

# HELLFROST

## LAND OF FIRE

• REALM GUIDE #11 •

# THE GRAZELANDS

Author & Layout: Paul Wade-Williams  
 Editing: Danny James Walsh  
 Graphic Design: Robin Elliott

## Introduction

Once a verdant landscape of grass and flowering plants, the Grazelands are slowly being swallowed by the relentless sands. Trade, which brought great wealth to the inhabitants, has declined sharply, though there is still some money to be made from making the long trip to the northern lands. The shrinking grass is placing the tribes under greater strain, and tensions are high. The times are changing, but not for the best. This supplement expands on material found in *Hellfrost: Land of Fire*.

## ORIGINS OF THE GRAZELANDS

Many stories hold that in the distant past, the entire desert was fertile. One tale says that Ashtart's planting of crops brought harmony to the universe by creating a natural cycle. Seeking to upset the balance, Iblis cursed the soil, rendering it sterile. Another says the land was once a fertile expanse of green grass and tall trees. The roots of the growing things descended deep into the earth, tickling Geb-Agni. Frustrated, the earth god asked who could rid him of his torment. Iblis gladly obliged. Yet another myth claims that during the creation of the world the gods vowed in turn to gift the land. During his oath, Iblis distracted Apsu, who forgot to promise to bring rain to Al-Shirkuh, leaving it a desert. The Bedu's most popular tale says Duamutef once ruled the grassy plains. His followers, the nomadic tribes, grazed vast flocks of sheep, goats, and cattle, and life was good. But Duamutef was angered by Ashtart, who began to use his land to plant crops. Iblis tricked Duamutef into stealing fire from Geb-Agni and setting fire to the crops. The fires burned out of control, rapidly incinerating all the grass. Depending on the cult telling the tale, this was punishment enough. Regardless of the tale, only the Grazelands survived. Such was the bounty of its soil that it became known as Ashtart's Garden, a title now used only ironically (in phrases such as, "As green as Ashtart's Garden," a euphemism for something that is not all it seems or has lost its splendor).

Most Faithful Bedu, and many sages, are adamant the root of the problem lies with the jinn. As their empire began to collapse, they invoked a powerful spell to blight the land, a petty act of vengeance against a region they never colonized. Perhaps, as some savants muse, they thought Suleiman might march north and try to settle the fertile land. Its destruction, though gradual, would ultimately spell doom for the upstart slave and his followers. Devoted point to the inhabitants having lost their spiritual way by turning away from Suleiman's true teachings. As they move further away from Oneness, so the landscape mirrors their tainted souls.

Permission is granted to print this ebook. No site licence is given.

THIS GAME REFERENCES THE SAVAGE WORLDS GAME SYSTEM, AVAILABLE FROM PINNACLE ENTERTAINMENT GROUP AT WWW.PEGINC.COM. SAVAGE WORLDS & ALL ASSOCIATED LOGOS & TRADEMARKS ARE COPYRIGHTS OF PINNACLE ENTERTAINMENT GROUP USED WITH PERMISSION. PINNACLE MAKES NO REPRESENTATION OR WARRANTY AS TO THE QUALITY, VIABILITY, OR SUITABILITY FOR PURPOSE OF THIS PRODUCT.

© 2013 Triple Ace Games Ltd. Hellfrost Realm Guides and all related marks and logos are trademarks of Triple Ace Games Ltd. Savage Worlds and all related marks and logos are trademarks of Pinnacle Entertainment Group. All rights reserved. Used with permission. © 2013. All Rights Reserved.



WWW.TRIPLEACEGAMES.COM

## RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Grazelands.

\* **Food and Water:** Although the land has become arid, there is still more food and water available than in the true desert. Survival rolls to find edible food and potable water are made with no modifier. In the foothills of the northern mountains, the roll is made at +1.

\* **Keen Traders:** Sandwall Oasis counts as a town for the purposes of purchasing equipment. Items from Rassilon are commonly available here, but when purchasing such goods the oasis counts as a village. The base price of any item found only in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* is doubled before any modifiers are applied. Streetwise rolls to sell goods are made at +1 among all the tribes. All the tribes use money, though barter is still commonplace.

\* **Religious Bias:** Whenever the heroes encounter a Faithful nomad tribe, the GM should draw a card from the action deck. Red indicates the tribe are Grazers. Clerics of Apsu and Ashtart receive a +1 Charisma bonus and are always treated as honored guests. Conversely, clerics of Duamutef have -1 Charisma and are treated as tolerated guests. A black suit indicates Wanderers, and reverses the situation. A Joker means the tribe belongs to neither camp.

A modern problem threatening the remaining grasslands is the Bedu's goats. Their herds are highly prized and a symbol of wealth. To cull them is utterly unthinkable. Thus, the herds continue to grow, despite an ever increasing lack of resources to feed them.

## ORIGINS OF THE HYAENIDAE

Where as the jackal-like cakali are widely regarded as an honorable and civilized race, the hyena-like hyaenidae are seen as despicable and almost barbaric. Among city dwellers, who seem to enjoy branding the Bedu as sexual deviants, there are many stories of how frustrated men on long hunts or caravan trains had their wicked way with animals of all ilk. Such acts resulted not only in the creation of the hyaenidae, but also the sand goblins and desert centaurs. Other legends point toward the hyaenidae being the creation of the jinn (common candidates for anything humans can't explain), Iblis' first attempt to create a sentient race, and even the offspring of a celestial hyena who ate the decaying flesh of fallen gods during the God War, and so became transformed. Their crime resulted in their exile to the mortal realm.

Among the Bedu, there are two main stories. The first claims Iblis seduced the women of a tribe, leading them to wickedness and adultery. He appeared in their tents in the form of a hyena, so giving rise to an entire generation of deformed children. By far the most popular myth tells

how a tribe of Bedu fell from grace, growing covetous of other tribes' possessions and lands. It is said that as they murdered and stole, they would laugh maniacally, mocking their victims as they pleaded for clemency. Duamutef, in his wisdom, cursed them to become the hyaenidae, for they had become like hyenas in his eyes.

## HYAENIDAE SOCIETY

Whereas the Bedu have families, clans, and tribes, hyaenidae society is focused solely on the family. Such units are not always one's blood kin, for hyaenidae are drawn toward like-minded individuals. In the case of adventuring hyaenidae, their family is the party.

Hyaenidae families are ruled not by hereditary nobles, the wealthiest, or the wisest. A pecking order exists within every family, but it is extremely fluid, with members rising and falling in status on a regular basis. Arguments are common occurrences, as are struggles for position. Often the latter are contents of taunts and intimidation, shows of force rather than brute force. When violence occurs, it rarely results in death—weaker members quickly accept their place rather than risk life-threatening injuries. Despite their many flaws (as seen by others), hyaenidae do not define social position by gender, and the females are just as aggressive, cunning, and crude as the males.

