Advanced Dungeons & Dragons® 2nd Edition

Al-Qadim™

LAND OF FATE

CAMPAIGN

Adventurer's Guide to Zakhara



Sandra Snan (order #9919724)



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Adventurer's Guide to Zakhara

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Introduction

The desert resounds with the hoofbeats of raiders as they descend upon a lonely outpost. Sails snap and unfurl as explorers journey toward treasure and treachery on the Crowded Sea. In the Grand Bazaar of golden Huzuz, merchants haggle over silks and spices and rings of silver, their words merging with the din of the crowd. Then the gongs of the mosques begin to sound. A hush passes over the city as the priests call the faithful to prayer. While the enlightened masses bow their heads, miles away—among the ruins of the Haunted Lands—a whirlwind rises, shifting the sand to reveal another idol, another tribute to some nameless, forgotten god.

Welcome to Zakhara, the Land of Fate.

This grand, exotic world is the official campaign setting for the *Arabian Adventures* rulebook. It forms a permanent base for AL-QADIM™ accessories and adventures, as well as a ready-made setting for the Dungeon Master™ who wishes to launch an "Arabian" campaign of his or her own design.

The *Land of Fate* boxed set contains two books. The first, in your hands now, is the *Adventurer's Guide to Zakhara*. Within these pages is an introduction to the people and gods of the Land of Fate, as well as a guide to Zakhara's cities. The material is designed for all explorers—players and Dungeon Masters alike.

In contrast, the second book, *Fortunes and Fates*, is primarily the province of the Dungeon Master. The book describes Zakhara's laws and how they affect PCs. It also explains how to handle high-level characters, and provides movement rates for Zakhara's terrain. Further, *Fortunes and Fates* introduces new magical items and reveals some of the "secrets" behind current tales and events in Zakhara's cities. In short, players should not see this material until the DM™ decides the time is right to reveal it.

Land of Fate also includes three poster-sized maps of Zakhara. The first provides an overview of the entire campaign setting. The others offer a closer look at two important regions: the Pearl Cities and the Golden Gulf, and the High Desert to the north. Additional "close-up" maps appear in other AL-QADIM adventures and accessories. (For example, *Golden Voyages*, a

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sourcebox inspired by the tales of Sinbad, features a map of the Crowded Sea.)

Furthermore, *Land of Fate* includes 12 full-color reference cards detailing the architecture, attire, and equipment of Zakhara. Last but not least, this set includes eight *Monstrous Compendium* sheets. Featured on those sheets: djinn, dao, efreet, jann, and marids—the five major races of genies—all suitably embellished for the AL-QADIM™ campaign.

Adventure awaits, honored players and explorers. Listen for the blasting of horns and the braying of camels. Join the caravans as they journey toward danger, intrigue, and even romance. The Land of Fate lies before you like a great feast. Enjoy!

TABLE 1:
Characters in Shorthand

Abbreviations describing characters in this book appear in this order: race, sex, class, kit, and level. For example, hmF/f/20 means "human male fighter, faris, 20th level."

Race

d	dwarf	he	half-elf
e	elf	hg	halfling
g	gnome	kb	kobold
gb	goblin	o	orc
h	human	og	ogre
hb	hobgoblin		

Sex

f	female	m	male

Class

B	Bard	R	Ranger
F	Fighter	T	Thief
P	Priest	W	Wizard (Mage)
Pal	Paladin		

Kit

a	Askar	mk	Mamluk
aj	Ajami mage	mr	Merchant-rogue
bg	Beggar-thief	mt	Matrud
br	Barber	my	Mystic
c	Corsair	o	Outland priest
dr	Desert rider	ow	Outland warrior
e	Ethoist	p	Pragmatist
f	Faris	r	Rawun
fm	Flame mage	sam	Sand mage
h	Hakima	sem	Sea mage
hs	Holy slayer	sh	Sha'ir
k	Kahin	sl	Sa'luk
m	Moralist	so	Sorcerer
mb	Mercenary barbarian	wm	Wind mage

DM's Note: Levels reflect the standard range of 1 to 20; DMs may choose to alter experience levels to suit their campaigns. While a character's description gives insight into his or her basic nature, alignment is not listed; DMs may assign alignment as they see fit.

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Chapter 1

Lay of the Land

Zakhara is a world of extremes. Travelers may cross a seemingly endless sea of dunes, cresting wave after wave, and then suddenly find an oasis as lush as any imagined paradise. They may climb snow-capped mountains that soar above 15,000 feet or discover the deadly Pit of the Ghuls, whose murky depths plunge well below the level of the distant sea.

The text below describes the symbols and features depicted on the poster maps in the *Land of Fate* boxed set. The key for those maps is on the back of this book. Movement costs for each type of terrain are detailed separately for the Dungeon Master in *Fortunes and Fates*; see "Travel Across Zakhara."

Features of the Land

Anvil: The Land of Fate contains two great "anvils"—the Genies' Anvil of the High Desert and the Great Anvil of the Haunted Lands. These are inhospitable and deadly places, searing by day and often freezing by night. Neither anvil ever sees rain, and duststorms continually sweep across them. Even the boldest and most experienced desert riders think twice before venturing into these regions.

Badlands: Sharp and forbidding, badlands are laced with steep ravines and deeply eroded canyons that are still being carved by erratic downpours.

Barchan Dune: See *dune, barchan.*

Barren: A rocky terrain not dominated by any particular land feature, a barren is arid and rough. Some light vegetation may exist, but it is typically insufficient for grazing large herds.

Battle Site: The symbol of crossed swords marks the site of a great war or an important conflict, some recent, others long past. Ruined steel and old skeletons often litter such areas, half-buried by the sand.

Brushland: Found primarily in the valleys of the Ruined Kingdoms, this land is overgrown with brush and vines.

Caravan Trail: See *trails and roads.*

City: Afyal, Hiyal, Huzuz, and Qudra are great cities—those of impressive size or importance. Each is represented by a large oval symbol. Other cities are represented by smaller ovals. (DM's Note: Cities count as "cultivated

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land" for moment purposes.)

Cliff/Plateau: In the desert, this symbol (a fringelike series of short vertical lines) indicates a sharp transition between lowland and plateau. Where the main elevation line intersects the cliff symbol, the cliff represents a steep rise of 2,500 feet. (The average elevation of Zakhara's desert plateaus is 2,500 feet.)

Cultivated Land: Zakhara's agriculture is concentrated around its major settlements; this feature is uncommon elsewhere.

Desert, Open: Desert lands showing no other terrain feature on the maps are open tracts of sandy desert. In general, such areas contain shifting sands and a variety of small dunes.

Dune, Barchan: This is a crescent-shaped dune, typically located at the desert's edge. The "horns" of the crescent point away from the prevailing wind. When this terrain symbol appears on a map, it means that barchan dunes are predominant in the area, with each of them arching in the direction shown.

Dune, Seif: A seif (or "sword dune") is the largest of all dune types. Like a whaleback dune, it runs parallel to the wind. Unlike a whaleback, however, a seif has a sharp peak, is very rugged, and can extend for hundreds of miles. The space between two seifs is virtually swept clean of sand and forms a rocky path known as a *gassi*.

Dune, Star: A twisted mass of rising sand that resembles a starfish, this type of dune is created in an area that has no predominant wind. Most star dunes lie at the very heart of a deep desert or at its edge.

Dune, Whaleback: This great, curve-backed dune resembles an enormous beached whale. The dune can measure up to 100 feet high and two miles from end to end. Its form runs parallel to the prevailing wind.

Elevation: Only one major elevation line appears on the *Land of Fate* maps. It marks the location at which the elevation reaches approximately 2,500 feet. (It does not necessarily depict a cliff-line. Cliffs are represented by a fringelike series of short parallel lines.) Future maps may also depict the precise elevation of major mountains, using the "+" symbol noted on the map key (for example, "+5,500 feet").

Most of the lesser mountain ranges in Zakhara rise no higher than 1,000 feet above the desert floor around them. In game play, all are low mountain terrain. This includes the small ranges scattered across the plateau of the High Desert, though their actual elevation may be up to 3,500 feet. The Tumbling Mountains of southern Zakhara reach heights between 5,000 and 6,000 feet; they're medium mountains. The World Pillars have peaks exceeding 15,000 feet; they're high mountains.

Fort: See *qal'at*.

Gassi: This is a rocky, barren trough between two seifs, or sword dunes (see *dune*, *seif*).

Grassland, Seasonal: This grassland is barren most of the year. During seasonal rains, however, the apparent wasteland comes alive with wildflowers and grasses.

Haram: A haram is a holy site. It may be a place of religious miracles or legendary heroics, or it may be the site of past triumphs over the unenlightened. Some harams are venerated by kahins and certain mystic groups, who view harams as places of power. Travelers may often find a hospice at a haram, especially if the haram is near (or is itself) a popular stopping point.

Zakhara's most significant haram is the Golden Mosque in Huzuz, which contains the House of the Loregiver. All enlightened Al-Hadhar (city-dwellers) strive to visit this mosque during their lifetimes, and so do many Al-Badia (nomads).

Another famous haram is the Desert Mosque, located at an oasis midway between the city of Qudra and the Genies' Anvil. The Desert Mosque is frequented by enlightened nomads, caravan drivers, and other travelers.

Harrat: A harrat is an area of volcanic debris. It may contain the weathered remains of old lava flows or the sharp, newly laid materials of recent eruptions. In either case, travel may be difficult.

Hogback: See *plateau and hogback*.

Intermittent River: See *river*.

Jungle or Forest, Deep: These lands are the heart of the jungle, thick and oppressive.

Jungle or Forest, Outlying: Once a region of scrub or cultivated ground, land marked "outlying forest" or "outlying jungle" is land that the forests or jungles are reclaiming. (The terrain is considered light jungle or medium forest in game play.)

Kavir: A kavir is a crusty salt flat that lies directly over a sea of black mud, making travel treacherous. The salt has crystallized and routinely expands and

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contracts, giving the surface the appearance of a glacier. The slimy mud between the cracks may appear shallow, but it rarely is, being more deadly than the moorlands of the far-off FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting.

In Zakhara, the greatest kavir lies just west of the World Pillar Mountains, home of the savage yak-men. The kavir and merciful Fate have helped isolate yak-men from the rest of Zakhara.

Lake, Alkaline: This is an evaporating, mineral-laden body of water, usually surrounded by salt flats, without an outlet. The water is bitter and undrinkable unless it is magically enhanced.

Zakhara's most famous alkaline lake is in the High Desert, at the bottom of a valley called the Pit of the Ghuls. The surface of this lake lies more than 1,000 feet below sea level. Though its edges are shallow, the bottom quickly drops toward the center, and the ultimate depth of the lake is unknown. The lake is a source of valuable minerals, including bromides and table salt, but its resources are still untapped. Let the name be a warning to all who might wander here: this valley is teeming with ghuls and restless spirits.

Lake, Seasonal: A seasonal lake may be nothing more than a salt flat during the dry season. During the rainy season, it may provide drinkable water and briefly give rise to vegetation.

Mangrove Swamp: This swamp represents a mazelike forest of trees whose roots are partially submerged (usually below dark, almost opaque water). Such swamps may spread to create new "islands" beyond the land from which they originated. Travel by boat or mount is restricted to cleared channels. Individuals moving through a mangrove swamp on foot must climb from bole to bole.

Mountain: See *elevation*.

Oasis: An oasis is a place where natural surface water exists in a permanent waterhole. Vegetation surrounding an oasis is lush, and plants that could not otherwise survive in the desert thrive there.

Open Desert: See *desert, open*.

Plateau and Hogback: Much of the High Desert is located atop a great plateau, which averages 2,500 feet in elevation. In addition, the desert is broken by rocky hogbacks—prominent ridges with steeply sloping sides, named for their resemblance to the back of a wild pig.

Qal'at: The word *qal'at* is a generic term representing all forts, fortifications, and castles found in the Land of Fate. Many qal'ats have been abandoned (usually when the water supply dried up or crops failed). These are marked "unoccupied" on the maps, though some are still the homes of bandits or foul creatures. Other qal'ats are marked "occupied." Such forts serve as outposts for the military forces of nearby cities.

Quicksand: In the desert, quicksand is a fine, powdery sand that gathers in depressions, posing a hazard to those who may stumble into it unaware. The quicksand symbol on the poster maps denotes areas in which travelers have a 20 percent chance of finding quicksand. An unencumbered person can float on quicksand, provided he or she remains calm (animals will panic and therefore sink). An encumbered or panicked individual sinks beneath the sand in 1d4 rounds. (DM's Note: Moving cautiously through a quicksand area costs twice the usual amount of movement points.)

River: Zakhara has two types of rivers: regular and intermittent. Regular rivers follow an unbroken path over the land's surface. They are always flowing, though the water levels may vary between seasons. In contrast, intermittent rivers disappear and reappear from the surface, flowing underground for a stretch; or they may disappear entirely as they flow into an alluvial fan or outcropping. Intermittent rivers are not wadis (see below).

Ruin: Only well-known ruins have been depicted on the poster maps. Most have been picked over by generations of explorers, but they still may contain a few secrets of the deep past.

Salt Flat: A salt flat is an evaporated lake that forms a level, smooth, featureless expanse. Travel across this flat terrain is easy, except when the midday temperatures are extreme.

Salt/Mud Flat: See *kavir*.

Sorcerer's Tower: Maps with a scale of 30 miles per inch include a guide to towers that are known to be the homes (or hideouts) of sorcerers. This is not meant as a "visitor's guide"—quite the opposite. The symbols have been provided to warn the unsuspecting traveler away from the area. Most sorcerers value their privacy highly, and they have set up shop in the wilderness to be free of meddlesome individuals.

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Stony Field: This rough wasteland is dominated by boulders that have been smoothed by wind and water. Travel here can be treacherous.

Town: A circular symbol depicts a town. These appear only on maps with scales of 30 or fewer miles to the inch.

Trails and Roads: Outside the cities and civilized areas, Zakhara has no roads to speak of—no great highways or bridges. The desert is very unforgiving of paved or permanent roads. More common are simple paths, trod by travelers and caravans.

Trails marked on the poster maps are little more than dirt paths kept clear by frequent use. These run along most coastlines, but they are not usually found in sandy terrain. Wadis can serve as trails in the desert, however, and may be treated as such. (DM's Note: Trails halve movement costs for those who travel them, but they have no effect in farmland.)

