Helm	•••	3 minae	400 dinars
Pot Helm	••	4 obols	40 dinars
Slotted Helmet	••	3 obols	25 dinars
<i>Shields</i>			
Buckler	•	1 bit	3 dinars
Target Shield	••	5 obols	55 dinars
Tower Shield	•••	1 minae	100 dinars

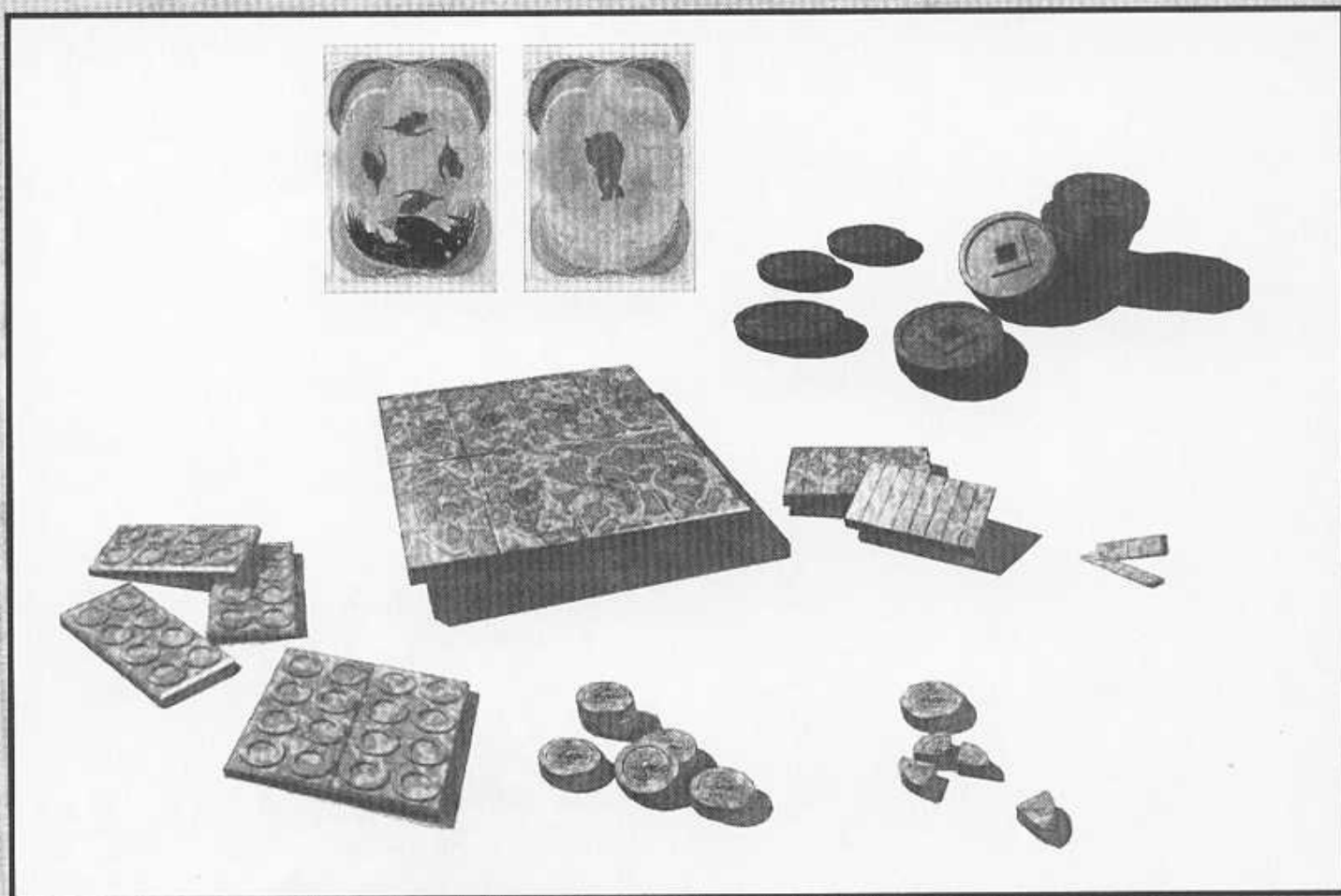
EVERYDAY WONDERS

Item	Resources	Jade	Silver
<i>Offerings and Prayers</i>			
Premade prayer papers	•	1 obol	12 dinars
Special prayer papers	••	4 obols	30 dinars
Small animal sacrifices	••	7 obols	90 dinars
Large animal sacrifices	•••	2 minae	400 dinars
Burning incense	••••	1 talent	5 talents
<i>Healing</i>			
Seven Bounties Paste	•••	2 bars	6 dirhams
Sweet Cordial	••••	2 talents	10 talents
<i>Talismans</i>			
Found good luck talisman	•	6 obols	50 dinars
Found disease talisman	••	9 obols	85 dinars