Hyaenidae society produces very little in the way of goods—almost everything they own once belonged to someone else. As a result, personal possessions are jealously guarded. It is commonly said a hyaenidae would let you starve to death if he had food to spare, and in many cases such tales are true. They are notoriously greedy, always demanding more than their fair share of any loot. While murder is rare, hyaenidae frequently try to intimidate those they consider weaker than themselves in order to acquire a better percentage of the spoils.

## RELIGION

Religion in the Grazelands is currently divided into two opposing camps. As the days grow hotter and the land more barren, so opinions have grown more entrenched. The schism has yet to reach violent levels, but heated debates are commonplace, even among families.

The first camp (known as Grazers) believes they must offer praise and supplication to Apsu and Ashtart, for it is their gifts of rain and grass that the jinn have destroyed. Only by strengthening the gods will salvation come.

The second camp (known as Wanderers) holds that honor must go to Duamutef above all others. The jinn curse cannot be reversed, and the people must return to the ways of their ancient ancestors and embrace the desert before it is too late.

Regardless of one's chosen camp, religious ceremonies are carried out frequently and fervently, and are always accompanied with bountiful sacrifices. Even if the

mortals must go short on daily provisions, the gods are always well-sated.

Qedeshet is worshipped only in his aspect as the god of trade. Unfortunately, his attentions have been diverted elsewhere, an indisputable fact to the nomads, for what else can explain why trade with the north is dwindling, and competitors are stealing away many of the tribes' old customers. The Bedu believe that unless they become more devout in their worship of Qedeshet, he may desert them altogether.

Upuaut has been, and remains, popular. Every tribe is now forced to migrate to new areas during summer, and most tribes have at least one merchant in their number.

All the other gods receive some form of worship, though outside of his small and secretive cult prayers to Iblis are for appeasement rather than devotion.

Hyaenidae, well accustomed to the hardship of a nomadic existence, remain strong in their dual worship of Duamutef and Upuaut. While those in the Grazelands do possess goat herds (keeping a goat is relatively easy work), they are scavengers, always on the edge of society, and incapable of forming complex societies. Tamarni receives plenty of lip-service, but few hyaenidae are professional thieves—the goddess is honored because she offers the twin gifts of stealth and wealth.

## HYAENIDAE FUNERALS

Despite numerous claims to the contrary, hyaenidae don't eat their dead (although they will eat carcasses of animals if hungry). Faithful take great care to bury their dead less troubled spirits return to plague their kin, though they never inter them with grave goods—such items are better used by the living, not the dead, and a grave is an easy target for grave robbers (a practise most hyaenidae follow as second nature).

Once a Devoted's souls is deemed to have left his body, hyaenidae lose all interest in the corpse. Their version of the creed places no emphasis on burning the remains and scattering the ashes, and corpses (by now thoroughly looted of every possession) are left to rot or be consumed by scavengers.

## Trade & Tribute

The reestablishment of trade with the northern continent brought great wealth to the nomads of the Grazelands. Long caravans carried all manner of goods through the mountains to the bustling markets of Sutmark, and brought back exotic wares that fetched a high price. Plentiful grass meant horses and camels were well-fed, and oases kept the merchants waterskins full.

Although the encroachment of the desert has made the journey harder, it was the recent opening of sea routes by the sphinxes and relaxation of taxes in the Free Emirates that truly began the recent and rapid decline in overland trade. The situation has been compounded in

the last three years by Sutmark's problems. Profits may be down, but trade has not ceased altogether, though.

Every year, Bedu caravans still make the long trek to Sandwall Oasis. In the great market, goods from Al-Shirkuh are exchanged for those from Rassilon. From here, desert goods are carried north over the treacherous mountains by merchants of the Suhayb tribe, for they have the best relations with Jarl Bosi, and can thus ensure better deals.

The last few years have seen trade shift from general goods toward food and weapons, both of which carry a high value in Sutmark. Unfortunately, these are also exactly the sort of goods that bandits prize.

Locals refer to the trade road running north of Sandwall Oasis as the Cold Road, and the southern branch as the Warm Road. In their eyes, the latter becomes the Northern Trade Road only after it passes beyond the Oasis of Dreams.

## Major Locales

Previously settled by at least two major cultures, the Grazelands is dotted with many ruins. While those along the trade road have been looted by successive generations, many of those further afield are avoided by the superstitious Bedu.

### ASSOUN

**Population:** 212

**Ruler:** Mirah Nadine of the Martok tribe

**Religion:** Faithful (Ashtart, Apsu, Duamutef)

Standing near the edge of the Salt Marsh, the small village of Assoun survives thanks to its well (the water from which is slowly becoming more saline) and the birds and animals caught in the marsh. The tribe has dozens of beehives, for while the Salt Marsh is largely inhospitable to humans, the flowers are attractive to bees. Honey forms a large part of the local diet, and most food is dipped or glazed in the sweet, sticky foodstuff.

What makes the village unusual is its inhabitants. For reasons no longer remembered, women are treated like gods. Never having to lift a finger, they are pampered and spoiled rotten. Many are obese, for they spend their days doing naught but gossiping and feasting. Men are not considered slaves, merely inferior beings. Few women are tyrants in their demands, though there are exceptions to every rule.

As one might expect, every important post is held by a woman. Men can serve as farmers, hunters, beekeepers, and warriors, but they are forbidden from being clerics or holding government posts. Even the head of the warriors is female, though she leaves day-to-day affairs to an experienced male.

The inhabitants rarely receive guests from outside the region (who always send female dignitaries), and have little concept that the entire world does not conform to

## CLERICS OF ASHTART

**Training:** Novitiates receive practical training in the fields, working alongside the farmers during the plowing, sowing, pulling weed, and reaping, all the while learning the various growing conditions and planting times of various crops. Students must also tend the bee hives, learning the songs and chants to appease the protective swarm. The healing properties of plants are studied before the novitiate begins learning how to make herbal remedies. In the evenings, he is taught the art of diplomacy and how to heal rifts between spouses by seeking amicable arrangements, as well as schooling in how to deal with children. As the old saying goes, “From the seed grows the tree.” During summer, when farmers are drafted into the levy, students help in hospitals and orphanages.

**Prayers:** Clerics make frequent allusion to plants, fruit, and bees. “May the leaves of Ashtart fan you” is a way of wishing a traveler a pleasant journey. “Don’t walk on the grass” is a common warning to be wary where you tread. “The juiciest looking fruit may be poison,” warns people not to judge things at face value. A standard way of ending a dubious-sounding statement or story is “and may Ashtart sting me if I lie!”