Caravan trails cross the deep wastes of the High Desert and Haunted Lands, marking the passage of men and mounts. The trails are extremely wide, measuring up to two miles across. That's because the route is good, but the travel may be easier on clear sand. Caravan trails reduce the movement in their area by –1 (to a minimum of 1 point).

Volcanic Debris: See *harrat*.

Wadi: This is a seasonal watercourse that floods but once or twice a year, and is otherwise dry and solid. Many caravan trails follow the course of wadis, since the ground is relatively firm and even. (DM's Note: While a wadi serves as a trail for those following its path, it counts as a ravine for those crossing it, and as a river when flooded.)

Well: Water from a well must be brought up from below ground to the surface, usually by a mechanism turned by human hands or by beasts of burden. Only major wells are marked on the *Land of Fate* maps. In general, a number of smaller wells may be scattered in the vicinity. The locations of such wells are often secret, known only to the nomads (or creatures) who have claimed them as their own.

Well, Artesian: Here water from underground rises to the surface to create a natural fountain. A few of the Pearl Cities are blessed with artesian wells, but they are rare elsewhere. Like oases, artesian wells may host a rich diversity of vegetation.

Features of the Coast and Sea

Coastal Cliff: This is forbidding territory at best. Craft can not beach here, and attempts to do so result in running aground on the rocks.

Coral Reefs: This area off Zakhara's coast is thick with coral. Travelers must make a seaworthiness check at –20 percent to avoid striking the reef. Reefs are host a variety of sea life, from fish to monsters.

Deep Ocean: The seafloor lies more than 100 feet below the surface. Whenever seaworthiness checks are called for due to weather, travelers in deep ocean suffer a –10 percent penalty (in addition to all other modifiers). For this reason, most craft hug the shore.

Lagoon: A coastal water marked as a lagoon on the poster maps is a warm, shallow pool. It is usually calm, for lagoons are sheltered by a reef, a sandbar, or the arm of an island. The bottom of a lagoon is typically sandy.

Rocky Coast: Submerged rocks and outcroppings dominate this coastline. Large craft (those with a seaworthiness rating) cannot moor here.

Rocky Shoal: This area is dominated by rocky outcroppings. Travelers must make a normal seaworthiness check to avoid hitting a rock.

Sand Bank: This area is dominated by sandbars. Travelers must make a seaworthiness check to avoid beaching their craft, but their ships take no damage. Craft that have been beached must be hauled off or left to float free with the next high tide.

Sandy Coast: Sand beaches and dunes dominate this coast. All craft can be moored here. At low tide, large craft can be beached and cleaned of barnacles.

Seaweed: In coastal waters, this is a spot where seaweed thrives, becoming a thick mass that can snag ships. (DM's Note: Seaweed cuts movement rates in half.)

Shallow Ocean: The seafloor lies 100 or fewer feet below the surface.

Note: Some symbols (a mangrove swamp, for example) appear on the map key but not on *Land of Fate* poster maps. These symbols may be used in future AL-QADIM™ adventures and accessories.

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Chapter 2
Life in Town

Zakhara's people are divided into two broad groups: the nomads, or Al-Badia, and the city-dwellers, or Al-Hadhar. This chapter focuses on the latter. While the nomads dwell primarily in the high, romantic desert plateaus, Al-Hadhar, for the most part, inhabit Zakhara's lowlands and coasts. It is cooler and wetter there, with frequent morning fogs and heavy but brief rains during the monsoon season. Life is not driven by the search for water and green grass, as it is for the nomads. Though irrigation and wells are still required for agriculture, in general, the people of Zakhara's settlements have easy access to water and other basic necessities—things the nomads hold so dear.

Al-Hadhar are sedentary as well as settled. A man often lives in the same house as his father, and in the same community as his grandfather. There is a greater sense of continuity here than in the desert, with buildings and businesses offering proof of man's ability to tame the land. Trade is more established in the settlements, which often have *suqs* (covered markets) in addition to open bazaars. The population is more highly concentrated here than in the wild lands, giving rise to stronger rules of order and law. Zakhara's Al-Hadhar also are more cosmopolitan than the desert-dwellers, for they have been exposed to foreign visitors. Traders from far-off lands rarely venture into the inhospitable desert, but they frequently visit Zakhara's great cities. As a result, Al-Hadhar have gained a broader, more practical outlook.

While they are often referred to as "city-dwellers" in the text below, Zakhara's Al-Hadhar live in settlements of all sizes, from the crudest collection of mud-brick hovels to the golden towers of Huzuz, the City of Delights. From the perspective of the Al-Badia, their lives are the same—soft, sedentary, and restricted. Indeed, the similarities between Al-Hadhar who live in a village and those who live in a great city far out-weigh the differences.

The Daily Routine

A day in the life of a typical city-dweller begins with dawn breaking over the rooftops. Those who are not already awake are roused by the sound of gongs in the minarets and the morning call to prayer. Al-Hadhar who are

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very religious, and those seeking favor of the priests if not the gods, are already at their mosque by this time. For most, however, the morning call involves prostrating oneself to one's chosen deity at home, reflecting upon one's chosen path, and asking for guidance.

No one may be unclean before prayer to an enlightened deity; ablution is required (see "Patterns of Worship" in Chapter 5). Servants of the wealthy carry fresh water to their masters' chambers about an hour before the dawn, while others wash with ewers of water that were filled the night before. Most Zakharan men shave, and they do so at this time.

Breakfast is usually foods served cold: bread, curd cheese, olives, and dates. Among the poor, a few dates may suffice. Those who are more prosperous may eat bread smeared with jams and preserves. During cool weather (or in higher altitudes), the morning menu may include soup. Rich or poor, nearly every Zakharan drinks a bit of dark, bitter coffee with breakfast. After the meal, it is customary to wipe one's teeth with a cloth.

Next, the Al-Hadhar turn to their work. Merchants travel to their stalls or stores; artisans go to their shops, which may be located at the front of their houses; public functionaries go the court or the bazaar to monitor and tax the transactions of the day. Women in the traditional role of wife and mother turn to matters of the household, tending to the children and preparing the evening meal.

In rural areas, the chief occupation is agriculture. In urban areas, the majority of Al-Hadhar devote themselves to weaving, sewing, and selling textiles. Wood is at a premium throughout most of the Land of Fate, so the preponderance of goods in the bazaar are either metal or made of woven fabric.

Two hours past midday, a gong sounds. The *imams* (priests) in their minarets again call the faithful to prayer. In some major cities, it is sufficient to face a mosque with a bowed head and utter a silent prayer. This "half-hearted" effort is frowned upon by most moralists, however, who feel a visit to the mosque is required (at least for men).

After prayer, it is time for lunch, and many of the open-air markets close against the heat of the sun. For those who can reach home, lunch usually consists of the reheated remains of the previous evening's supper, often made into a soup or ragout. Those whose business keeps them away from home may carry with them an onion, dates, and some bread for a midday snack, or they may purchase a bit of stew from a cookshop or a peddler.

The afternoon schedule for the Al-Hadhar is much the same as the morning's. To escape the heat, some engage in business meetings and commerce in the suq, a market sheltered by tarps or rooftops high overhead. For others, the early part of the afternoon is a time of leisure. Some visit the *hammam* (bathhouse). Others relax and enjoy the diversions of the marketplace.

Bazaars and other public squares usually have areas set aside for spontaneous public speaking. Those who wish to teach, harangue, or enlighten the masses may do so quite freely. Travelers tell of great discoveries. Hakimas and dervishes describe their wondrous encounters. On the more practical side, the arrivals of ships are also announced in these open-air forums. All is permitted within reason, according to the laws and customs of the area. Blasphemous, obscene, or revolutionary speech is forbidden, of course., and the city guards remain nearby to handle malcontents. Further, even the most exemplary caliph retains a few priests who are armed with *silence, 15-foot radius* spells, so that heathen speech need never offend the enlightened.

Entertainers are also common sights in the bazaar. These include poets, tale-tellers, musicians, and young dancers. The dancers frequently arrive with their own musicians. Other dancers may accompany themselves with drums, tambourines, or wooden clackers, or by hissing pleasantly as they dance. Most entertainers will agree to perform at a private engagement in exchange for the promise of an evening meal. The truly talented, however, may catch the eye of a high-ranking courtier and be commanded to perform before the local caliph or emir. Thereafter, such entertainers will be able to demand high prices for their performances.

With the approach of sunset, most of those working in the city or town return home for the evening meal. Whatever their standing, enlightened Al-Hadhar wash before eating. Where appropriate, the master of the household says a grace thanking the gods for the family's bounty and good fortune.

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The evening meal is the largest of the day. Among members of the upper class, it may consist of a number of courses, especially when guests are present. A low stool forms the base for a large tray that is brought from the kitchen. The tray is laden with plates and bowls, which are overflowing with meat, rice, and flat bread. A number of courses are served in quick succession—ragouts, pilafs, and soups. If it is a special occasion, wine or koumiss may be served (though not in the Pantheist League). Dessert consists of candies and spiced or sweet coffee.

Al-Hadhar who are not as wealthy eat a dinner of fewer courses, though this is still the largest meal of the day. They devour a good deal more rice and far less meat than the upper class. Though dessert may be skipped, coffee is not.

In a wealthy household, a servant may prepare the coffee after the meal. However, it nearly always the host who actually serves the coffee. (A ruler might appoint someone else to the task, such as a favored son.) This is a ceremonious affair in which the host takes great pleasure and pride.

In traditional households, men dine separately from women, who take their meals in the *harim* after the men have been fed. In more liberal and cosmopolitan areas, men and women eat together. A servant or slave (or the youngest wife in a polygamous household) may bring the trays.

Al-Hadhar rarely use dining utensils. Spoons are an exception, but these are seen primarily in the cities of Hiyal and Qudra, where people eat a good deal of soup. Most food is eaten with the fingers or scooped up with pieces of flat bread. Civilized people always eat with their right hands (unless they have been maimed). To do otherwise is a serious breech of etiquette. Many a rawun's tale begins by describing a guest who eats a meal with his left hand. When his host demands an explanation, the man reveals that his right hand has been rendered useless or completely severed. This, in turn, leads to the story of how the man came to be in his wretched state.

Following the evening meal, family members wash their hands. Then they may gather to tell tales or enjoy small entertainments, often religious in nature. Al-Hadhar who engage in evening crafts or business typically do so at this time.

Two hours after the sun touches the horizon, the gongs of the local mosques sound for the third and last time of the day. This signals the commencement of evening prayer. Citizens are not expected to visit a mosque; evening prayer should take place in the home. Afterward, most Al-Hadhar retire for the evening. Some try to finish handiwork by the light of an oil lamp. The night watch is active, too, patrolling the streets to seek out nefarious characters.

Most Zakharan cities observe a curfew, during which no one is permitted to wander the streets. The curfew begins an hour after the evening prayer, lasting until two hours before the dawn. Those who are found wandering the streets during this time should be prepared to explain themselves—either to the night watch or, later the next day, to a *qadi* (judge).

Through the passage of time and the seasons, the routine of the Al-Hadhar varies little. The sound of the gongs provide a framework and a constant rhythm for their daily lives. Outsiders—especially desert-dwellers—view the Al-Hadhar as clockwork automatons, trapped in the same rut throughout their lives. While it is true that some Al-Hadhar are prisoners of their routine, most find it reassuring that time passes in an ordered fashion. This shows that all is correct beneath the eyes of the gods and under the watchful and beneficent rule of the Grand Caliph.

Leadership

The ultimate spiritual and temporal leader of all enlightened Zakharans is Grand Caliph Khalil al-Assad al-Zahir, Scourge of the Unbelievers. He follows in the footsteps of his father and of his father's father before him, being the eighteenth man in his bloodline to ascend the Enlightened Throne. The First Caliph, who discovered the word of the Loregiver and spread its wisdom throughout the land so many years ago, was hardly more than a boy. (He was also a desert nomad, a fact in which enlightened Al-Badia take great pride.) The city where it all began was golden Huzuz, still the home of the Grand Caliph and his wondrous palace (see "Huzuz" in Chapter 6 for further details).

One step down in the hierarchy of power are the rulers of Zakhara's city-states and tiny empires—

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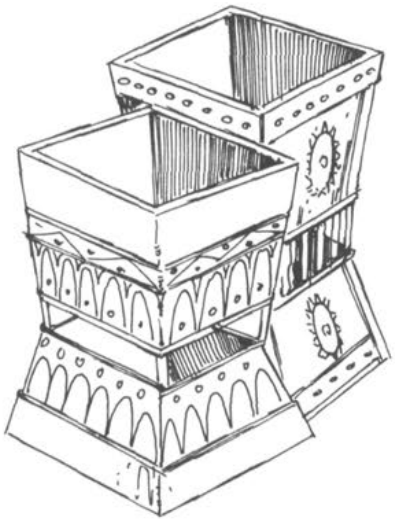

a collection of kings, caliphs, emirs, padishahs, sultans, khedives, and the like. While each pays tribute and taxes to the Grand Caliph, many rule their communities with a surprising degree of independence.

Even lower in the hierarchy of power are the local qadis (judges). Despite their rank, they may have a profound effect on the lives of an average man or woman. Qadis are arbitrators and mediators, pronouncing judgment in virtually all civil and religious disputes. (Only the Grand Caliph or the ruler the qadis serve may override their decisions.)

Qadis are chosen in one of two ways: by the community or by the ruling bureaucracy. The former is a common practice in settlements that have close ties to the desert or the nomads. Qadis chosen by the community are often scholars, merchants, or sages who are greatly respected for their wisdom and strength of character. Because they have popular support, they may hold their posts indefinitely; their positions are essentially permanent.

Qadis appointed by rulers must answer to the bureaucracy. They may not hold their positions long. Those who fail to placate both the bureaucracy and the community at large are swiftly replaced. (For more on qadis and justice in the civilized lands, see "The Law" in *Fortunes and Fates*.)

Land

Zakhara's Al-Hadhar adhere to an established and regular system of agricultural production. Common crops include wheat, maize, rice (where water is most abundant), dates, legumes, and citrus fruits. In the terraced plantations of the Pearl Cities, fragrant lemons and pomegranates flourish on the lower slopes. High above, coffee grows.

Most of Zakhara's agricultural land relies on irrigation; few areas receive enough rainfall to grow crops without it. In some villages, a single waterwheel turned by a donkey may support a small farm no larger than a glorified garden. Near the cities, where agriculture occurs on a larger scale, the grand civil works required to irrigate the fields are more than an individual farmer can handle.