Found warding charm	•••	3 minae	400 dinars
Created warding charm	••••	1 talent	6 talents
Created good luck charm	••••	2 talents	8 talents
Created walkaway	•••••	8 talents	36 talents

GREATER AND LESSER WONDERS

Item	Resources	Jade	Silver
Collar of Dawn's Cleansing Light	•••	6 bars	5 talents
Dragon Tear Tiara	••••	1 talent	7 talents
Daiklave	••••	4 talents	22 talents
Grand Daiklave	•••••	9 talents	45 talents
Hearthstone Amulet	•••	4 bars	3 talents
Hearthstone Bracers	••••	2 talents	8 talents
Mask	••••	3 talents	24 talents



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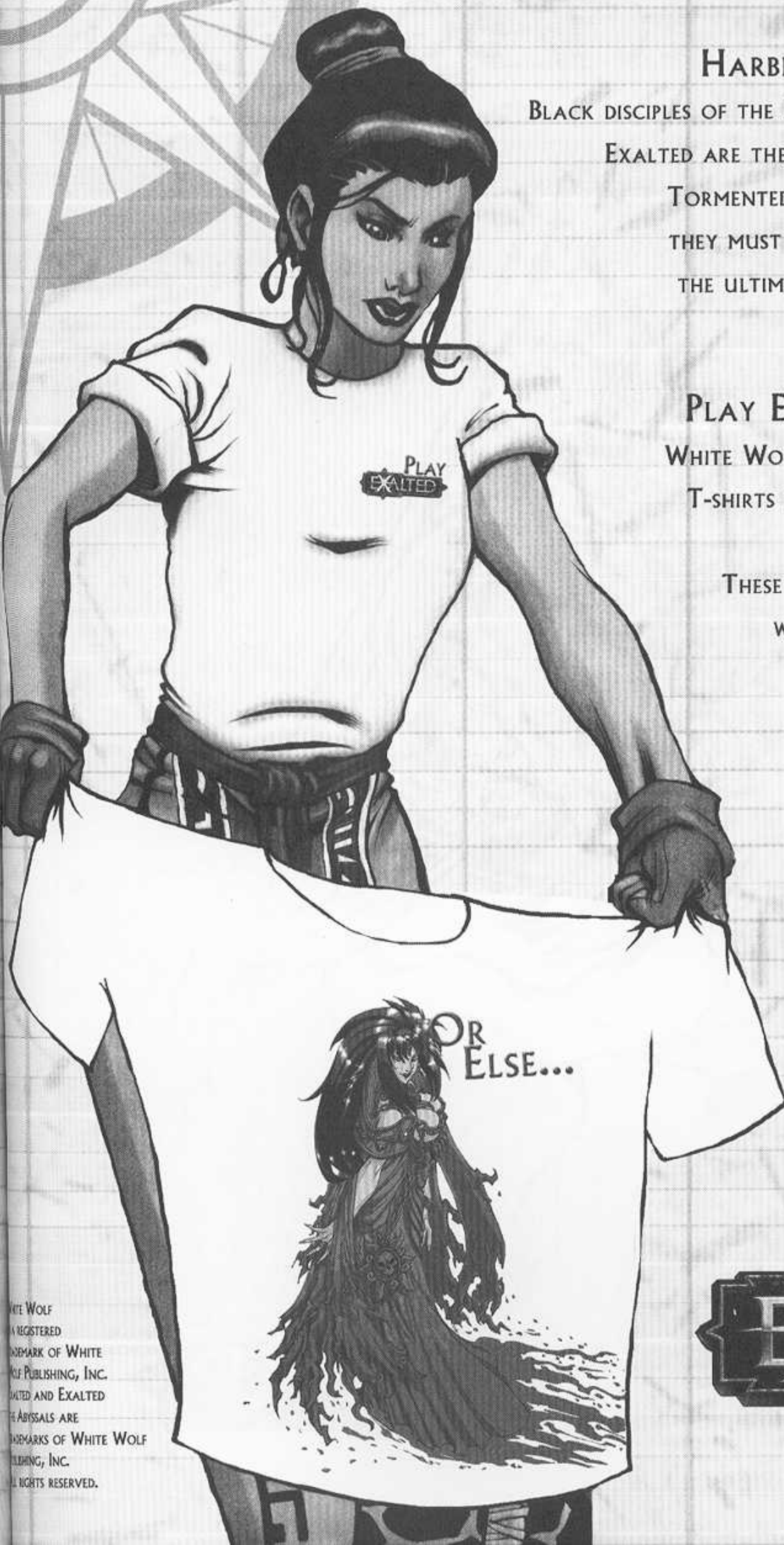
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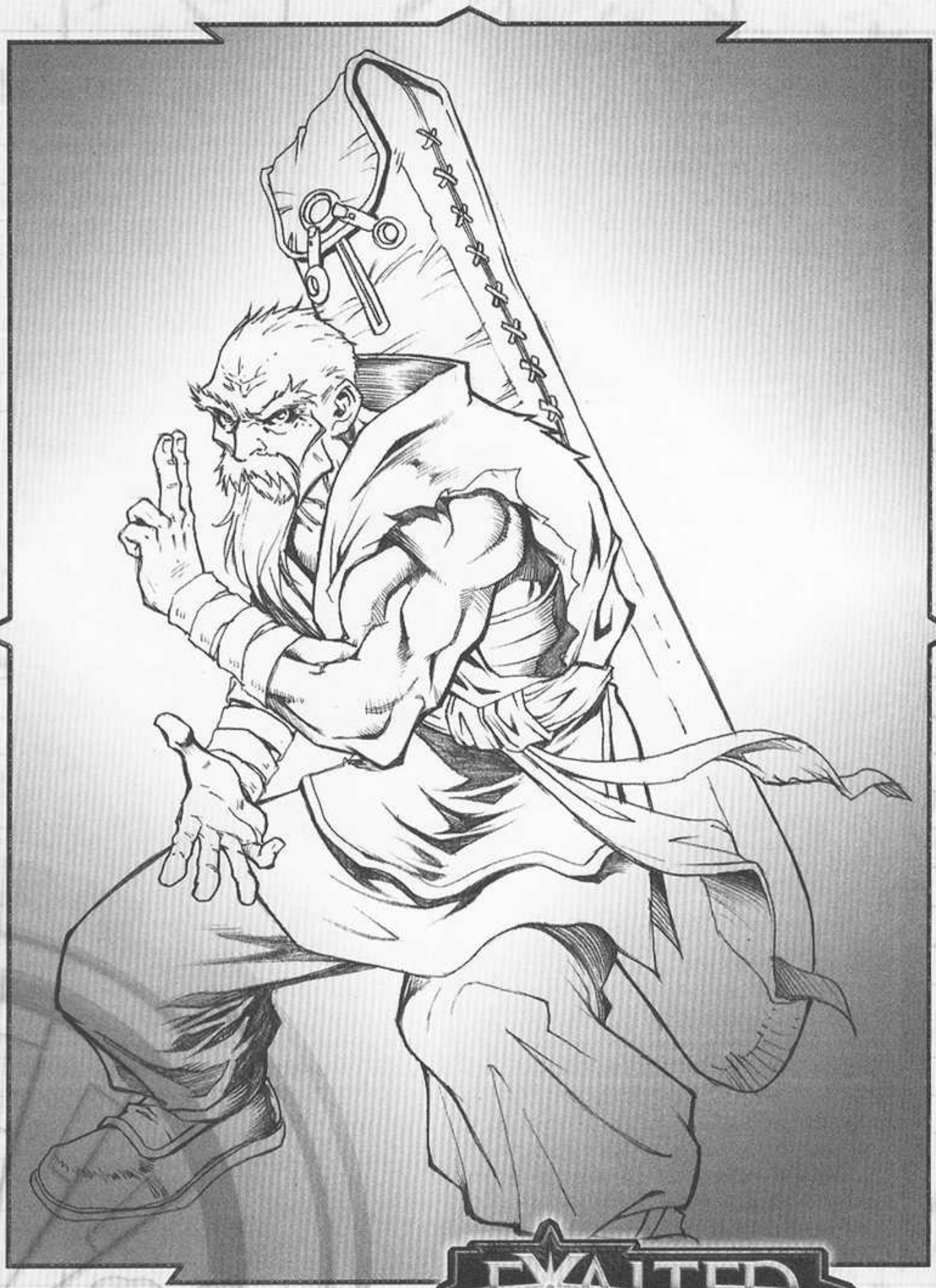
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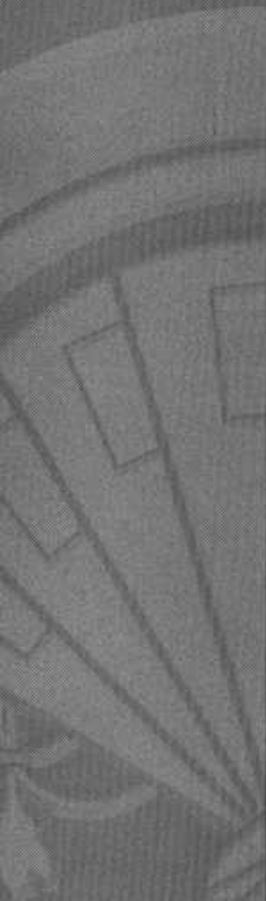


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