Such phrases crop up in conversations involving marriage. Children are often referred to as “shoots of one’s loins,” while sex is politely spoken of as “pollination.” One needn’t ask what a bee’s stinger represents in their parlance.

**Adventures:** Martial adventures appealing to clerics involve protecting the fields from marauders, protecting oases that support agriculture, and guarding caravans carrying food. Clerics are also well-suited to investigative and political stories, such as tracing missing children, looking into a future spouse’s background, and following wayward husbands (who may be up to worse than having an affair).

**Character Guidelines:** As well as tending crops, priests are responsible for sorting out marriage problems. Intimidation and Persuasion are both useful for helping resolve difficult issues. Investigation and Streetwise are both beneficial, as the cleric may be called upon to arrange a marriage, and that means finding a suitable partner without skeletons in their family cupboard. Although not healers, their knowledge of plants and medicinal properties is second to none. Hence, Hedge Magic is a common Edge.

Paladins are protectors rather than aggressors. Shieldwall allows the paladin to shield others from harm, while personal defensive Edges like Block and Dodge keep the paladin safe—a wounded paladin cannot protect his charges effectively.

their beliefs. On the odd occasion they receive visitors, local males will always reply to the most senior looking woman (based on Charisma, which is as much about an authoritative bearing as it is looks), even if a male asks them a question. Women visitors are always honored guests, irrespective of tribal affiliations. Unless a female vouches for her male worshippers (the term used here for male attendants), their treatment is based on the standard tribal relationships.

Disrespecting a woman is punishable by public flogging, striking one results in the loss of the offending limb, and daring to kill or rape one results in being stung to death by bees commanded by the high priestess of the cult of Melissah (p. 10).

## BURAQA’S GRAVE

In the same range of hills as the Circle of Gods (see below) is a holy sight. A long, strangely shaped hill barely protruding from the sand, it is said to be the grave of Buraqa, Suleiman’s fabulous steed (see p. 11 for more details). The site is holy to both Devoted and Faithful, and is a sacred place. The site is marked by painted white stones that form the crude outline of a horse. Every year, a passing tribe detours to ensure the stones are freshly painted and that any carnivores are driven away.

It is said buraq horses come here to mate and to die. It is true the hill is littered with horse bones, but the species cannot be discerned.

**Spirit Name:** Buraqa.

**Ambience:** Horses feel calm here. So long as they are on the hill, any Spirit rolls they make are at +2. Rassilon centaurs (should they ever visit), receive a +1 bonus. Other races, sentient or animal, are unaffected.

**Deity:** Upuaut (Faithful only).

**Senses:** Notice d8.

**Communication:** Buraqa does not speak to any creatures except horses. When he is awakened by sacrifice, faint neighing can be heard on the wind, and horses prick up their ears, as if listening.

**Powers:** If at least a pint of griffin blood is poured on the ground, the supplicant can make one request of Buraqa. The available blessings are detailed below. A maximum of one request per season will be granted to any individual, no matter how many sacrifices he makes.

Benefits are automatically lost if the supplicant harms a horse, accidentally or deliberately.

\* *Better Rider:* The supplicant gains a one die increase to his Riding skill until the end of the current season; two dice if he offers a live sacrifice. Above a d12, die types become a single point bonus (d12+1, d12+2, etc.).

\* *Faster Horse:* One horse the supplicant owns, which must be present when the sacrifice is made, has +4 Pace until the end of the current season. If a live sacrifice is offered, the horse also increases its running die one step (max d12+1).

\* *Healthier Horse:* One horse the supplicant owns, which must be present when the sacrifice is made, receives a one die Vigor increase (and thus +1 Toughness)

until the end of the current season; two dice is a live sacrifice is offered.

**Sacrifice:** Anyone wishing to gain Buraqa's blessing must offer the blood of a griffin. It doesn't matter how fresh, though bringing a live animal here and sacrificing it produces more potent results.

## THE CIRCLE OF GODS

Sandwall Oasis may be the mercantile center of the Grazelands, but it is not the political center. Located atop the highest peak in the most northerly range of hills is a collection of stone statues. Arranged equidistantly around the edge of a 100 yard wide circle, each of the 12 gigantic stones depicts one of the gods. The site is considered sacred to Faithful nomads of every creed, though it especially important to the cult of Shamash.

Bedu myth claims that in the old days the gods met atop the hill to discuss the creation of the mortal world. Thus, it marks first land created by the gods, and, despite its location, is the center of the world. Each deity sat upon a stone throne which, once the gods vacated it to return to the heavens, took their form.

Every three years, the tribes gather at the base of the hill. By tradition, only the elders or their appointed spokesmen, and the tribe's wizards and clerics, are permitted to enter the circle at such times. After honoring all the gods in turn, even Iblis, with simple prayers, the elders begin the arduous process of settling disputes and defining grazing rights for the next year. Secret deals, bribes, bitter arguments, and threats (no violence is permitted within the circle on penalty of death) are the norm.

Meanwhile, those who have accompanied the elders and their advisors remain in their camps, trading goods and stories, and arranging marriages. By law, no food may be consumed during daylight hours during this time, nor may one engage in sexual intercourse. Various curses are said to befall those who break these rules.

Outsiders are welcome to attend the tribal camps at the base of the hill, but only those invited by the majority of elders may enter the stone circles (again, death awaits transgressors). Those who wish to speak stand outside the stones, waiting to be recognized and invited inside to speak. All must reveal their faith, for Devoted are banned from entering while the elders gather. To allow a non-believer into the circle, it is said, would be a grave offense to the gods.

## THE CITY OF LONG SHADOWS

Somewhere in the western wastes stands the crumbling ruins of a once mighty city. Like most such places it is shunned by the Bedu, but in this case their superstitions are actually true. Storytellers whisper of the city, which grew fabulously wealthy before the jinn came. Such was their avarice, the inhabitants traded with the jinn, profiting greatly by selling slaves and buying goods produced under the lash. The gods were not pleased with the citizens, and they struck them with a curse. As they grew

## FESTIVAL TO ASHTART

### HIVE DAY

*Four weeks after Flowering Day*

After the first harvest, Ashtart kept back some of her crop to plant again. No matter what magic she worked, the seeds and bulbs would not grow into new plants. Frustrated, she called on Qedeshet, as many gods did in those early days. After consulting his books, Qedeshet revealed that an animal needed to fertilize the seeds, imbuing them with new life. Knowing the meat-eaters would not help her, she approached the birds. But they were greedy and sought only to eat all her seeds.