In the Land of Fate, the ultimate and official owner of all land is the Grand Caliph. He is granted this land by the gods in exchange for guiding Zakhara's people along the path of enlightenment, in accordance with Law of the Loregiver. In turn, the Grand Caliph grants ownership of the land to petty shahs, sultans, lesser caliphs, and emirs, who are to manage the parcels granted and provide for the Grand Caliph's people. These local rulers in turn provide grants to still lesser magistrates and worthies (in large areas) or to individual farmers.

A farmer's grant commonly states that the farmer will forward a portion of the crops grown or money raised to the creator of the grant. This money takes the form of a tax. Funds raised in this manner are used to create irrigation ditches, dig new wells, fund public works, and strengthen the city walls when necessary. They are also used to pay the grant-giver's own tax, forwarded to whoever stands one rung higher on the ladder of ownership. In the cities proper, a similar system applies to space in the suq and in the warehouse district, as well as to facilities that are used for manufacturing or artistry. In other words, through a series of grants, the common merchant, business-person, or artisan can obtain a little plot.

Farmers are not bound to the land. They are essentially renters; few of them own the ground on which they toil. They work solely to earn a livelihood, and much of what they earn goes to the land owner.

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Because the land owner must also pay taxes, it is not in his or her best interest to apply too severe a tax, or to insist on receiving full payment when the farmer's yields are poor. Harsh magistrates soon find that farmers are drifting off, production is down—and tax collectors are hot on the magistrates' trails. Responsible magistrates gain enough funds to pay their own grant-taxes with something left over to improve the land, thereby bringing in even more funds. In general, all land "contracts" are flexible and can be rewritten to avoid disaster. Crops may fail, and no one wants to see farmers starve when such failure is beyond their control.

The government of Zakhara provides two types of land grants: temporary and permanent. The temporary grant is enforced as long as the grantee lives up to his or her obligation and pays what is due in taxes. If the grantee fails to fulfill such obligations, the granter may choose to cancel the agreement. Temporary grants also end if the grantee dies, moves on, or ceases to use the granted land in the intended fashion without first obtaining the permission of the granter.

The recipient of a permanent grant is a family rather than an individual. The grant's term is indefinite—it remains in effect as long as the family continues to live in the area or utilize the land. It may be rescinded, however, if the family dies to a man or fails to pay its taxes. This type of grant is less common than the temporary variety. Though a permanent grant typically involves lower taxes, it requires a higher initial payment from the grantee. Because a permanent grant allows a family to build on their land, three or four generations often live in the same city block.

This orderly system of grants and ownership was established under the First Caliph (though the tradition of granting land is much older). A group of advocates and judges—the qadis—arose to handle conflicts between granter and grantee. The qadis' duties quickly expanded. Today these important figures adjudicate crimes against the state, against faith, and against fellow men and women.

Attitudes and Customs

The *Arabian Adventures* rulebook introduces many of the attitudes and cultural themes shared by civilized men and women throughout Zakhara—themes such as family, hospitality, and propriety. For instance, nearly all Zakharans feel that offering hospitality is a matter of honor. In practice, however, the interpretation of these themes frequently varies between the Al-Badia and Al-Hadhar. This section describes the attitudes and ideas that prevail in Zakhara's settlements. While the text below may paint the Al-Hadhar with the broadest of strokes, it is, for the most part, true enough to be representative.

Home

In the villages, towns, and cities of Zakhara, a love of family is closely linked to a love of one's home. To the nomad, "home" and family are synonymous. To the Al-Hadhar, "home" means having roots and continuity—a safe and constant haven that helps give a person an identity almost as much as his or her family does. Even traders who wander the seas on voyages of many years pay tribute to their home town.

"Home" also represents familiarity. Given their sedentary tradition, Al-Hadhar can usually trace some relationship—through blood, marriage, or mutual history and experience—that links them to most of the people in their village, town, or city. While such a thin bond may not open the palace doors to a beggar, it does create a sense of community, and it helps the Al-Hadhar in gathering information, conducting business, or merely getting around in their home town or city.

Hospitality

Like the desert tribes, the people of the cities and lowland settlements believe an honorable person must be hospitable. Al-Hadhar make much of welcoming visitors at the city gates—even strangers. In practice, however, individual city-dwellers do not feel as great a sense of duty toward a stranger as they do toward a guest they know. Often, an Al-Hadhar may discharge his responsibility to be hospitable by directing an unfamiliar or somewhat displeasing face to the nearest mosque or hospice. (Though the man has not welcomed the stranger into his own house, the "town" has welcomed the stranger, and that is what truly counts.) A known traveler, however, is almost always welcomed by the Al-Hadhar.

Guests who have been invited into a city-dweller's

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house receive the same respectful treatment as an honored guest of the Al-Badia. On the first eve of a guest's arrival, a great feast is laid out, often above the means of the host. If the guest remains on the second and third evenings, smaller meals ensue. The atmosphere is festive. The traveler tells of his or her journeys, and family members or hired minstrels provide further entertainment. On the third morning, the guest is expected to depart. The guest may leave a gift of some type if he or she is so inclined, but this is not required.

If a guest has no other business in the city, the host may request assistance with the family business: making deliveries, carrying messages, minding the stall, and so forth. This often exposes the traveler to a number of different professions. Occasionally, a wanderer will arrive in town, become intrigued with a particular craft, and remain as an artisan. Adventurers, on the other hand, have often discovered that immersion in such a routine interferes with their deeds of glory. Rather than become "glorified messengers" for their hosts, they stick to inns and hospices.

As long as a guest is working on behalf of a host, the host is responsible for the guest's actions. In turn, the guest may not shame or endanger the host in any way. The guest may not steal from the host or the host's comrades. Nor may the guest draw a weapon except in defense of the host. Such are the rules of hospitality.

Tolerance

Hospitality is closely related to a city-dweller's willingness to be tolerant. A guest need not share the beliefs or racial heritage of the host to be accepted and welcomed. Indeed, a fellow Zakharan with varying religious or social beliefs—who venerates a different enlightened god or comes from a different part of the civilized world—can count on several evenings of lively discourse but nothing worse. (Visitors to the Pantheist League frequently encounter exceptions to this rule; see Chapter 9.) Though agreement among civilized peoples may be uncommon if not rare, tolerance of other ideas is in effect a Zakharan tradition.

Tolerance does have its limits, however. In general, it extends to those who profess a belief in the words of the Loregiver, a belief in the authority of the Grand Caliph of Huzuz, and a belief in a god or gods, regardless of type. An individual who does not believe in some higher divinity is viewed with suspicion and perhaps even hostility. A lack of belief indicates that a person also lacks the moral anchor that separates civilized folk from barbarians. To the Al-Hadhar, it is better to believe in an antithetical position or a competitive god than to believe in nothing at all. Unbelievers can expect to be denied hospitality by most, to be sent on their way by many, and to be verbally or physically attacked by a righteous few. A wise unbeliever, it can be said, keeps his or her philosophy private.

Respect for Authority

An Al-Hadhar's notion of what is civilized (and what is to be tolerated) harkens back to the recognition of the Grand Caliph's ultimate authority. This is something of a paradox: All civilized men recognize the greater authorities who help bind them into a cohesive realm called the Land of Fate. Yet each city, city-state, or island nation often feels a great independence from the rest of Zakhara—and frequently a sense of superiority.

Distance accounts in part for this attitude. Zakhara's outposts are far-flung. That distance, coupled with tolerance on the part of the Grand Caliph, gives local rulers a fairly free hand in attending to the demands of their communities. The basic independence of the Zakharan peoples also plays a role in establishing this regional autonomy. Like the Al-Badia, many Al-Hadhar are accustomed to choosing their own rulers. If rulers and the authorities who accompany them are unfit, few "commoners" have qualms about removing them. A leader's position is based on an informal contract between the leader and the people he or she leads. The people agree to follow a chief or to honor the ruling of a qadi or a religious authority. In return, the leader is expected to make choices that are wise and fair to the people.

Among the Al-Badia—who choose their sheikhs for their merit and not necessarily for their bloodlines—this democratic respect for authority is at its finest. Among the Al-Hadhar, however, the bureaucracy is well entrenched—overseeing trade routes, collecting taxes, and keeping records that span generations. In

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theory, the Grand Caliph can choose his successor from among his sons, naming the most competent. But for the past five generations, only the eldest son has succeeded his father. In keeping with this tradition, a local ruler regularly chooses his eldest son as successor and grooms him accordingly. (Local rulers who are female, however, have already broken with tradition. Often, they choose whichever successor they deem fit.)

Further down in the hierarchy of power—beneath the courts of kings, caliphs, and emirs—a more democratic form of rulership occurs. On a local level, the qadis (judges) are arbitrators and mediators. As noted above, they are chosen in one of two ways: by the community or by the ruling bureaucracy. The common people frequently view the latter group with suspicion, for the goals of the bureaucracy do not always coincide with the desires of the people. A community often ignores the rulings of judges they don't respect. Qadis who fail to earn this respect are usually removed from office.

Attire

Zakharan attire may vary between regions or cities, but several common themes predominate. Wealth and station are stronger influences than geography. The following description generally holds true for civilized Al-Hadhar throughout the Land of Fate. (See Chapter 6 of *Arabian Adventures* for further definition and detail.)

Among lower-class men, dress is a simple set of trousers with a drawstring waist, a loose-fitting overshirt, and a sash at the waist. Whenever possible, all but the poorest man wears sandals or leather slippers and a soft cap or headcloth; city-dwellers do not relish having bare heads and feet.

People who live in the great cities of Qudra, Hiyal, and Huzuz usually wear turbans—including the lower classes and a handful of fashionable ogres. In cities that feel the press of the desert, where trade with the nomads may be important, keffiyehs and agals are more popular. (In the Pearl Cities, for example, keffiyehs and agals far outnumber turbans on the streets, though the gaudy men of these towns have been known to wear headcloths of silk—something a true man of the desert would not do.) Where men don keffiyehs, the women often wear a shawl draped over their heads. The richer the woman, the sheerer and more ornate the shawl. Cotton is replaced with silk and cloth-of-gold. Among the upper classes, shawls often give way to peculiar ornamental headpieces adorned with brilliant feathers and gems.

The working or middle class—comprising lesser merchants, bureaucrats, craftsmen, barbers, caravan workers, and similar tradesmen—always dress more elaborately than the lower classes. Men wear trousers—either knee or ankle length. Shirts are common, topped by a sleeveless robe or a dolman. The waist-sash is tied over all. Men tuck tobacco and weapons into the sash. They keep their money in a small purse or place it in a folded handkerchief; either way, riches are commonly tucked inside the shirt or robe, in a pocket formed by the sash, just below the breast. Leather stockings attached to the trousers commonly adorn men's feet. Middle-class men also don leather slippers with soft soles. For long trips on foot, harder shoes of yellow leather or even loose boots are common. When the weather is inclement, a caftan is worn over the entire ensemble, again secured by a sash. A turban wrapped around a soft cap is predominant among middle-class males.

Middle-class women usually wear full trousers and smocks. Slippers and overshoes are common on the street, but around the house, bare feet are more popular. A shawl draped over the head completes the typical ensemble.

Among the upper classes—great merchants, court officials and courtiers, highly skilled artisans, and heroes of renown—dress resembles that of the middle class. Each garment becomes more elaborate and expensive, however. Gemstones adorn buttons and buckles, blouses are adorned with golden thread, and caftans are embroidered and decked with small jewels. Turbans are wrapped around a fez instead of a skullcap, making the turban (and the man) appear taller. Women don fine silks, and their jewelry becomes opulent (except in the Pantheist League, where such vanities are considered improper). Both men and women carry bejeweled little purses beneath their robes or dolmans, though people of especially high stature may have servants who accompany them to the market. In that case, the servant carries the purse—an

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activity which may be his or her sole job.

As noted, local variations in clothing exist, usually in the favored colors of the costume or in the choice of headdress. This is especially true in the Free Cities, where middle- and upper-class men prefer fezzes to turbans and keffiyehs. Each city's fezzes and sashes can be identified by their color (see Chapter 7 for details). Ironically, it is the common folk of these cities who wear turbans, wrapping the cloth (often tattered) around their fezzes.

In the Pearl Cities, dyes and fabrics are imported from northern Zakhara as well as from the far-flung East. The vast array of brilliant colors distinguishes the locals, not the cut of their costumes. Pantheists across the Golden Gulf frequently refer to these people as peacocks, with no compliment intended. In contrast, the heavily moralist citizens of the Pantheist League can by identified by their black garb, which befits their somber and self-denying nature.

In the great cities of Qudra, Huzuz, and Hiyal, a cosmopolitan mix of styles can be seen. With the great influx of visitors from other cities and other lands, local traditions have blurred over time. Here one can find a broad array of costumes, from the sweeping abas and flowing headcloths of desert riders to the dark chadors of moralist women. In the great cities of the continent, the kaleidoscopic designs of the Pearl Cities blend easily with the common and simple dress of the caravan drivers and pilgrims.

Island cultures and the remaining small city-states of Zakhara tend to follow the provincial variants of the nearest larger city. Usually, the fashion of these small or isolated settlements is several years out of date. Even Afyal, which boasts a rich trade in silk and other fabrics, tends to cut its outfits in a fashion that was out of style during the Grand Caliph's own grandfather's day.

One group is routinely an exception to the general rules of attire. Adventurers, heroes, and other roustabouts in Zakhara usually dress as they see fit, in whatever manner makes them comfortable. As the Loregiver once said, "Never argue fashion with one who sings the song of the Sword."

Veils

The thickness and placement of veils in Zakhara's settlements tell a great deal about the status and sense of propriety of both men and women. In the Free Cities of the North, across the Great Sea from the barbarian nations, neither men nor women cover their faces. These are defiant city-states whose people feel a rather fragile tie to the Grand Caliph of Huzuz. In the gaudy and festive Pearl Cities, upper-class women wear veils, but these are no more than fashion statements—flirtatious wisps of transparent silk designed to be more alluring than modest. In the League of the Pantheon, by contrast, both men and women are thickly veiled. Indeed, most Pantheist women don the traditional chador of the moralist factions—a garment that conceals their bodies from head to toe, revealing the eyes and hands at most.

Settlements that came to enlightenment late—such as the cities built among the ruins of Nog and Kadar, as well as some civilized islands in the Crowded Sea—observe a grab bag of customs. In some places, men are veiled but not the women. Elsewhere, the reverse is true, or both are veiled, or neither. In Afyal, tradition demands that a woman *have* a veil at all times, but not that she wear it. Her veil simply hangs aside. Thus, what is a symbol of modesty and propriety in some places is little more than a more flirtatious ploy on the Isle of the Elephant.

Customs vary even among the great cities on the continent (Qudra, Hiyal, and Huzuz). According to Qudran custom, neither men nor women wear veils. Such garments are inappropriate frills in the life of a slave-soldier. Further, veils may conceal the facial tattoos denoting each man and woman's mamluk society and rank. Smoky Hiyal and golden Huzuz observe a variety of customs, tolerating those who choose to go unveiled, and respecting those who do. Veils are more prevalent in Hiyal than in Huzuz—which is not surprising when one compares the open atmosphere of City of Delights to the clandestine activities in the City of Intrigue.

Architecture

Throughout most of Zakhara, wood is at a premium. Hardwoods of value must be imported from islands across the Crowded Sea, or must brought overland from the Ruined Kingdoms of Nog and Kadar. Such considerations affect the way buildings are constructed.

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The simplest building material is unfired mud brick, shaped into a one-room building with a roof of woven fibers or cloth and a floor of packed dirt. Easily constructed, this is the poorest form of housing. This style of architecture is most often used for outposts and the houses of poor villagers.

Multi-room buildings of baked clay brick are an improvement upon the previous design. Their roofs are made of branches woven into a mat, which is then clad with clay tile. Woven mats cover the earthen floor, and niches in the wall serve as containers and cupboards. This is the most common form of housing in rural areas and agricultural communities. Such homes often boast a small central court.

In the cities, housing styles improve dramatically. Baked brick is still the building material of choice, but it is usually white-washed on the outside and plastered within. Arched ceilings become common, along with tilework and other interior ornamentation. The house gains simple wooden furnishings, usually just a table and a chest of drawers. Some of these structures rise several stories tall, housing generations of the same family.

Wealthy merchants and officials of the cities can afford to build homes using stone and timber. The interiors are richly tiled, with painted frescoes on the court walls. The central court becomes an oasis of greenery, an extensive garden with flowering plants, pools, and bubbling fountains.

The greatest buildings of Zakhara are its palaces and mosques. These are worked in stone, richly detailed with mosaics and hand-painted tiles, and decked in precious metals that are often inlaid with ornate patterns. Palaces generally bear the mark of generations of rulers and their individual tastes. They are great, complex sprawls of individual buildings, apartments, and private courts.

Mosques of Zakhara's cities are large structures where the faithful can gather en masse. The ground floor of a mosque usually contains one great, single room with arches and pillars soaring high overhead. Most mosques also have minarets: tall, slender towers from which the priests call the faithful to prayer. While the temples of Zakhara's towns and villages may not be as grand, most have the same basic floorplan.

The central garden court is a common theme in Zakharan housing, found in simple abodes as well as grand palaces. (Even the poorest villagers may strive for this luxury, grouping their simple one-room houses in a cluster that surrounds a communal garden.) Life in a house with a central courtyard focuses upon the court. Outer walls have no windows on the ground floor, giving the home the appearance of a small fortress. Even the upper stories rarely have windows facing the street. Inside, however, each of the rooms on the ground floor has a set of glass doors or windows that open onto the court. Rooms of the upper stories overlook the garden court with balconies and verandas.

In its simplest form, the garden court is no more than a collection of potted palms grouped around a cistern. In larger homes, it may be an opulent garden of flowering shrubs and fountains, laid out in a geometrical array. In the palaces, acre-large courts are filled with roses and other flowers, fountains, pools, ornamental trees, and tame beasts. The garden is an oasis for the inhabitants of the house, an island of cool tranquility in a hot and often hostile world.

Another feature common to the settlements of Zakhara is the central marketplace. In the villages, this may be no more than a sleepy open court set aside as the bazaar. In the cities, however, the marketplace often includes suqs—great shopping areas that are sheltered from the sun by roofs pitched high overhead.

Women's Roles

Ni kan skippa detta

In unenlightened times, before the word of the Loregiver spread throughout the Land of Fate, the roles of men and women were simple. Men ruled the household and were responsible for its livelihood. Women kept the house and raised the children. The coming of the Loregiver and the establishment of the Grand Caliphate have broadened women's roles among the Al-Hadhar, but a good deal of the traditional customs remain. The Land of Fate can be said to provide an opportunity for equality, but any town-dwelling woman who desires that equality must be willing to grasp it for herself.

Today, throughout most of Zakhara's settlements, a man is still is responsible for his wife and family, and he is expected to provide a living. The woman is responsible for upholding the man's honor through moral behavior. She maintains the house and rears the

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children. Though an upper-class woman may oversee servants who work in the household, rarely does she relinquish all duties where her children are concerned.

According to Zakharan tradition, women live apart from men in the same household. Women's quarters are the *harim*. (A similar concept for men is the *selama* or *selamlik*.) The *harim* is a separate area where only women and children may go. (The master of the household may enter, but in general, even he does not, or he may ask for permission to enter out of respect for the women's privacy.) In a poor household, the *harim* is no more than a room with a tapestry hung over the door. In the Grand Caliph's palace, the *harim* is a magnificent complex guarded by its own elite unit of eunuch mamluks.

Al-Badian women have always had a high degree of equality with men; the nomads' harsh, impoverished lifestyle demands that every person do his or her part to ensure a tribe's survival and success. This kind of equality has only recently come to town-dwelling women. Nonetheless, today there are bold women among the Al-Hadhar who act as merchants, artisans, and mercenaries—who take up many of the same roles as men.

A woman may receive land grants and maintain them under the same conditions as a man. A woman may choose to serve in the armed forces in times of peace or war. (In contrast, men of suitable age may be drafted into service.) Though certain groups and fellowships exclude them, women have served as deadly assassins, wise viziers, and brave generals. They have been as caliphs, emiras, and sultanas. The tales of Zakhara are filled with women who were wiser, bolder, and more capable than the males in their own families.

Perhaps it is telling, however, that a woman has yet to hold the title of Grand Caliph (though several have acted as regents for their sons until they had reached the age of majority). Nothing in the philosophy of the Loregiver prevents a woman from being Grand Caliph, but the men of Zakhara are still resistant to crossing this final threshold.

Marriage

Marriages are essentially contracts between two families, arranged by parents even while the children involved are young. In many regions, the "best" marriage is still a traditional one: the union between a girl and her first cousin on her father's side. If two young people without this relationship desire a love-match, the parents may still approve—provided station, faith, race, and profession do not stand in the way. In general, a civilized man can marry beneath his station, but a woman does not. A "bad match" may voided by parents or authorities. In poems of the rawuns, such a parental impediment is often the start of evening-long tales of how the lovers are split apart and pass through all manner of adventures before they are at last reunited and married.

As in many areas of their lives, heroic and adventurous men and women may ignore tradition and do pretty much as they please. Or perhaps it is the other way around: to avoid an unwanted marriage, an average city-dweller suddenly becomes a free-wheeling, far-ranging adventurer.

If a woman is independent (usually defined as capable of making her own living), even if she marries she is considered a separate legal entity under the law. She can hold property apart from her husband. In



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contrast, a woman who is dependent on her spouse must share any property she attains during her marriage—with the exception of the amount she brings with her to the marriage. A husband may always have property or possessions that are considered separate from the wife's.

Polygamy

Polygamy—the practice of having more than one spouse at a time—is rare but tolerated in most of Zakhara's settlements. The traditional arrangement—a husband with more than one wife—is more common. Four wives is the unofficial maximum. According to legend, the first sha'ir had four genie wives, and Zakharan tradition reflects that legend. In general, only wealthy men can afford more than one wife (in part because every new wife may bring forth more children). Many upper-class men feel one wife is sufficient, however. The first wife must approve of any additional wives in the household. If she agrees to share her husband, she still retains authority over the household.

Some men keep courtesans (as do some independent women), but only with their wives' permission. While Zakharan law does not prohibit this practice, it doesn't endorse it, either. Tradition demands that a man be married before taking a courtesan; to avoid marriage entirely is now considered shameful.

In the past, Zakhara's Grand Caliphs rarely married. Instead, they maintained large *harims* of courtesans and concubines, some of whom were gifts from lesser rulers. This allowed them to neatly bypass the "four-wife" limitation of proper society, and to only recognize offspring who showed promise or worth. Both children of courtesans (free-born courtiers) and concubines (slaves owned by the Grand Caliph) have risen to power in this fashion. Today's Grand Caliph does have four wives, however, in addition to a large *harim*. This practice has helped endear him to the common people.

While a polygamous marriage generally places all wives under one roof, a second tradition is common in many trade cities on the Golden Gulf, especially the Pearl Cities. In this arrangement, each wife lives in a different port of call; she works as an independent woman, selling the goods her husband conveys. These wives know of each other, but they may never meet. Upon the death of their spouse, each fully owns the trading post she operated during the marriage. The moralist governments of the League of the Pantheon have outlawed this practice in their cities.

Polyandry—the practice of having multiple husbands—is a custom on the isle of Afyal. This practice arose because many of Afyal's men are traders, who are often far from home. A woman is allowed to take many husbands in the course of her life (though always with consent of the first). She owns and manages the trading company for which all her husbands work. This system has resulted in a tight circle of female-dominated mercantile houses. Their combined power rivals that of the padishah of Afyal himself.

Children

The children of Al-Hadhar are raised in the women's quarters until they reach the age of five. At this time, boys leave the *harim* and live with the men in the *selamlik*. Separate instruction begins for both boys and girls at age five. Tutors (if they can be afforded) teach the children about matters of language, faith, culture, etiquette, and law. In wealthier families, these early years of instruction help determine where a youth's interests lie and to which livelihood he or she is best suited. Girls begin to reveal if they are more interested in living as independent women—thereby gaining an education similar to that of the boys, which is more socially and economically based. A girl who is destined for a traditional role may focus on household skills and the "gentle" arts. For the middle class, artisans, and the poor, such a choice in education is a luxury; any training for boys or girls takes place in the family trade, be it pot-making or caravan driving.

If men or women of a cultural group wear veils, the boys and girls begin to follow suit at age 12. A boy is commonly considered a man, and a girl a woman, at age 16. They are allowed to marry at this time, though their unions may have been arranged years earlier.

Divorce

Prior to the establishment of enlightened civilization, a man of the coastal cities could divorce his wife merely by declaration. She would be then sent packing

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to relatives or friends (taking whatever she owned before the marriage with her). Under the Law of the Loregiver, women have greater protection. Both parties must agree to the divorce, or one partner may ask a qadi for a ruling. Should the qadi rule against such a split, the pair must live together and attempt to reconcile for the next year before asking again. A woman who is granted a divorce may rejoin her original family or become independent (though a woman does not need to be divorced to be independent in the Land of Fate).

Slavery

Slavery is a fact of life in the Land of Fate. It is most common among the Al-Hadhar, but it is not a dominant feature is most areas. Mamluks, of course, are an exception, but their roles as soldiers and administrators make them unusual. A person may become a slave in one of three fashions: by debt, by breaking the law, and by lacking civilization.

People who have incurred a great debt and are unable to pay it off may be enslaved and sold, usually to the group they owe payment. Such enslavement lasts until the debt is considered paid through labor or until the slave's family finds sufficient funds to settle the matter. A debtor's relatives are never enslaved in his or her place, and children who are born to debtor slaves in Zakhara are considered free.

Those who have seriously transgressed Zakhara's laws may also be enslaved for their crimes. The term of enslavement is life. In numerous cases, however, rulings have been reversed in response to a slave's sincere penance and good deeds. Again, a criminal's family may not be enslaved as a result of the crime, though in a sense they are punished, for their honor is stained. (Some families avert the whole issue of slavery by doing away with the one who committed the crime.) Children born of slaves who are criminals are considered free. The slave's owner often raises them as his or her own.

Finally, some people in Zakhara are enslaved simply because they are uncivilized. They lack understanding and acceptance of the Loregiver's law and, therefore, are in need of firm enlightenment. Natives of various islands, certain mountain tribes, and unbelievers who wander the Haunted Lands are often captured by slave-masters and sold into servitude. The Law of the Loregiver prevents a civilized person from being enslaved in this fashion, but a slave may later be enlightened and still not gain his or her freedom. Slavers who are truly unscrupulous may sometimes capture pilgrims and claim they were heathens at the time—asserting that the ways of civilization came later, spurred by the desire to escape slavery. Children born of such slaves remain slaves only if they fail to embrace the Law of the Loregiver.

Slave-owners have a number of responsibilities under Zakharan law. They are responsible for the health of their charges, and failure to comply may result in fines. Slaves who are starved and otherwise abused are poor workers who may eventually rebel; qadis have been known to grant their freedom in light of their masters' immoral conduct. Slave-holders are also responsible for the actions of their slaves; if a slave damages another person's property, the slave-owner is held accountable. Slave-holders may not cast out or sell a slave due to illness or age, and they must provide for slaves who can no longer perform their normal duties. However, slave-owners may free healthy slaves at any time, and some owners have granted whole groups their freedom. A slave may receive the owner's permission to marry a free spouse, and thereby also become free.

While it is true that the law requires slave-owners to treat their slaves well, the mamluks—a much more tangible power—are the greatest enforcers. The most elite military forces in Zakhara, mamluks are themselves slaves, property of the Grand Caliph. They were captured as youths by other mamluks and trained to become perfect, loyal warriors. The fortified city of Qudra on the Great Sea is ruled by mamluks. Slave-holders who make port in this city must be honorable and fair or suffer a price, for the mamluks do not tolerate anything less.

Qudra, in fact, is home to the largest active slave market in Zakhara, which the mamluks run. Companies of mamluks roam the mountains near the Free Cities and beyond, seizing youths from the Hill Tribes. Youths captured in such raids who turn out to be less than suitable for mamluk training are offered in the slave market as personal servants.

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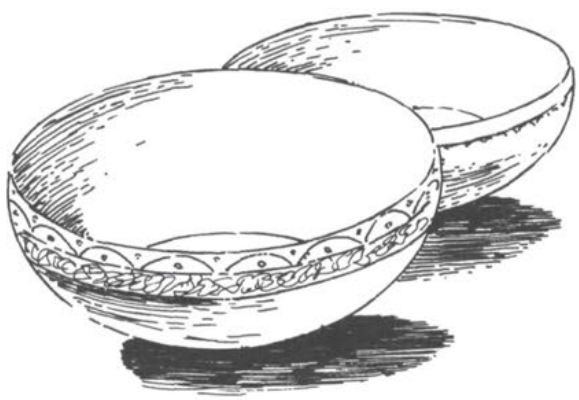
Pantheists also promote slavery—and not just the enslavement of debtors, criminals, and the unenlightened. With provocation, they are willing to enslave anyone who does not agree with their five-power Pantheon.