While sitting in her field pondering her next move, she noticed a bee buzzing around in front of the flowers. Ashtart asked the bee what it was doing, to which it replied that it found the scent of the flowers pleasing and its nectar was especially tasty. Ashtart struck a deal with bee and her kin, offering them as much nectar as they could drink if they fertilized her plants. Formerly servants of Upuaut, who controls all flying creatures, the bees were so pleased with the deal they became converted to worship of Ashtart.

Once the fields are full of flowering plants, clerics of Ashtart carry the sacred bee hives from the temple into the fields. Still drowsy after winter, the bees are encouraged out of their slumber with gentle songs and the tinkling of small bells and cymbals. If the bees have not left the hive by dusk, then the omens are bad (there are a lot of bad omens in Al-Shirkuh).

richer in material goods, so they grew thinner in physical form. Eventually, they became shadows, forever cut off from Shamash's guiding light, for it pained them sorely, and condemned to walk the mortal realm for eternity.

Though the city is falling to wrack and ruin thanks to the unceasing passage of time, the immense wealth the citizens acquired still rests in their vaults. Unfortunately, not only do the fell shades have no wish to lose their fortunes to thieves, they are still driven by greed to acquire yet more. No one who has entered the feared city has ever returned.

Treat the inhabitants as typical human archetypes, but add Stealth d12 and all the special abilities of shadow elementals (see *Hellfrost Bestiary*). Devoted mages can cast spells as if they were still living beings, but must always use darkness trappings. Clerics now honor Iblis, and must also use darkness trappings.

## THE ETERNAL FARM

Long before the War of Copper Jars, humans not only settled the Grazelands, but farmed its fertile soil. Most

## FESTIVAL TO ASHTART

### MOTHERS' DAY

*Ansbi Yaus al-Hamala Tamith Alak Shemu*

During the God War, Marqod, mother of Apsu, Ashtart, Geb-Agni, and Upuaut, grew tired, for she was constantly tending the gods' many battle wounds, trying to broker peace and brew herbal remedies, maintain her household, and watch over her many grandchildren. While her three sons carried on their duties as normal, Ashtart saw that no one could do everything without help. She bade her mother to rest while she tended to her duties. Thus, for one day Ashtart became mother of the gods. Marqod was so impressed she elevated Ashtart, formerly a relatively lowly deity, to patron of motherhood and all things connected to children.

At dawn on this holy day, mothers across the Faithful settlements of Al-Shirkuh down tools, refusing to perform any chores until the sun next rises. Instead, their duties fall upon their children, both male and female. They are expected to care for the children, cook, wash, clean, and so on.

The temporarily jobless mothers visit the temple of Ashtart in the morning, where they are blessed for their hard work throughout the year and given a token sum of money. During the afternoon they gather to gossip, drink coffee, moan how their children do not care enough, mock their lazy husbands, and generally vent their many frustrations to each other.

of these are now covered in sand, or were abandoned as the soil dried and cracked, their inhabitants driven away, scattered to the four winds. One farm still operates, though it produces naught but armfuls of spindly grain and barley; not that the workers seem to notice.

Located between the two ranges of hills that dominate the west, the Eternal Farm is operated not by desperate humans trying to scratch a living for the barren soil, but by a large number of golems. Every year without fail they dredge the sand-choked irrigation channels, till the sandy soil, sow seeds, and reap the meager harvest, storing it in vast granaries now full of withered stalks and barren husks. That their masters have gone means nothing to the golems, who are simply continuing to follow their orders.

Most of the constructs are made of stone. Time and weather have not been good to them, and they are in a sorry state. Those in the best condition are heavily cracked and pitted after many centuries of ceaseless toil, while the worst cases are missing entire limbs.

Who built the farm is unknown, for the remaining buildings the passage of time has not crumbled are engraved only with the holy symbol of Ashtart, a deity

whose faith has existed since men first walked the world. Excavations of the area might produce pottery that could be used to date the farm, but few scholars even know it exists, yet alone have a desire to make the long trek.

What happened to the inhabitants is similarly unknown. Logic would seem to indicate they died, perhaps of disease, for no sane creature would leave behind expensive golems if it chose to abandon the farm willingly. Likewise, bandits or invaders would surely have taken the golems with them to sell.

Oblivious to all attempts to communicate, the golems ignore curious visitors. The only time they react is if the crops are threatened, and their response is deadly force. Fortunately for transgressors, they have no desire to leave the boundaries of the farm.

## THE LAND OF A THOUSAND TOMBS

The nomads have long known of the cairns that litter the Grazelands, but nowhere are they more common than in the so-called Land of a Thousand Tombs. Situated in the far west, the landscape is dotted with many hundreds of what appear to be low, conical dunes. After a strong wind, or many hours digging for those who lack patience, the dunes are revealed to be small pyramids fronted by a pylon gate.

The pyramids range in height from six to thirty yards, and typically have a footprint no larger than 64 square yards, resulting in very steep sides and a small interior—just enough space for a single sarcophagus.

Created from mud bricks faced with smooth limestone, most have stood the test of time with only minor structural damage. Few retain much of their outer casing, and many have lost their top half to wind and sand erosion, but only a few have crumbled to total ruin.

Who lies within the tombs has yet to be discovered. Any external inscriptions have faded or been destroyed, and there are no markings on the few interiors that have been destroyed. That the structures are pyramids has led many scholars to believe the site was a distant outpost of Hekata, but this seems unlikely—the living need homes, and there are no other ruins within many miles. Perhaps, as some argue, the tombs were built for the soldiers of a campaigning army. A possibility for sure, but this is an extravagant resting place for common warriors.

As well as supposedly being home to ghosts, the Bedu claim no mortal has ever counted the total number of tombs. To do so guarantees a swift death. Thus, the location's name is poetic, rather than an exact count.

## SANDWALL OASIS

Sandwall takes its name from the ancient belief that the distant Dustwall Mountains were just massive sand dunes. Although the truth has long been known, the name is traditional, and no one sees need to alter it.

**Caravanserai:** The vast wealth earned through trade

by the sheikhs of Sandwall down the centuries was not squandered away on frivolous things. Huge sums of money were poured into building an immense caravanserai at the edge of the lake. Thanks to the receding waters, it now lies half a mile from the lake. As well as offering merchants a safe place to rest and haggle, it doubles as a temple to Qedeshet.

**Horse Market:** The highlight of the social year for the northern tribes is the annual horse market. As well as horse races and fights, on which large sums are frequently wagered, they buy and sell horses and foals, and barter fiercely for stud rights. During this major market, the oasis is treated as a city for the purposes of purchasing goods. The cost of barding, horses, and saddles is reduced by one-quarter—someone is always willing to cut a deal to get a sale. Herbalists make a healthy living selling tonics and ointments designed solely for horses.