The island of Afyal engages in slave-trading, too, impressing criminals into servitude and raiding unenlightened islands to the south for potential slaves. Lastly, the raiders who hail from the Ruined Kingdoms and the Haunted Lands often engage in slaving, and they tend to be very liberal in determining who is not civilized and therefore suited to slavery.

Though it does not endorse it, the legal code throughout most of Zakhara permits slavery. For this reason, slavery is tolerated in Huzuz, Hiyal, the Free Cities, and the Pearl Cities. No official "slave market" exists in any of these locales, however. Slaves who are brought to Huzuz are often "enlightened." Whenever possible, they are also purchased and freed. Officials of the Pearl Cities tolerate a fair-minded visitor who owns slaves, but, unlike the people of Huzuz, they make no attempt to interfere. For its part, Hiyal has no official slave market. It does, however, maintain a shadowy black market that deals in slaves—including slaves who have been captured illegally.

Most of the clans of the High Desert do not recognize slavery. If they capture slaves in a raid, they free them. Tribes of the Haunted Lands keep no slaves themselves, but they treat captured slaves as booty to be traded. The Corsair Domains are strongly abolitionist, and slaves who fall into their hands will be freed and recruited to serve in their ships.



Nonhuman Races

Most of the enlightened residents of Zakhara's cities are human, but not all of them. Almost all sentient humanoid races who recognize the nature of Fate, the Loregiver, and the sovereignty of the Grand Caliphate are considered members of the community (if not wholeheartedly embraced as such). The differences between them do not present a major problem, nor do most humans deem this multiracial mix to be worth much contemplation. How one acts—not how one looks at birth—is most important in the Land of Fate.

All Zakharan cities have nonhuman residents. In most major settlements, nonhumans account for about 10 percent of the population. Qudra's population is about 15 percent nonhuman. In Hiyal, the figure rises to 20 percent. The League of the Pantheon—while supposedly tolerant of other races—fails to attract many nonhumans. In fact, no Pantheist city has a nonhuman population that surpasses 5 percent of the total.

Who are the nonhumans of Zakhara's Al-Hadhar? In most cities, they include a smattering of elves, dwarves, halflings, gnomes, orcs, kobolds, ogres, hobgoblins, goblins, hill giants, lizard men, and gnolls. Port cities may also host a small community of mermen and locathah. Though they are rare, other races may also be accepted members of the population, provided they do not pose a threat to the rest of the community. Such unusual residents must be intelligent enough to understand the nature of Fate and the Loregiver. In addition, they should not be phenomenally powerful.

Intelligent or not, some nonhuman races are entirely unsuited to Zakhara's settlements. Those who are continually and unrepentantly evil (such as sahuagin and yuan-ti) are never invited to dwell among the enlightened. Further, individuals who are very rare in numbers (such as larger giants), who are

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wildly nonhuman (such as beholders), and those who by nature seek to dominate others (such as mind flayers) are never counted among the Al-Hadhar.

With few exceptions, the nonhumans' traditions, faiths, occupations, and attitudes differ little from those of humans. The two groups live and work "cheek to jowl." Natural abilities do encourage some races toward certain professions; ogres and giants, for example, make excellent porters and warriors. But it is not unusual to find an elf working as an apprentice (or a master) in a foundry, a dwarf serving as a potter or gardener, or an orc serving as a nursemaid. In fact, one of Hiyal's master jewelers is a stone giant, who can often be found crouched at his bench, working with fine-tipped, giant-sized tools.

The Law of the Loregiver does not forbid nonhumans to marry outside their race; nor do most individual faiths. Still, this is one matter in which race does matter. Marriage between humans and other races is frowned upon. It is also extremely rare. Most interracial marriages can never produce children—and a love of family is firmly embedded in Zakharan culture. Further, most marriages are arranged by parents, who wish to enhance their families' standing. Given these considerations, interracial marriages that do occur are matters of deep and abiding love. Few such newlyweds can remain within their former circles; usually the couple must leave their families far behind to seek a life together. With this stain upon the families' honor, the lovers' relatives might well hunt down the couple and slay them.

Orcs and elves are exceptions to the rule; marriages between orcs and humans as well as elves and humans are relatively common, perhaps because such households can include children. (Of course, orcs and elves almost never marry each other; in general, both groups find the concept ludicrous.) The union of elves and humans is much more prevalent than that of orcs and humans. The *harim* of the Grand Caliph has often included elves; through the years, half-elvish blood has been mixed into the line of the Enlightened Throne several times. Furthermore, some noble female elves keep human men as courtiers and concubines in *selamas* (counterparts to *harims*).

In general, the Law of the Loregiver recognizes no difference between humans and other races; a man is a man, a woman is a woman. Before a qadi, for example, a dwarf's standing equals that of any other enlightened person. Nonhumans may be punished and enslaved in the same manner as humans. In some small communities, elves and dwarves serve as qadis elected by a human population, who acknowledge the value of their long lifespan and respect their accumulated wisdom. (This is another case where a natural ability or quality has guided a nonhuman race toward a particular profession.)

Military units, mamluk societies, holy slayer fellowships, merchant houses, navies, shops, church hierarchies—all these can count nonhumans among their numbers. No enlightened faith in Zakhara excludes nonhuman members. Zakhara's armed forces also include nonhumans among their ranks. The emir of Qudra, the most respected mamluk of his city, is a dwarf. While foreigners might find this unusual, Zakharans speak of the emir's race matter-of-factly, as if they were saying, "He has red hair." Race is descriptive, not defining.

War and Al-Hadhar

Formally, the Land of Fate is at peace with itself and its surroundings. It is a unified community, ruled with wisdom and enlightenment by the Grand Caliph. No major opponents of the Enlightened Throne lurk within its lands. The ajamis of the distant North and East do not pose a threat, for they are separated by great oceans and mountains.

Reality, however, is less pretty than these official court pronouncements. Zakhara has a plethora of lesser rulers—caliphs, emirs, sultans, khedives, khans, padishahs, and sheikhs. Which of these is superior to the others depends on the person you ask. Most are local rulers acting as if they are the supreme power in their own region, even though they recognize the ultimate authority of Huzuz. As a result, these small powers frequently become embroiled in petty wars with each other. When they're not warring with each other, they may do battle with the small barbarian factions on their borders.

As a rule, the cities of Zakhara are well defended. All maintain a common militia and a watch. The former is called upon in times of crisis to repel

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enemies. The latter is a permanent force of soldiers serving as palace guards and city patrols. In addition, a number of Zakhara's cities have their own standing armies, navies, or both. Some cities retain the services of mercenaries and mamluks for protection. Most military units consist of infantry and cavalry, with an occasional magical unit or an airborne support wing. Siegecraft is not common in the Land of Fate, and the natives of Zakhara generally lack the war engines of northern nations.

The text below offers an overview of Zakhara's city-states and their forces. Chapters 6 through 10 provide additional detail.

Afyal: The Isle of the Elephant boasts a healthy, prosperous navy that protects its trade routes in the Crowded Sea. This navy acts better than any fortification to repel raiders. It turns its magnificent face toward the lands of the far-flung East, displaying the power and wealth of the Land of Fate. Afyal also has a large standing army, one of the few able to use elephants as mobile and effective "machines" of war. (The islanders' skill with these beasts is uncanny. So are the abilities of the beasts themselves.) On the debit side, the padishah of Afyal is mad, and he uses his armies the way a small child uses toy soldiers. His current plan: the conquest and colonization of Sahu, Isle of Serenity.

Hiyal: The great, smoky city of Hiyal is ringed with a wall. The city can be entered through just four great gates, each of which is guarded by the local sultana's hand-picked guards. Hiyal's greatest protection is not its wall, however. Many desert raiders have breached this relatively low barricade only to discover Hiyal's best defensive structure: the squalid slums that ring the city. In this crowded maze, horses can scarcely move. Hopelessly stalled, the raiders cannot reach the treasure-troves at the heart of the city—Hiyal's suqs, mosques, and palaces.

In addition to the slums, Hiyal has a more clandestine defense strategy. Striking from the shadows is very much the way of this city. This practice—plus the fact that various factions of Hiyal regularly conspire with and against the sheikhs of the Haunted Lands—helps ensure the city's overall safety.



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Huzuz: The City of Delights, gem of the Golden Gulf and Suq Bay, looks like a ripe fruit for the plucking. It lacks the forbidding walls of Zakhara's northern holdings. Further, Huzuz is open sprawl of parks, easy to cross. It has a number of gates, but these primarily serve as a means for regulating trade and guaranteeing taxation; the gates would do little to repel a serious invader.

The strength of Huzuz lies not in its steel or its stone but in the authority of its Grand Caliph. Moreover, it lies in the hands of the genies who recognize the Grand Caliph's sovereignty, choosing to protect the city in his name. Twice twenty years ago, in the age of the current Grand Caliph's grandfather, a rebellious desert sheikh led a great endeavor against Huzuz. The sheikh reached the plains before the city, where his army was met by a lone sha'ir. The sha'ir warned the sheikh to turn back. In response, the sheikh rode down the sha'ir and slew him. At that moment, a host of genies appeared: djinn, dao, efreet, and marids, leading an army of jann. The sheikh's army was destroyed to the last rider. The land was decimated. Most of that damage was the result of the genies, who competed to see who among them could slay the most riders, using the most impressive displays possible. Since that bloody occasion, no one has challenged the magical protection of Huzuz.

League of the Pantheon: The Pantheist Leauge maintains a united military force, heavy in footmen. This army is collectively called the Sword of the True Gods. The Sword's purpose is to protect the religious leaders of the League from the incursions of tribesmen from the Haunted Lands and rivals in the Ruined Kingdoms. In reality, the Sword exists as a living extension of the League's stated religious policy—spreading the word of the Pantheon and denouncing the lesser, "incorrect" gods. Occasionally, units are sent far afield, into Nog and Kadar and to the islands of the south. No direct action has been taken against the decadent caliphates of the Pearl Cities and Afyal, but most feel it is only a matter of time.

Pearl Cities: The Pearl Cities of the Golden Gulf and the Crowded Sea are primarily merchant and trade cities. They gain their armies the old fashioned way—they buy them. Mercenary units, naval units, desert clans, and untethered mamluk organizations are pressed into service as need demands. Usually, such a "need" calls for a limited action, over which the caliphs and sultans of the Pearl Cities have full control. Their main foes are the sporadic desert raiders from the High Desert as well as each other, with a looming threat from the League of the Pantheon across the Gulf.

Qudra and the Free Cities: The tiered city of Qudra is the greatest fortress in the Land of Fate. Its stalwart walls have been strengthened by magic, and they present a forbidding face to the northern barbarians across the Great Sea, reminding them of the strength of the Grand Caliph. Qudra is ruled by mamluks who elect an emir from among their mamluk societies. The main foes of the city are the Corsair Domains and rebellious rulers among the nearby Free Cities.

Much to the annoyance of Qudra, the Free Cities regularly fight each other. This is primarily low-level warfare, taking the form of raiding. Each of the city-states knows that a large-scale military action would certainly prompt a reaction by the mamluks of Qudra. It might also trigger a unified attack by the other Free Cities. For this reason, the rulers of the Free Cities expend a great deal of energy on political intrigue. Each strives to convince Huzuz (and, more importantly, the generals of Qudra) that his or her city deserves to be left alone and granted free rein (while all the others deserve to be watched more closely). Ultimately, these intercity scuffles are trivial. Greater threats exist. On land, the Free Cities must continually fend off raiders from the Hill Tribes of the Furrowed Mountains. At sea, the Free Cities must battle the chaotic and cagey pirates of the Corsair Domains, who wreak havoc with trade and travel.

Ruined Kingdoms: The cities built upon the ruins of Nog and Kadar are home to a mixed bag of petty tyrants. Some of these tyrants seek to rule with the blessing of Huzuz. Others seek to regain the glories of their predecessors—savage rulers from a distant and long-buried past. This a land in which a man can raise an army by breakfast and see it destroyed by nightfall. Hiyal, Huzuz, the Pantheon, and even Afyal meddle in the politics of this region. A general in the forces of Kadarasto, Rog'osto, or Dihliz is certain to receive gifts and supplies from at least one of these would-be influences. Quite often, the same general accepts the gifts of more than one.

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Chapter 3

Life in the Desert

The deserts of Zakhara are vast and foreboding. Temperatures frequently climb above 130 degrees during summer days and plummet below freezing during winter nights. No other region is as cruel, yet to the desert nomads (Al-Badia), no other place is as divine. Many a wanderer has remarked on the perfection of a cool desert morning: a cloudless sky, glittering dunes, and no other creature to be seen for miles, except perhaps a fleeting gazelle.

Most of the Zakharan desert is not dunes, however, but an expanse of dry, rocky plains. Here and there are fields of volcanic debris—great, broken, black expanses. Trees, where they exist, are stunted and brown. (Tamarisk is the most common wood.) Thorny shrubs and grasslands dot the region, turning green during winter and spring, then concealing their life behind a brown, crackling facade. In the height of summer, a few hardy succulents and sprigs of milkweed still grow on the dunes, but the gravel plains are barren.

Zakhara has two great deserts: the High Desert and the Haunted Lands. Both are situated on plateaus that rise to an average elevation of 2,500 feet. Between them lie the waters of the Golden Gulf, Suq Bay, and the Al-Tariq Channel ("The Passage"). At the heart of these deserts, however, virtually no permanent water source exists—just a handful of precious wells and oases.

A lack of water is not the only danger the desert holds. Mirages entice the unwary travelers toward waters of sheer illusion. Sandstorms scour men and beasts and bury encampments. Winter storms fill the sky with lightning, flood the hollows, and rip tents from moorings. Worst of all, perhaps, are the black clouds of locusts that strip a pasture bare to the last blade of grass before the nomads and their herds arrive.

The Daily Routine

A day in the life of a nomad family begins early, when days are still relatively cool. Two hours before the dawn, a daughter of the family rises and begins to make *leben*, a sour milk or buttermilk. First, she fills a goatskin with milk and hangs it from a tripod. Then she rocks the skin back and forth, often singing, with the sloshing *leben* providing a rhythm. Cultures inside the

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skin eventually thicken the milk. If she uses sheep's milk, she will have butter left over. Camel's milk has virtually no fat, so it yields neither butter nor cream. Nonetheless, sour camel's milk is an Al-Badian staple.

An hour before dawn, the rest of the family rises and washes, using sand when no water is available. If the tribe is enlightened, all family members face Huzuz and kneel upon the ground, praying for guidance and good fortune. Breakfast follows—usually just a handful of dates and some milk for each person. Many families share a wooden bowl filled with *leben*, passing the bowl until it is empty.

If the tribe has sheep and it is not summer, a boy assigned to shepherding leaves the camp in search of good grazing ground. (During the summer months, grazing is poor or nonexistent, and the tribe stays near an oasis or town.) Having found a good spot, the boy plants his staff on the ground and hangs his aba upon it. The sheep, notoriously stupid, mistake the robe for the boy and are less apt to wander. This allows the boy to doze or hunt for jerboas (desert rats). If the hunt is successful, the shepherd roasts his catch and enjoys a snack. Otherwise, he eats only the dates he brings with him each morning.

Nearly all Al-Badia own camel herds. At night, the animals are tethered or hobbled. In the morning, a few dates and kind words encourage them to rise. Most camels range freely during the day, seeking their own fodder. As evening approaches, a call from a boy or girl brings them back to camp, where they know fresh water and more dates await them.

Most women attend to chores during the day: milking animals, caring for young children, spinning wool, weaving cloth, and mending tents. Girls and boys gather brushwood for the fires. Older children may take a camel to fetch fresh water—a task that can take all day if the source is far.

Unless it is summer, men go hunting—setting their *saluqis* (hounds) after the gazelles or setting their falcons after hares and desert bustards. Not every nomad has a saluqi, but most men (and some bold women) have at least one falcon, which they raise, name, and treat almost as a pet. Other prey of the hunter includes the *dhabb*, a tasty but elusive lizard about two feet long, which is shot with a bow and arrow. No matter what the prey is, however, an enlightened nomad always utters a prayer to Fate and the gods before slaying it, giving thanks for the animal and asking that its death be quick and merciful.

When game is scarce (a common situation), the hunters train hawks or patrol the area around the camp, reading the desert for signs of recent events. Where a town-dweller sees nothing, a nomad sees all—what kind of camels have passed, what they were carrying, how many men accompanied them, and more. Warriors may also go on raids (see below) during the day. Some, exhausted by events of the previous day or evening, simply relax in the shelter of the tent and share stories.

As evening approaches, the shepherds and the hunters return to camp, and the family gathers round the fire for dinner. This is the usually the second meal of the day; most Al-Badia eat no lunch. If a family is fortunate, the evening meal includes bread, rice, and a bit of meat. To make bread, the cook throws dollops of unleavened dough directly onto the fire. After it has baked and then cooled slightly, the eater scrapes off the ash and sand, and then dunks the bread into a bit of clarified butter before devouring it. Al-Badia consider this a treat because flour is expensive. Al-Hadhar claim that a nomad's bread tastes worse than dirt.

The nomads of Zakhara observe a number of customs during meals. Like Al-Hadhar, enlightened Al-Badia eat only with their right hands; to do otherwise is shameful. Belching is a compliment to the cook. The back wall of the tent is the proper tool for wiping greasy hands—the more grease marks the wall shows, the better the family's fortune.

The nomads stay gathered round the fire after the sun has set, telling stories and singing songs. Small children retire to women's quarters and fall asleep listening to the talk outside the tent. In most Al-Badian tribes, men and women do not segregate themselves during the evening; in others, the segregation is hardly meaningful, since only a thin curtain divides them. (For a look inside a typical Al-Badian tent, see Card 12 in this boxed set.)

Nomads are lean and strong. They rarely sit on their haunches as the town-dwellers do. Instead, they crouch, resting their entire weight upon their heels. A town-dweller finds this difficult, but to the sturdy nomad, it's a natural position. Al-Badia sometimes

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recline upon carpets and lean on their camel saddles within the tent, but outside, around a campfire, everyone sits in the manner described. (This position helps avoid another breech of etiquette: showing the soles of one's feet to a guest.)

Two hours after sunset, enlightened Al-Badia wash themselves with sand or water, say their evening prayer, and retire for the night. For safety, new lambs are tethered inside the camp (if not inside the tents). Other animals are gathered behind the lambs. Only the person assigned to the watch stays awake—sitting by the fire to guard against wolves and other dangers.

Migration

During the summer months, when the grasslands are bare, Al-Badia establish crowded camps beside oases or wells. Their tents offer little relief from the sun; temperatures inside frequently top 110 degrees. For most Al-Badia, this is a miserable experience—not simply because it is hot, but also because nomads despise being settled.

This is a good time to seek diversion by doing business in a village or town. The nomads sell livestock, wool, woven textiles, curd cheese, and perhaps some roasted locusts (considered good eating by many). In turn, they buy rice, wheat, dates, and weapons. If the tribe is wealthy, they also purchase trinkets and finery.

With the onset of autumn, a bit of rain begins to fall in the desert. Spirits soar, and the tribe packs up the camp—tents, food stores, cushions, ornate carpets, and thin mattresses stuffed with cotton, in addition to personal belongings. The migration begins. For eight months, the tribe will move from place to place, breaking camp every week to 10 days. (This is a matter of sanitation as well as restlessness.) With the coming of winter, nights grow windy and cold. In higher elevations, a bit of snow even falls to the ground, melting as the sun breaks free of the horizon.

With the onset of spring, grazing is at its best. Families camp far apart, seeking what is otherwise a luxury: privacy. The camps remain close enough to hear the warning blast from a neighbor's horn, however. Each family knows the position of their neighbors, and they feel honor-bound to protect them. Tribes arrange their tents in a widespread circle, making raids by the enemy more difficult. If raiders penetrate the circle, they're surrounded—which usually leads to their defeat.

Each tribe migrates within its own territory, or *dirah*. A typical dirah covers 200 square miles. Boundaries are unofficial, and alliances between neighboring tribes are common. This helps ensure their mutual survival; if the grazing in a tribe's own dirah is poor, they must seek it elsewhere. When enmity does exist between tribes, each fiercely protects their own territory—and, most importantly, its wells.

Raids

To the Al-Badia, theft of livestock is not sinful—it's the mark of brave, successful men. Women may also take part in raids; those who do earn a reputation as great warriors.

Al-Badia routinely travel over a hundred miles on camelback to conduct a raid. Along the way, they seize anyone who might be able to warn the enemy of the impending attack. If the target's location is close, and the raiders own horses, then both mounts are used, with one horse backing each camel.

Provided all goes well, raiding is a quick affair: a swift assault just before the break of dawn or a harried attack during a dust storm. For honorable tribes, death of the enemy is not a goal; they raid only to acquire. Warriors fight valiantly hand-to-hand, but those who are weaker feel no duty to fight to the death. Surrender is not dishonorable. To show their desire to go on living, embattled warriors simply place their thumbs between their teeth and extend their fingers toward their attackers. (No white flags are raised.)

The Al-Badian code of honor demands that women who do not fight be left alone. In their tents, they are usually quite safe, for only a dishonorable nomad would harm them. Pots, carpets, and food stores are suitable for looting, but anything a woman wears on her person (as much as possible, during a raid) is considered off-limits.

Many Al-Badian tribes also conduct raids against distant villages and outposts. Unfortunately, town-dwellers do not observe the same rules of etiquette in battle as honorable nomads. As a result, these raids are

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often bloody affairs for both sides, creating an enmity and hatred that do not fade quickly.

Blood Feuds

Despite the nomads' rather civilized views on raiding, fights to the death do occur. Known as a *blood feud*, such a conflict may arise when a tribe believes one of their members has been wrongly killed. Or a matter of honor may trigger the feud. Whatever the cause, the conflict escalates into a deadly exchange, with each side killing a member of the other until the conflict is resolved.

Sheikhs of warring tribes can rarely end a blood feud between them. A third, neutral sheikh must mediate. He or she begins with a ceremony of "digging and burying." Each side in the feud draws lines in the sand—one for every tribe member killed. If the death toll is uneven, the side with fewer lines must pay a "blood price" (usually a combination of camels and money) to offset the other tribe's loss. The neutral sheikh strives to set a price that preserves the honor of everyone involved.

Sheikhs

Al-Badia look for four things in a sheikh: courage, wisdom, generosity, and luck. The importance of the last trait should not be underestimated. A lucky sheikh is blessed by Fate, and all members of the tribe would like to share in that good fortune.

While it is true that many sheikhs are the sons of former sheikhs, in the High Desert neither a family connection nor a sheikh's sex are as important as the qualities listed above. In the Haunted Lands, the position of sheikh usually passes to a sheikh's eldest son, but he is not guaranteed to keep it. No Al-Badian tribe will support a sheikh who is unworthy of respect. Over the course of time, nomads have banished and killed many leaders who were deemed weak, stupid, or dishonorable.

As noted above, Al-Badia expect their sheikhs to be generous. That, in a large part, determines a sheikh's honor. It is the sheikh's job to ensure that no tribe member goes hungry or cold while others have food and warmth. The basic necessities—food, water,

The Coffee Ceremony

Throughout Zakhara, from the poorest Al-Badian camp to the most luxurious palace, coffee-making is the measure of a good host. If a woman rules the house (or tent), she may make the mocha, but this is typically a man's job.

Nowhere is the preparation and drinking of coffee more ceremonious than among the Al-Badia. A prince or sheikh may allow a slave to prepare the coffee and an honored son to pour it. But the average Al-Badian host does it all with great flourish and pride.

A nomad's coffee-making begins when the host sits before a little hollow in the sand and lights a fire. Camel dung is the fuel of choice. Next, the host spreads out his coffee equipment—tiny cups; mortar and pestle; utensils for stirring; and a shallow metal dish with a long handle, designed for roasting the beans. The host also sets out two coffee pots—one sooty and battered, the other shiny. All the while, the host asks his guests how they are, but he never inquires directly about their business or wealth, because that would be rude.

Next, the host places some dried coffee berries in the mortar and begins to pulverize them. The pestle rings like a bell as the mortar strikes it. When the berries have been thoroughly crushed, the host puts them in the roaster and holds it over the fire. As soon as the beans are brown but not burnt, he sets them aside to cool. Then he pours a little of the previous day's coffee into the black pot, adds water, and sets the pot on the fire. When the mixture boils, the host adds the freshly roasted coffee and stirs. A helper (his wife or son) brings a little cardamon, which he quickly pulverizes and adds to the still-boiling pot.

When the coffee is as black as oil, the host transfers it from the battered pot to the shiny one. After allowing the grounds to settle, he at last begins to pour—a ceremony in itself. The host must hold the pot in his left hand; to do otherwise is a serious breech of etiquette. He must take the first swallow himself, proving that the brew isn't poisonous. Then he commences serving. According to custom, he pours for the eldest guest first.

After drinking coffee, a town-dwelling host often passes round a censer filled with frankincense, allowing each guest to inhale the scent and bask in its fragrance. Among the nomads, only sheikhs observe this custom. Once the censer has been passed, guests are expected to leave or retire for the night. Town-dwellers, who have frequent visitors in the afternoon, light the incense after guests have been present as briefly as 15 minutes. Al-Badia consider that practice extremely rude; incense is reserved for long, languid visits.

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clothing, and housing—are every Al-Badia's right. A nomad has only to need these things, and, if it is at all possible, he or she will receive them.

Al-Badian Hospitality

Like all civilized Zakharans, nomads believe hospitality is a matter of honor. Though a prince or a caliph may offer more gifts and a greater banquet, none can approach the Al-Badia's generosity of spirit. A nomad's everyday meals are meager until an guest appears; then the family may prepare a feast that surpasses all they have eaten for weeks. A sheep is the main course of preference, with the fatty, succulent tail being handed to the guest of honor. If a sheep is not available, the family may slay a camel instead.

It is a fairly simple matter to gain a nomad's hospitality, but some rules of etiquette must be observed. For example, it is bad form to approach the back of a nomad's tent. Instead, travelers must appear within full view of the front. Further, it's extremely rude to approach a tent directly. Travelers are expected to stand a good distance from the tent and wait to be noticed, busying themselves with their camels or horses. Then the man or woman of the tent goes out to extend a formal invitation. If a guest is important, the hostess hangs her gayest frock at the front of the tent, like a banner, to celebrate the guest's arrival.

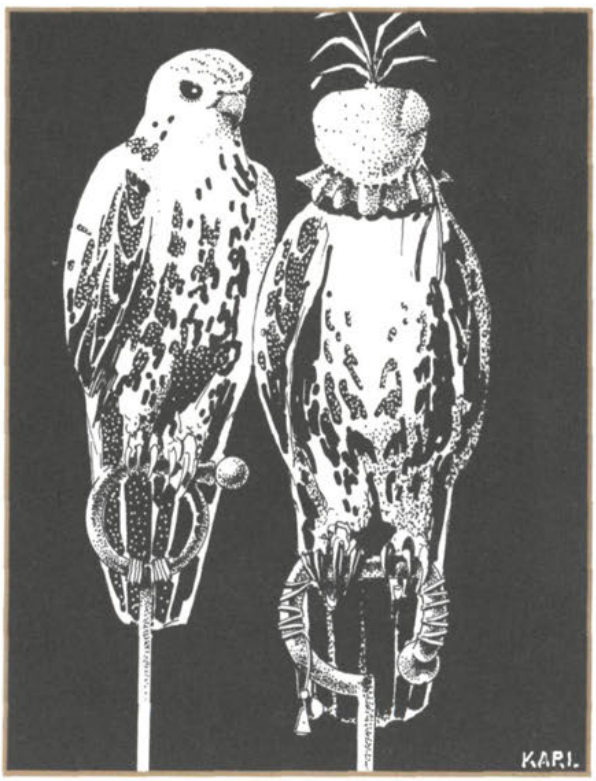
Guests who approach during the day and are just passing through can expect a bit of *leben*. Those who seek shelter at night receive dinner, coffee, and a place inside the tent. A polite traveler never offers money in exchange for lodging; to the nomad, that's an insult. Instead, a traveler who wishes to show thanks may offer a gift before departing. As is the custom throughout Zakhara, guests should not remain beyond three days. One exception exists: important guests of a sheikh are permitted to stay for up to a week if the invitation is extended. The sheikh offers gifts, and the guests generally reciprocate.