The amount of horses at the oasis attracts flights of ravenous griffins. Archers and spellcasters willing to brave the threat of being torn apart by a griffin desperate to get its next meal can find ready employment.

**Sutmark Embassies:** The northern nation of Sutmark, which lies just beyond the Dustwall Mountains, has two permanent representatives in Sandwall Oasis. Although kinsmen, they are also competitors.

## THE SHORE OF RIBS

During the invasion of the Hearthlands, one mad emperor doomed an entire fleet to destruction. His plan, drawn up in a drug-induced stupor, involved landing a mighty army in the Grazelands, marching north through the mountains, and from there into Sutmark, Veemark, and Ostmark. The coastline of the eastern Grazelands is notoriously treacherous, full of sharp, semi-submerged rocks and powerful, swirling currents that can rip a steering board from a helmsman's calloused hands. Caught in a storm, the fleet shattered and sank. Heavily armed and armored, the soldiers had no chance of survival. Elders still claim there were survivors, short, fair-skinned men who were adopted into the local tribes. Even today, a rare Bedu is born with blond hair or pale complexion.

It is said the Bedu tribes living in the region named the stretch of shore after the wooden timbers that jutted up from the foaming waters. Never having seen a ship, they believed them to be the ribs of strange sea beasts. After terrible storms, the shore is still littered with timbers, dragged up from the thick silt as if the mariners are still determined to reach the safety of land.

Stories of ghost ships sailing the waters are common, but unproven—the lights could just as easily be the lanterns of passing merchantmen, corsairs, or smugglers. However, there is no smoke without fire. On still nights, the cries of drowning mariners, shouting in their strange tongue, can be heard drifting in from the surf.

## WEIBA

**Population:** 214

## FESTIVAL TO ASHTART

### FLOWERING DAY

*Varies, but usually in late Alak Arkhet*

Flowering Day marks the official start of spring, the time when the first shoots of the crops begin to rise. Throughout the Caliphate, clerics scour the crop fields from late Alak Arkhet for the first signs of life. Because each section of the river floods at a different time and level, planting times vary immensely. The same is equally true of when the seeds begin to sprout.

Once the first shoots are spotted, the high priest informs the local ruler. By tradition, he then parades through the streets, slaves throwing dried flower petals in front of him as he proceeds toward the nearest temple or shrine of Ashtart. Along the way he gives small gifts of money to expectant mothers, mothers of newborn babies, and newly married couples, for these are all symbolic of spring, a time of new life.

At the temple he is presented with a large bouquet of flowers by the high priest, a blessing from Ashtart on his household, and a sign of renewed health and prosperity. He is then taken to the fields, where he prays to Ashtart in front of the tiny shoot for her generosity. Traditionally, the yield of that plant, no matter how poor it might be, is always harvested first, whereupon it is given to the noble.

The Flowering Day ceremony is carried out even if the coming harvest is going to be a total failure, for not performing the ritual dooms the harvest for the next year and bodes ill for the ruler. Some may call it coincidence, but many rulers who fail to carry out this duty do fall ill within the year, and more than a few have died.

**Ruler:** Sheikh Assan of the Filasti tribe

**Religion:** Faithful (Ashtart, Apsu, Qedeshet)

A small village at the southern end of the Warm Road, close to the start of the Great North Desert, Weiba has survived the encroaching sands. Its oasis, a vital stopping point for merchants, is greatly diminished, but so long as there is water, life will continue.

A hardy strain of barley is grown in what remains of the fields, the trees provide enough dates and pomegranates to keep the inhabitants from starving, and butter and yogurt are made from goat's milk, but mostly the oasis relies on the coin and goods brought by traders. Unfortunately, that is now under serious threat, and not from the desert—Weiba is beset by a plague of particularly vicious scorpions.

The situation is so bad the villages have resorted to living on the flat roofs of their houses, linking them together with crudely made, unsupported wooden bridges so as to avoid having to walk at ground level as much as

## FESTIVALS TO ASHTART

### RUMBLING BELLY DAY

*Tamith Yaus al-Kemi Tamith Alak Shemu*

As Burning Throat Day (*Realm Guide #7: The Salt Basin*) symbolizes the shortage of water under the jinn's oppressive rule and the subsequent search for a new homeland, so this day recalls the shortage of food the people endured during that time.

Citizens are expected to fast between sun up and sun down, though they may drink water (and only water) during this time. In areas where the cult is strong, even smoking is forbidden, for there were no tabac plants in the desert. The city granaries are locked, food shops and stalls are closed, as are abattoirs, mills, butchers, and other establishments dealing with food, and hunting is prohibited. Once the sun has set, the citizens celebrate with huge feasts, as well as much praying that Ashtart will not forsake her flock in the future.

### SEGREGATION DAY

*Varies*

The Faithful see marriage as a blessed union between two people. While divorce is virtually unknown, death is a common occurrence in the harsh lands of Al-Shirkuh, and is the most common way of ending a marriage.

When a spouse dies, the surviving partner undergoes a period of quarantine lasting one week per year of marriage. Segregation Day is held the day after the deceased's funeral. It takes the form of a feast, at which the survivor bids farewell to family and friends. After the sun sets, the only visitors they may receive during the mourning period are clerics of Ashtart, who provide counseling and say prayers for the departed.

Following the period of mourning, the surviving partner is expected to remarry quickly, for such is the will of Ashtart that man and woman be as one. Exceptions are made in small communities, where they may be a shortage of potential partners, or when old age prevents marriage (which must be consummated to be legal).

possible. Movement is normally a slow crawl, for falling means plummeting into a host of crawling death. Most families own meerkats and mongooses, but they used to protect houses, not cleanse the streets and fields.

Famine is now a real threat, for the fields are literally crawling with the stinging arachnids, and few farmers will risk their lives. Few doubt the claims of shrieking laborers who claim to have seen giant scorpions moving among the crops. Goats not killed by the scorpions or

hungry citizens have fled into the Grazelands. Rightfully afraid, merchants have begun avoiding Weiba. Better to stock up on water at the Oasis of Dreams or even go without than risk the sting of a scorpion, they say.

The cause of the problem is a golden idol. A young goatherd discovered it while rescuing a kind from a deep crack in the ground, and thinking he could sell it to passing merchants, carried it home. He buried the idol in the sand near the village to prevent it being stolen.