Attire and Vanity

In contrast to a sheikh or well-to-do Al-Badia, many nomads own little more than the clothing on their backs. When a robe becomes so tattered that it falls off, they get a new one. Washing clothes is a luxury for those who do not know the value (or scarcity) of water. While sand can scour bodies, it does little to clean fabric. Consequently, a nomad's clothes are usually filthy. No one seems to mind the smell.

Men among Al-Badian tribes wear either a loincloth, simple trousers with a drawstring waist, or both. Over that, most wear a long, buttonless shirt that hangs almost to their ankles, like a narrow smock or nightshirt. An aba (robe) tops the shirt. If the man is well to do, the front of the aba may be trimmed with embroidery. Rarely is it silk, however; most Al-Badian men consider such "softness" shameful. A keffiyeh and agal (headcloth and cord) complete the attire.

Women's attire is much the same, but it may be more gaily colored. Many women loosely drape a shawl over their heads instead of a wearing a keffiyeh and agal. All don as much jewelry as possible, adorning themselves with silver, gold, turquoise, pearls, and glass beads—from headpieces and nose rings to ankle bracelets. The wealthier the woman, the greater her finery. Few Al-Badian women wear veils. (In fact, in



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some tribes only the men are veiled, wrapping their black headcloths across their faces.) Finally, a nomadic woman wears one other item of interest: a little key, which opens a chest containing her personal treasures. She wears the key openly, on a chain or silken rope around her neck.

The Al-Badian woman enjoys many vanities. Her kohl-rimmed eyes are practical as well as alluring; the black lines help shield her eyes from the sun. Henna stains her hair, hands, and feet. She brushes her teeth with a bark that reddens her lips. Perhaps her most notable vanity is tattooing. Forehead, cheeks, chest, calves, hands, feet—all may be adorned with attractive and simple patterns of dots, lines, and cross-marks. Each tribe's women favor a unique set of designs.

Marriage and Family

Monogamy is a way of life among the Al-Badia. Few nomads can afford more than one spouse and family. Moreover, aside from a handful of well-to-do sheikhs, few of them think polygamy is worth the inevitable hassles. Parents typically arrange marriages, favoring a union of cousins. By tradition, a girl is bespoken to her first cousin on her father's side. But if she objects strongly (and preferably quietly), she may convince her cousin to seek the hand of another. Should she fall for the wrong man—an enemy, a slave, or a man from an inferior tribe—they'll have to elope and abandon both their tribes to be together.

A groom always gives his prospective bride a *jehaz*—gifts that include clothing, money, livestock, and the all-important "marriage bed" (cushions and carpets). These are hers to keep forever. Because the livestock multiply, and because her parents may have already given her a few camels, an Al-Badian bride soon owns a sizable herd.

Divorce is a simple matter among the Al-Badia. Nomads completely ignore the supposedly "enlightened" ways of the Al-Hadhar. If a man wishes for a divorce, he simply says so, repeating his desire three times aloud. If a woman wants a divorce, she returns to her parents' tent. Her husband may try to woo her back with gifts, songs, and ardent pleas. If she resists, he'll eventually tire of her absence and agree to divorce her. No shame is involved for either of them, and both usually find new spouses with ease. After a divorce, children over the age of eight live with their fathers, but their mother may visit them freely. In fact, she often becomes friends with her former husband's new wife, offering tips on how to handle him.

Like Al-Hadhar, desert-dwellers value a large family. But the desert's harsh life means that many children die at birth or during infancy. This sorrow, coupled with the nomad's fierce moral code and love of life, makes children precious to the Al-Badia.

It is nearly every new wife's desire to become pregnant. When she does, it's cause for celebration in the tribe. Her husband remains especially close and watchful until the baby's birth. For 40 days thereafter, however, tradition demands that she and the baby sleep alone, preferably in a separate section of the tent.

Like town-dwellers, the nomads believe that children are especially susceptible to the evil eye. As proof against this sinister force, Al-Badian mothers attach a small blue bead to the baby's cap and mark each cheek with a line of kohl. Further, almost every mother places a steel dagger at the baby's side while the infant sleeps. If the child lies upon a leather mat on the ground, the mother sticks the dagger in the earth beside the baby's head. In a cradle or hammock, the unsheathed dagger simply lies alongside the baby, who is swaddled so snugly that the risk of injury is slight.

For the first few months, an Al-Badian mother carries her baby about in a leather cradle, which she slings over her shoulder. Thereafter, the baby spends most of its time in a little hammock suspended near the front of the tent. This arrangement makes sure visitors can admire the family's latest addition. It is customary for a newcomer to place a coin or trinket in the baby's fist. Supposedly, this brings the child luck. Certainly, it brings the mother a bit of good fortune, for she quickly retrieves the gift. (After all, if the baby were to die choking, no one would view the gift as a good luck charm.)

Camels

Volume One of the *Monstrous Compendium* provides combat statistics for the dromedary, or single-humped, camel—the type found throughout the Land of Fate (see the page titled "Animal, Herd").

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From an Al-Badian standpoint, the brief description in the *Compendium* could scarcely begin to pay justice to this wondrous, beloved creature.

The camels of Zakhara are brown, black, or white. Golden brown is the most common color. White is the rarest and most prized. In any market, a she-camel that is young, healthy, and as white as a pearl commands the highest price.

An Al-Badia's greatest desire is to begin his or her adult life with a dozen camels. If most of the camels are female, their number will double in a few years. Nomads owning 40 or 50 healthy camels consider themselves rich, regardless of the herd's color.

Owners give all their camels names. Some beasts even come when called; others simply hiss and spit. Nomads are very fond of their camels, but it has nothing to do with their disposition. Camels, as a rule, are ornery and mean—especially males. Rather, the nomad loves the camel because of its practicality. The camel's uses are seemingly endless. It carries water bags, cargo, and riders. When it falls to the ground, unable to travel farther, it may be slain to provide meat. The female, especially valued, gives milk, a staple of the Al-Badian diet. The camel's hair can be shorn and mixed with the hair of sheep or goats to make wool. The camel's dung is a treasured fuel, creating embers that are especially suited to heating coffee. When the dung has dried until it is virtually odorless, it becomes a powder that protects a newborn nomad's skin.



The urine of a female camel has as many applications as a con-artist's snake oil—but in this case, the substance works. Urine serves as a weekly shampoo for Al-Badian women, especially when water is scarce. Wondrously effective (though not exactly fragrant), this "water of the camel" cuts grease and filth with ease. More importantly, the urine kills a variety of pesky head vermin (which are especially problematic in summer). As an added benefit, the urine lightens hair, enhancing any subsequent application of henna. On a more practical note, urine also serves as an eyewash and a purgative.

Camels are extremely well suited to life in the desert, enduring hardships that quickly kill the average horse. The animal's broad feet are designed for plodding easily across the sand. And its heavy fringe of eyelashes help protect its eyes from the sun and windborne sand.

Most importantly, a camel's need for fresh water is minimal. It can go without water for two to four weeks during winter and early spring, when grazing is good. The desert's green plants satisfy the camel's need for water. It is a misconception, however, to believe that a camel can survive for long without water *and* fresh fodder. When the spring days grow warm, a camel begins to need watering about once a week. During the height of summer—when Zakhara's deserts are as dry as tinder and ash—camels must be watered every two days to remain healthy. A camel in top condition can survive two weeks without water and food, but few nomads would purposely risk so valuable a life for a foolhardy trek.

Nomads can tell the health of a camel by the condition of its hump. If the hump is firm and full—weighing about 25 pounds on its own—the camel is healthy. On the other hand, if the hump is small and shrunken, the camel is weak. Contrary to popular belief, a camel's hump is not a storehouse of water—it's mostly fat. Yet by metabolizing this fat, the beast converts a good portion of it to water.

A dehydrated camel is bony. If it has grazed a bit recently, its hump looks about half full (a "15-pounder"). The animal's body makes every effort to

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conserve water, limiting urination and sweating, and even slowing breathing. When the parched camel at last reaches water, it can suck in as many as 30 gallons in just a few minutes' time. Gradually, its entire body will regain a plumper, healthier look. The hump will not enlarge again until the camel has resumed vigorous grazing or feeding, however.

In addition to green fodder, camels need salt. The shrubby brush that grows near the mineral flats and lakes can satisfy that need. If a camel does not have access to this brush at least once every 10 or 12 days, however, its owner will hand-feed it salt.

Like the nomads themselves, camels are extremely fond of dates, though the beasts devour the stones along with the fruit. Al-Badia give dates to the animals as bribes or rewards for good behavior. Nomads also feed their camels a mixture of dates and milk in preparation for a long or difficult trek.

The camel's need for water and food plays an important role in determining an Al-Badian tribe's mobility. During the winter and spring months, a tribe can camp many miles from a well or oasis, using the camels to haul water each week. By filling leather skins and buckets, Al-Badia collect water for the people as well as the beasts in camp. Camels need only an occasional drink when grazing is good, but the lambs, dogs, horses, and goats drink freely from a leather trough outside the tent.

As previously noted, camels can be ornery creatures. When urged toward some awkward task, even a particularly docile camel will hiss with annoyance. Most show their opinions by spitting—deftly aiming a parcel of green, slimy cud at the person who raised their ire. A male camel takes his anger one step further: he bites. This is rarely a playful nip; the jaws of a bull camel have been known to break a man's forearm with a single chomp. For this reason, few male camels serve as mounts. Most bulls, in fact, are best suited to stud service, after which they may end up as the main course during some festive occasion.

Camel meat is tough and rather coarse, but tasty. One camel can serve an entire tribe. The hump is tender, and nomads consider it the best part for eating. Guests are always offered their fill of the hump before anyone else—a practice in keeping with the Al-Badia's intense desire to be hospitable.

Travel by Camel

Al-Hadhar have dubbed the camel "ship of the desert." True, this beast is the most common conveyance across a seemingly endless sea of dust and sand, but that's not the reason for the name. Camels are called ships because they sway back and forth beneath their riders. To the uninitiated, this endless wobbling can cause nausea, much like the swaying of a boat beneath ocean swells.

Most Al-Badia mount a camel by bending its neck toward the ground, using it as foothold, and then swinging up into the saddle. This demands experience in handling camels as well as acrobatic talent. Those who haven't mastered this technique (or acquired the camel-riding proficiency) must force the camel onto all fours, and then quickly climb onto the beast. The rider's weight signals the camel to rise.

Camel-riding is in itself a physical challenge. Some nomads ride with their legs astride. Most kneel, however—even when the camel is at a full gallop. This feat takes exceptional balance and endurance.

When a tribe is on the march, moving from one camp to another, nomads rarely ride their camels. Instead, the camels are loaded and the nomads walk beside them. Women are an exception. Frequently, they ride in large, elaborate litters. (Card 11 shows such a litter, as well as a common saddle.) The more elaborate the litter, the more important the woman.

Camels walk at an easy pace of about 4 to 6 miles an hour. Pack animals that are fully laden travel only half as fast. While carrying a rider, camels can trot at speeds of 10 to 13 miles an hour, and maintain that pace for an entire day. At a full gallop, most camels reach a maximum speed somewhere between 15 and 20 miles an hour. Exceptional mounts—prized during raids—can attain speeds as high as 30 miles as hour.

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Chapter 4

Desert Tribes

Beyond the walls of cities, beyond the bands of orchards and fields, lies the true Burning World of Zakhara. Here, in regions known as the High Desert and the Haunted Lands, creatures must live with the world on its terms instead of their own. This chapter describes the people of Zakhara's great deserts—those who are strong enough to survive there, and those who are bold enough to thrive.

Tribes of the High Desert

The people of the High Desert are mostly enlightened nomadic tribes. They are the "classic" desert riders—passionate, romantic, and powerful. In spring, they travel in search of the seasonal grasses. In summer, they camp near wells and oases, many of which are unmapped. But in the very heart of the desert, not even the nomadic tribes and their mounts can survive, for here lies the Genies' Anvil (*Saddan al-Jinn*).

Nine major tribes lie scattered throughout the High Desert. These are described below. Hundreds of smaller tribes, bands, and raiding parties make their home here as well. Even the major tribes aren't found together in full numbers, save at gatherings for water or trade. These tribes are broken into clans, each of which consists of several families. The clans of the major tribes are often larger than some of the smaller tribes, numbering hundreds of individuals and thousands of livestock (horses, goats, camels, and sheep).

House of Asad (Children of the Lion)

The House of Asad is an enlightened tribe that numbers some 5,000 men and women, divided into 20 clans. They claim the Jamal Oasis as their own, though they permit other enlightened nomads to use it. Asad is one of the wealthiest tribes in the High Desert, and it is blessed with strong camels, fine sons, and beautiful daughters. The people of Asad are proud to the point of arrogance. They are easy with their friendship but also easy to offend.

The Leader: Sheikh Najib bin Kamal al-Asad (hmF/dr/20), a lean, middle-aged warrior hardened by a life in the desert, is the most powerful sheikh in the entire High Desert.

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Important Individuals: Of greatest significance to the tribe is the sheikh's wife and chief vizier, Alia al-Jamal umm Nabil (hfW/sam/17). Alia is a beautiful middle-aged woman, soft-spoken but thoughtful and forceful. She is as much a leader of the tribe as is her husband, and her words carry the same weight as his. As such, she negotiates with other tribes and makes rulings in Najib's absence. The bond between husband and wife is so strong that, even though the sheikh is successful enough to have additional wives, he chooses not to.

Nabil bin Najib (hmW/dr/4) is the eldest son of Najib and Alia; he inherited his father's strength and his mother's wisdom. Still a youth who has just attained his majority, Nabil is taking over some of his father's traditional duties, including the yearly journey to the city of Tajar for trade. Nabil is bright, friendly, and trusting—all traits that can lead to trouble when dealing with less than honorable people.

House Bakr (Clan of the Young Camel)

Most of the House Bakr, an enlightened tribe, now lives in and around the city of Tajar, where Sheikh Ali al-Hadd rules. However, some tribe members chose to remain true to the desert life; most have married into other tribes. The others, a core of some 500 members of House Bakr, still remain in the High Desert, determined to carry on the tradition of their people.

The Leader: Sheikh Ali al-Hadd (hmF/dr/16) leads the House of Bakr, the majority of whom live in the city of Tajar (see "Tajar" in Chapter 8 for more information).

Important Individuals: The remnant of House Bakr still living in the High Desert is led by Ajan bin Najon al-Yaqud (hmF/dr/15), the son of Sheikh Ali al-Hadd's sister and, as such, the nephew of Tajar's sheikh.