Unbeknownst to the youth, the crack was actually the entrance to a secret temple of Chactinax, and the idol a sacred artifact used to guard the entrance from enemies of the cult. The scorpionmen who inhabit the temple are responsible for the plague. Not wishing to reveal their presence directly, they unleashed the scorpions to kill the villagers. Once everyone is dead, they intend to recover the idol. Unfortunately for the villages, the boy buried his find so prevent it being stolen, and told no one of its existence. He was among the first to die, stung by a scorpion while he slept.

## PERSONS OF NOTE

The following persons may help or hinder the heroes in their adventures, or perhaps become the start of an adventure for those exploring the Grazelands.

### AELFRIC OSWALDSUNU

A recent arrival in Al-Shirkuh, he is the official representative of Lendmann Throrisunu of Whitehall, a small Sutmark trading port. As relations between Jarl Bosi of Sutmark and the Suhayb tribe grow stronger, so fewer merchants bother to make the extended trip to Whitehall. Trade still flows, but after Bosi's markup there are lower profits to be made.

Aelfric has been sent to Al-Shirkuh to convince the Bedu to found a port on the eastern coast of the Grazelands. His attempts are being hampered by his inability to speak Beduan (though he is slowly learning), his impatience (Bedu rarely act rashly), and their love of Jarl Bosi, whom they consider to be a distant cousin.

While such a port could in theory boost Whitehall's ailing economy, there is a strong chance the nomads might learn of the existence of Sandvik, a major trading port in the land of Ostmark, and the primary port used by the sphinxes' merchant fleets. The journey would be longer and more dangerous (the sphinxes detest competition), but profits for the nomads would be much higher. To that end, Aelfric is suggesting that the nomads stay on land, where they feel more comfortable, allowing Sutmark ships to undertake the sea voyage.

### MIRAH MELIKAH BINT-ASHOUD

By appearance, Melikah is nothing more than a goatherd. She is attractive, carries herself with a strange



confidence for a peasant, and speaks in a refined manner. She claims she was merely brought up well by her late parents. In truth, she is the youngest daughter of a powerful Grazeland Bedu sheikh.

She ran away from home to avoid an arranged marriage to a corpulent beast of a man, a merchant from Rawdah, City of Heroes, who promised her father lucrative trade contracts in return for his daughter's hand. Quite adept at living off the land, she has survived by herding goats for over a year. Her life is lonely, but she has found an inner peace she never knew as the spoiled daughter of a rich noble. Unfortunately, her serenity may soon be ruined, for she is being hunted, and her pursuers are closing in.

One party is in the employ of her father. At first he believed the merchant kidnapped her, though investigations quickly revealed this was not the case. Thus, it was logical, in his mind, that someone else had kidnapped her. Meanwhile, her husband-to-be, has hired trackers to find his missing bride. After convincing himself her father had not changed his mind and hidden her away, he deduced she had been kidnapped by bandits. Unfortunately for any party who befriends Melikah, both sets of hunters will assume they are kidnappers, and deal with them accordingly.

## RIDDER OSRIC HAPTVALDSUNU

Ridder Osric Haptvaldsunu is the appointed ambassador of Jarl Bosi (a northern nobleman who has adopted Bedu ways, despite still living in his native land). Having lived among the Bedu for many years, he speaks Beduan fluently, and has grasped all but the intricacies of their culture. He has even taken a Bedu wife, with whom he has sired five children, and now honors his god, Var, god of merchants, with the trappings of Qedeshet's mercantile cult. Among the nomads he is known as "Kameh Rahhaal" ("straw nomad"), a reference to his yellow hair and also acknowledging his adoption of Bedu customs.

## GODS & MONSTERS

This section details three minor deities tied to the cult of Ashtart, and four new monsters.

### HUMBABA

**Titles:** The Cooling Shadow, The Darkness in Day, Foiler of Shamash.

**Aspects:** Shade.

**Affiliation:** Ashtart. Tamarni.

**Symbol:** A palm leaf.

**Priesthood:** Shade Bearers (priests); Shade Blades (paladins).

**Herald:** None.

**Holy Days:** Every Yaus al-Maat during Alak Shemu is a holy day.

**Duties:** To protect shade-giving trees and structures.

**Sins:** (Minor) refusing to provide shade when asked by a civilized being, taking a level of Fatigue as a result of high temperature; (Major) allowing a civilized being to suffer Fatigue as a result of heat, damaging a tree that provides shade; (Mortal) destroying a tree that provides shade, becoming Incapacitated as a result of heat.

**Signature Power:** *Refuge*.

**Powers:** *Deflection, ethereal/corporeal, fog cloud, beat mask, obscure, summon elemental* (shadow only)

**Trappings:** With the exception of *refuge*, all trappings take the form of shadows and darkness. *Deflection*, for example, casts the target in shadow, hiding his form, while *fog cloud* causes darkness to fall across the land. *Refuge* spells are usually squat, hollow trees.

One day, Ashtart gazed down into the mortal realm to see how the gods' creations were tending the plants she had given them. Instead of witnessing a hive of industry, she saw the farmers lying on the bare earth. On asking what was wrong, she was told that Shamash's gaze was too fearful—the people could not work in the heat of the day else they collapse, and their skin was blistered and burned by prolonged exposure. The people could not toil in the lee of the mountains, for the ground was too stony, and the fertile fields offered no protection.

Having no wish to watch mortals suffer unnecessarily, the goddess grew the first tree, whose leaves obstructed the sun god's gaze. Where his gaze did not fall the land was cast in darkness, and was much cooler. Of course, this infuriated Shamash, who demanded he be able to see everything in the universe in order to ensure order prevailed. Some legends claim it was this that forced Shamash to begin traveling the heavens, for he tried to see what lay in the shade, an impossible act as the tree always obstructed part of his field of view (there are other myths concerning his wanderings, though).

With lots of other duties to attend, Ashtart promoted Humbaba to the goddess of shade, entrusting her with the duty of ensuring mortals always had somewhere to shelter from the sun.

The cults of Humbaba and Shamash do not see eye-to-eye. Fanatics within the latter have been known to destroy temporary shelters and cut down trees in order that Shamash's gaze not be obstructed, acts which have resulted in violence.

Any structure or tree that provides shade is considered a shrine to Humbaba, though few citizens treat them as anything special. Her true shrines are usually found in fields. Taking the form of a large canvas supported on four poles or single leafy tree, field workers take shelter from Shamash's gaze in the shade of the shrine when the sun is at its fiercest.

Clerics are responsible for offering shade to weary civilized beings. Most carry large palm leaves with which to block Shamash's burning eye. Nobles and rich citizens rarely venture out without a servant providing such shelter, though few can afford the services of an actual cleric. Paladins perform a similar service, but do so for travelers in the deep desert, where there is little respite

## FESTIVAL TO ASHTART

### SOWING DAY EVE

#### *Varies*

In settlements along the great rivers of the Caliphate, Sowing Day Eve is held the third Yaus al-Hamala after the inundation. Although the civilized farmers already know the height of the water, until it recedes they do not know how thick the precious silt lies. Once the water level drops, the clerics inspect the fields, carefully measuring the depth of the black mud. Through centuries of record keeping they know what the various depths mean in terms of types of plants to sow and the expected yield of crops. As the sun sets, they return to the temple to pass on their findings.

If the mud is thick and deep, the evening is a time of great celebration. The temple holds a feast for the local farmers who, come the rising sun on the morrow, begin the back breaking work of sowing the fertile land. If the mud is too thin, or non-existent, it is a time of much wailing and lamentation. Clerics symbolize this by giving each family a portion of a loaf of bread. How much is given is an indication of how good or poor the harvest will likely be.

Around the oases, where floods never occur, it is always celebrated on Amt Yaus al-Hamala Amt Alak Arkhet. With no mud to measure or fertilize the crops, it is always a day of celebration, a final chance to enjoy oneself before two seasons of hard work begins.

from the heat or glare of the sun. They are also charged with protecting any tree that provides shade. They have no concern with protecting buildings, as these are Geb-Agni's territory.

Ceremonies generally involve nothing but prayers and songs, and are usually undertaken at midday, when the shadows are shortest and Humbaba at her weakest. They are always undertaken in shade, never under the direct glare of the sun.

**Character Guidelines:** Although clerics offer shade, they must often work in the heat of the sun. Vigor is thus important for avoiding Fatigue. Survival is very important for finding water, a necessary component in warding off the effects of high temperatures.

## MELISSAH

**Titles:** Queen Bee, Great Pollinator, Buzzing Lady, Mistress of Countless Stings.

**Aspects:** Bees.

**Affiliations:** Ashtart, Shamash.

**Symbol:** A golden bee.

**Priesthood:** Queens (priests); Drones (paladins).

**Herald:** None.

**Holy Days:** Each Yaus al-Niwat during Alak Paret. Hive Day (p. 5) is a high holy day.

**Duties:** To protect bees and bee hives.

**Sins:** (Minor) accidentally harming a bee, damaging a bee hive, not eating honey once a month; (Major) purposefully harming a bee, destroying a bee hive; (Mortal) killing a bee.

**Signature Power:** *Beast friend* (bee swarms and giant bees only).

**Powers:** *Aura, bolt, deflection, fly, obscure, stun, summon beast* (bee swarms and giant bees only),

**Trappings:** All trappings relate to bees. Many spells can be represented by swarms of bees, while *beast friend* and *summon beast* may involve the cleric making buzzing sounds or performing a dance similar to that of bees.

After accepting the bees as her worshippers (see Hive Day, p. 5), Ashtart left them to their own devices. Bees were solitary creatures at this time, and they proved easy pickings for the birds, who blamed bees for causing for causing them to lose their sweet voices. Melissah, a lesser daughter of Shamash, took pity on the bees. She taught them the secret of building hives, in which they would be safe from birds, and convinced them to live together, for in numbers lay strength.

The early hives were chaotic, for the bees argued much of over who should do what work. Melissah divided the bees into two castes—rulers, who would always be females, and workers. In order to prevent further disputes, it was agreed that only one queen would inhabit each hive. Thus did bees become industrious and well-organized workers. Greatly pleased by her activities, Ashtart promoted Melissah to the statue of goddess of bees.

The only temple to Melissah stands in Hulwan, City of Gardens. Bees are considered sacred animals in Hulwan. Killing one is punishable by a stiff fine, while being stung is a sign of misfortune, requiring the victim to make a donation to the temple in order for the bad omen to be removed as well as paying a fine for the bee's subsequent death. Every temple to Ashtart honors Melissah, its sacred bee hives serving as a living shrine. Melissah is only ever depicted in art as a bee wearing a crown. Most statues and drawing of Ashtart have a bee in them somewhere.

Priests are charged with ensuring the bees work hard pollinating the crops, placating the queens, and gathering honey. Paladins are responsible for protecting the hives against predators. More importantly, clerics of both types are important members of farming communities, where they work closely with the cult of Ashtart. Labor disputes are often mediated by clerics of Melissah, for bees are among the most industrious and harmonious creatures. While many clerics thus live in farming communities, some are itinerants, for Melissah's subjects can be found across Al-Shirkuh.

Ceremonies are strange, almost comical, affairs to outsiders. Dressed in robes of black and gold, clerics dance in elaborate patterns while shaking their rears and making loud buzzing sounds. Sacrifices involve flowers,

which go to seed Melissah's garden, honey, the only food the goddess eats, and birds, the mortal enemies of bees.

**Character Guidelines:** Clerics, like bees, are expected to be sociable and hardworking. Persuasion is useful for mediating industrial disputes, as well as helping organize people involved in common tasks, while Streetwise represents the ability to integrate oneself into society. Leadership Edges also represent the communal and cooperative nature of bees, though they are not essential. In terms of attributes, Agility represents the bees' nimbleness, Spirit its tenacity, and Vigor the resilience of the hive.

Paladins strike fast and often, delivering multiple blows as quickly as possible. Frenzy and Sweep are well-suited to this style, though Two-Fisted is also suitable.

## CENTAUR, DESERT

Desert centaurs have the upper body of a human and the lower body and distinctive hump of a camel. Like their northern counterparts they are semi-intelligent beings. Although primarily hunter-gatherers, they are fond of flesh (especially that of sentient races), and thus are much hated by the nomadic cultures.

Members of both Devoted and Faithful civilized races claim that in times long gone wicked men lay down with camels instead of women, thus siring the barbaric, bestial centaur race. One presumes these were the same mythical men who also created the sand goblins. Centaurs claim they were the first race created by Duamutef, his chosen people. Men grew jealous of their status though, and destroyed their villages and culture, forcing them into the deep desert.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Survival d8, Tracking d8

**Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9 (1)

**Gear:** Leather armor (+1), long spear (Str+d6, Parry +1, Reach 1, 2 hands), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage 2d6)

**Treasure:** Meager per 3 centaurs.

**Special Abilities:**

- \* **Camel:** Desert centaurs do not start making Vigor rolls for heat or dehydration until the 8th day after water runs out.
- \* **Fleet Footed:** Centaurs roll a d10 when running, instead of a d6.
- \* **Sand Walker:** Desert centaurs treat sand as normal ground in tactical combat and as Average terrain when using overland movement.
- \* **Size +2:** Centaurs are the same size as riding horses.

## DESERT CENTAUR PRIEST

Desert centaurs are devout followers of Duamutef. Rarely, one is born with enough intelligence to become a priest of the desert god. These intelligent specimens frequently lead tribes. Even if another centaur leads, priests are always close by to advise him.

## FESTIVAL TO ASHTART

### STONE CLEARING EVE

*Amt Yaus al-Maat Tamith Alak Shemu*

While the menfolk clear the irrigation ditches, the women and children take to the fields to begin clearing the fields of stones scraped up to the surface during plowing or deposited by the flood the previous year. Clerics sing songs to help the day pass and distract Geb-Agni, for he does not appreciate his rocks being moved about by mortals. As an act of further supplication, large rocks are heated until they shatter rather than broken by picks. As dusk falls, the clergy of Geb-Agni come to the fields and rebuke the workers, ordering them to replace the stones. The workers meet the spirit of the demand by placing the stones in piles or long lines, thus marking field boundaries.

This ritual symbolizes the complex relationship between Ashtart and Geb-Agni. After receiving permission for plants to be grown in Geb-Agni's ground, Ashtart started to remove all the stones littering the ground. Geb-Agni flew into one of his rages, claiming this was not part of the deal. In the end Ashtart placated her fiery brother by using the stones to delineate the size of her fields.

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

**Skills:** Faith d8, Fighting d8, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Survival d8, Tracking d6

**Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9 (1)

**Gear:** Leather armor (+1), long spear (Str+d6, Parry +1, Reach 1, 2 hands), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage 2d6)

**Treasure:** Worthwhile.

**Special Abilities:**

- \* **Camel:** Desert centaurs do not start making Vigor rolls for heat or dehydration until the 8th day after water runs out.
- \* **Fleet Footed:** Centaurs roll a d10 when running, instead of a d6.
- \* **Powers:** Centaur priests know the following spells: *aim*, *battle song*, *boost/lower trait* (Vigor, Persuasion, Riding, Shooting, Survival, and Tracking only), *deflection* (swirling sand), *hamper movement* (sand clings to legs), *obscure* (miniature sandstorm).
- \* **Sand Walker:** Desert centaurs treat sand as normal ground in tactical combat and as Average terrain when using overland movement.
- \* **Size +2:** Centaurs are the same size as riding horses.

## HORSE, BURAQ

Buraq means "lightning" in Beduan, an apt title for the fastest breed of horse in Al-Shirkuh, if not the en-

tire world. Faithful refer to them as “Upuaut’s steeds,” believing they are the mortal descendants of the god’s favorite steed. To the Devoted they are the offspring of Suleiman’s mare, Buraqa from whom the name of the breed derives. According to their myths, Buraqa’s speed carried Suleiman across the Jinn Lands in a single night, enabling the mage to fight six greater jinn in a single night. No buraq has repeated this feat, but Devoted are not concerned—Buraqa sired foals with a normal horse, so diluting the bloodline.

Legends claim buraqs’ legs are capable of stretching to immense lengths, ensuring the rider is always level. In reality, they are just immensely sure footed and steady beasts, capable of crossing uneven terrain unimpaired and with amazing balance.

Buraqs are a wild breed native to the open desert of the Grazelands. They have proven nearly impossible to break, and even more stubborn to train. Many a rogue merchant has sold a supposed buraq for a princely sum, leaving the owner to rue his gullibility when the *speed* potion mixed with the ordinary riding horse’s oats wears off.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d4, Notice d6

**Pace:** 16; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 8

**Treasure:** None.

**Special Abilities:**

- \* **Fleet Footed:** Buraqs roll 2d6 when running instead of a d6.
- \* **Kick:** Str.
- \* **Size +2:** Buraqs weigh between 800 and 1000 pounds.
- \* **Stable Platform:** A rider mounted on a buraq does not suffer the Unstable Platform penalty.
- \* **Stubborn:** A rider may control a buraq only if it is under the effects of a *beast friend* spell.
- \* **Sure Footed:** Ignores penalties for difficult ground.

## PERYTON

A peryton has the legs and head and legs of a deer, and the body and wings of a bird. Although their form is bestial, perytons are bipedal. Strangely, their shadow has the form of a human.

According to one story, perytons are born when a person dies far from his homeland, when his soul is out of reach of the gods. Another says they were once servants of Ashtart, but fell from grace after killing men who tried to pick the crops they feasted upon. For their sin of not sharing Ashtart’s bounty, they were cursed to become perytons.

Although perytons prefer fresh vegetation, they can survive on sand and dust for as much as a week. Perytons dislike the taste of meat, though they delight in killing.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d8(A), Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Survival d8, Tracking d6

**Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

## FESTIVAL TO ASHTART

### UNION DAY

*Baot Yaus al-Niwt Alak Neteru*

Among her many roles, Ashtart is the goddess of marriage. Although many of the gods are married, Ashtart did not preside over their union. Instead, she became associated with the role, so the Faithful believe, when Suleiman asked her wedding ceremony to be performed by a cleric of the faith.

Some records say he chose Ashtart because her clerics accepted the sacred task while others turned their backs (Karmelos’ clergy, for instance, were said to have wanted him to remain focused on the war against the jinn), others argue that as goddess of children, which are expected to be born in wedlock, she was the natural choice. Ironically, Suleiman never sired any children. Despite their many differences, even the Devoted agree Suleiman married, for it expected of all people.

Regardless of the date of their marriage, all married couples celebrate their union on this day. Families gather together to honor the couples with feasts, toasting their time together and wishing them many more happy years. Given the tangled web of family bonds, the feasting lasts much of the day, family members visiting as many households to whom they are related by ties of marriage as possible.

Union Day is an especially auspicious time to marry. By law, couples who join together on this day can never divorce—only death can separate them. Although marriage ceremonies always require a donation to the temple plus a gift to the presiding cleric, on this day the rate and expected value of the gift increases dramatically. Followers of the faith claim this is because of the special materials used in the ritual of marriage, while Devoted mock it as a sign of the Faithful’s inherent corruption.

Divorcees yet to remarry spend the day in silent contemplation at the temple, asking forgiveness for breaking the sacred union of marriage, tainting the goddess with their mortal fallibility, and praying that they find a new partner when the 10 year period of legal solitude is up.

**Treasure:** None.

**Special Abilities:**

- \* **Antlers/Bite/Hooves:** Str+d6.
- \* **Flight:** Pace 6.
- \* **Gore:** Perytons use this maneuver to gore their opponents with their antlers. If they can charge at least 6” before attacking, they add +4 to their damage total.
- \* **Sated:** At the start of the round after a peryton kills a foe, it must make a Spirit roll. With success, its desire to kill is sated and it immediately tries to fly away.