Ajan's father, Najon, was part of the vanguard that led the rebellion against the old sultan who ruled Tajar. When Kori al-Zafiri (father of Ali al-Hadd) took the throne, he offered Najon a position as captain of the cavalry. That night, Najon had a vision of a beautiful marid, crying and lamenting that only sadness would follow House Bakr in the city of Tajar. The next morning, Najon refused the position and returned to the desert with a handful of people, including his son Ajan. Najon promised to aid the sheikh and his descendants should they ever need assistance.

Najon told his son Ajan this tale, and Ajan has watched the fruit of Tajar wither with the passing years. Ajan's tribe wanders the south-central region of the High Desert and often pursues bandits who prey on the caravan route to Akota. Ajan believes that the rest of the tribe is in danger as long as it remains confined by walls and fettered by civilization. He prefers his freedom, living by the will of Fate. Periodically, he sends representatives and messengers to the sheikh in Tajar to report on the clans, but he will not go there himself. Ajan, like his father, has had his own vision. It has told him that if he enters Tajar, he will never leave the city alive.

House of Dhi'b (Sons of the Wolf)

The House of Dhi'b numbers some 4,000 enlighened people, most of whom are herders and craftsmen. Sheikh Anwat al-Makkar maintains several raiding clans of 200 or more warriors each. These clans prey on the caravans traveling through the south and south-central region. The sheikh has allied with or against most of the other major tribes over the years, depending on the circumstance. He and his warriors rode with Kori al-Zafiri to cast out the old sultan of Tajar, but now Anwat's raiders attack the caravans serving Kori's son, Ali al-Hadd. Conversely, Anwat has offered Ajan (the leader of the Bakr people remaining in the High Desert) the service of his household and warriors.

The Leader: Sheikh Anwat al-Makkar (hmT/sl/18) is a wizened graybeard, so thin and gaunt that his nickname is "Tarkib al-Azam" ("skeleton"). Sheikh Anwat is a sly old man who has outwitted his enemies for many years, and he uses the qal'ats of the mountains as personal fortresses and treasure vaults. It is said that he has a dozen such hideouts, concealed by magic, throughout the south-central mountains of the High Desert.

Important Individuals: Anwat's chief advisor, Mamun bin Harun bin Hamid (hmW/sh/10), is the grandson of Anwat's first vizier, the legendary Hamid al-Garib. Mamun commands genies and jann but would never dare question the ruling of his sheikh, whom he regards with equal amounts of fear and respect.

The Sons of the Wolf use a number of contacts and go-betweens to unload their raided goods, but their most

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notable middleman is Takira min Hiyal (hfT/mr/12), a trader out of the City of Intrigue. Twice a year Takira takes a caravan of dried fish, weapons, and jewelry and returns with an odd assortment of spices, woods, and other riches not normally found in the High Desert. Takira meets Anwat and his raiders at one of the qal'ats the old skeleton uses as a temporary base.

House of Dubb (House of the Bear)

The House of Dubb, an enlightened tribe, lives in the southwestern corner of the High Desert, hard on the borders of the Al-Suqut Mountains. There are about 3,000 tribe members, broken into nine separate clans. Most live by herding, but some clans do a thriving business among the Realm of Bleeding Trees, where they harvest aromatic gums. The tribe is on excellent terms with the people of the city of Ajayib, and has aided Ajayib's caliph in her raids against the mountain people.

The Leader: Sheikh Yaqub al-Quwwat (hmF/dr/13) is a tall, proud, powerful man who would frankly rather see himself as the leader of an army than a collection of clans that gather sap and raise goats. Still, one must play with the tiles that Fate provides.



The young sheikh drops everything to adventure with a few choice companions. These "hunting trips" are usually filled with excitement (and a few casualties). As a result, much of the tribe's duties have fallen on the shoulders of Yahun al-Hattab, the tribe's kahin (see below). Lately, the sheikh has been smitten with the beauty of Ajayib's caliph, who is known as the most beautiful woman in the Pearl Cities (if not all of Zakhara). This attraction spurs the sheikh to extra efforts. He has no wife or children and, if a certain kahin is correct in his predictions, will not survive long enough to acquire them.

Important Individuals: Yahun al-Hattab (hmP/k/10) is one of the wise elders of the tribe, though he now doubts his wisdom when he recommended the heroic, headstrong, and impulsive Yaqub as sheikh. The lad had acquired a number of abilities under his belt while adventuring, and he had a reputation for courage and coolness in the face of danger. What Yahun didn't count on was that Yaqub as sheikh would have the same traits as Yaqub as adventurer—and would bolt off at a moment's notice. As a result, the venerable Yahun is left picking up the pieces. He would hate to admit his recommendation was wrong, but already some of the clan chieftains are complaining about Yaqub's leadership (or lack thereof).

House of Nasr (People of the Eagle)

The House of Nasr roams the northern reaches of the High Desert and maintains the Desert Mosque, a haram (holy site) of great importance to the desert tribes. The enlightened tribe numbers some 3,000 people (split into 30 clans), and all are known for their hospitality and prowess in weapons—none more so than their sheikh. Every year a single clan is entrusted with protecting the Desert Mosque. The clan members work with the kahins and mystics at the mosque.

The Desert Mosque is a huge, domelike sphere of volcanic rock buried in the ground. The mosque is arranged so that, in facing Huzuz, one also faces the rock. Dedicated to no specific faith, the mosque is maintained not by hierarchy priests, but by kahins and mystics. The site became holy when Yusef al-Nasr, the first of desert dwellers, received enlightenment there. He promised

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that the enlightened peoples of the desert would hold that great land in the name of the Grand Caliph.

The Leader: Sheikh Nadia umm Fadela (hfF/dr/15) has led the tribe for the past 20 years. Although a female leader is uncommon, it is not without precedent in the High Desert. Furthermore, the tribe members have no more resistance to following a capable, independent woman than they would an independent man.

Sheikh Nadia is extremely capable. Some of her feats include protecting the Desert Mosque from savage defilement at the hands of an ajami raid and singlehandedly rescuing her eldest daughter from the hands of Qudran slavers. Nadia is the daughter of the previous sheikh and has outlived two husbands.

Important Individuals: Fadela bint Nadia (hfF/dr/8) is the eldest daughter of the sheikh and Nadia's likely successor. Fadela is much like her mother in her strength and force of will. She is also visibly different from her comrades. Her hair is dark red, the shade of dried blood, which gives her the name "Fadela Bloodmane" (Fadela Urf-al-Dam). The true name and nature of Fadela's father is in question. Although Nadia insists that Fadela's father was Nadia's first husband, rumors persist of outlanders and jann. Such hearsay is whispered only well outside of Bloodmane's hearing, for whoever her father is, Fadela inherited a hot temper from him.

Fadela is well known for her adventurous spirit, which led to her capture by mamluk "recruiters" as a barbarian (her hair color led them astray at first, and her curses "confirmed" their suspicions). Nadia broke into the tower of Qudra's emir, Hatit Abd al-Wajib, for a "chat" with him on the matter. Identities were revealed, the matter was settled, Fadela was reunited with her people, and the mamluk captain responsible was assigned to a naval unit. The House of Nasr has since enjoyed good relations with the slave-soldiers of Qudra.

Not as fortunate as Fadela is Nadia's son, Amar bin Nadia (hmW/sam/6). The youth has been overshadowed by his stronger, better-liked sister, and this has made him bitter and cynical. By rights (ancient traditions from before the enlightenment), the eldest son should be considered before the eldest daughter for inheritance, but such is not the case with the House of Nasr. The fact that Fadela is more competent than her brother is all the more reason for her position as heir apparent.

A third major figure to the Nasr is Angaloran of the Desert Mosque (hmP/k/14), a kahin. He maintains the haram for all followers, and the haram is protected by one clan of the Nasr and a mystic group known as the Dome Dancers. Angaloran is a quiet, retiring individual, given to stories and parables. His two favorites are the enlightenment of the desert peoples at the mosque (of course) and the tale of Nadia breaking into Qudra to rescue Fadela.

House of Sihr (Jann of the High Desert)

In the heart of the desert lies the Genies' Anvil, an inhospitable place where no mortal can survive for long. It is the home of the enlightened janni tribe of the High Desert. Although jann normally choose to live far removed from mere mortals, the Genies' Anvil is their land. The interloper who travels there had best have good reasons for coming to see the jann.

The number of jann in the House of Sihr is unknown. Those living in the desert have never been counted by the likes of men. Further, some members may be serving genie masters in faraway magical lands. The tribe itself is divided into a number of clans, each with its own sheikh. These clans wander, herd, trade with other enlightened tribes, and occasionally raid settlements. All sheikhs claim allegiance to Amir Bouladin (see "Leader" below).

Whether the jann should be considered a major tribe is a point of argument to some—but not to the desert tribes or the jann themselves. One scholar of Tajar put forth publicly the idea that there were only eight major tribes and discounted the janni tribe. The next morning he was found tied up and hanging from a minaret. Individual jann are often playful and adventurous, but in large groups they tend to be respectful, diligent, and *very* dangerous.

The Leader: Amir Bouladin al-Mutajalli, His Resplendent Magnificence, may the gods themselves speak highly of him (a janni of 10 HD, maximum value with vizier abilities), is the official ruler of the jann of the High Desert. However, each sheikh commands his or her own tribal house, which consists of 11 to 31 jann. The amir is noble, honest, and ruthless with those who oppose him.

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Amir Bouladin has pledged to aid Sheikh Ali al-Hadd and the city of Tajar in its time of need. A janni representative has appeared before the Grand Caliph himself to pay Bouladin's respects and to pledge the loyalty of the jann.

Important Individuals: The sheikhs of the janni tribe all consider themselves to be first among equals and superior to their fellows. This fact should be remembered among those who seek the blessing of the jann or a boon from their ruler. Flattery, thick and heavy, is the meat and drink of these petty sheikhs. Their amir, while wise enough to see it for what it is, enjoys adulation as well.

Bouladin's eldest daughter is a janni named Jamala who, like Fadela Bloodmane of the House of Nasr, is hot-blooded and eager for adventure. She is a janni of 8 Hit Dice, and she has vizier abilities as well as the ability to shapechange. She may masquerade as a mere mortal to accompany humans during their travels. If she does, she will fight to aid them. Should anything happen to her, however, both her father and the full power of the janni tribe will turn against the miscreants. Fate protect those who are so foolish!

House of Tayif (Ghost-Warriors)

The House of Tayif has at most 1,000 unenlightened members who follow their sheikh, Mouli al-Ajami, in the High Desert. The tribe's numbers seem much greater, for the people roam the entire length of the desert. Raids conducted in the name of Mouli have struck caravans outside Qudra and resin-farmers in the faraway Realm of Bleeding Trees. Almost superhumanly fast, Mouli and his followers survive solely through raiding. They seem to have no set pattern or purpose other than to damage established trade. The other tribes believe that only serpents and vultures must deal with Mouli, for they have no contact with the raider except in combat.

The followers of Mouli wear white in battle, and they are always veiled. No Ghost-Warrior has ever been identified, save for the leader and his vizier.

The Leader: Sheikh Mouli al-Ajami (hmPal/mb/14), a foreign-born interloper, has brought together a large number of smaller tribes and unenlightened clans to rebel against the Grand Caliph. Intelligent and charismatic, Sheikh Mouli has freakish blonde hair and blue eyes. The man learned to hate civilized people because of the torture he suffered at the hands of the Qudran mamluks. Escaping into the desert, Mouli gathered a group of raiders, matruds, outcasts, and dispossessed persons. He led them in lightning raids against oases, trading posts, wells, and civilized lands.

Mouli is a powerful leader—so much so that his followers attain fanatical status while in his presence. There are rewards in Qudra, Hiyal, and the Pearl Cities for Mouli al-Ajami. Indeed, even the Grand Caliph has heard of this outlander's exploits.

Important Individuals: Known today as "Fadahl the Crippled," Vizier Fadahl al-Araj (hmW/so/18) was once Fadahl the Enlightened, a sage in the city of Hiyal. He ran afoul of Hiyal's sultana and had his legs crushed for his troubles. Reduced to begging, Fadahl was apparently befriended by Mouli himself during Mouli's escape from Qudra. Fadahl's knowledge of the land and his hatred of his former rulers aided Mouli in surviving the desert's hardships, and the pair now form the core of leadership of the Ghost-Warriors. Fadahl may almost always be found atop a flying carpet, a present of Sheikh Mouli to his accomplished companion.

House of Thawr (Children of the Bull)

The enlightened tribe of Thawr has dwindled to some 1,500 people. The Children of the Bull have been lured away by the prospect of employment and adventure in the Pearl Cities. The Thawr land is currently in the southeastern spur of the desert, where the tribe supplements trade by raiding the border regions for horses and supplies. These raids were originally minor and inflicted little injury or damage to either side. Now, however, the Pearl Cities are striking back hard against the raiders. Losses among the tribe have been heavy, and the tribe is thinking of retreating into deeper desert. Their other option is to migrate north and seek shelter with the Bakr in the city of Tajar. So far, the leader of the Children of the Bull has refused these plans. Instead, he speaks of a cleansing wind that will resolve all conflicts.

The Leader: Sheikh Ali al-Sadid (emF/dr/17), already old when he took on the responsibility of leading his people, has ruled wisely for 80 years. To his misfortune, during the last five years his wife and four

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of his five children have died. His three youngest sons died at the hands of adventurers and raiders out of Gana. Their deaths have plunged the sheikh into a black mood, and in this mood he has had visions. These visions are of the desert winds rising, driving a great force of sand to the south to smother the soft young cities. The winds rip apart the stone walls of the cities and tear the flesh from the unworthy men and women who take shelter behind them. The sands leave only a blanket of desolation, where true beings may ride at their own will, with only Fate to guide them. Sheikh Ali is slowly going mad from his visions.

Important Individuals: Ali's only surviving child is his daughter Alia bint Ali (hefP/k/9). She is disturbed by her father's words and actions. He has ordered the tribe (and those adventurers who could be hired) to scour the region for old ruins and ancient treasures. He seems to be searching for a particular item, the nature of which he will not reveal. Alia's father has been consumed by sorrow, and he seems lost to others.

With great regret, Alia has begun speaking with the clan chieftains. If the sheikh is no longer capable of leading his people, someone must step forward and take the reins of command from him. Alia has volunteered to do this herself if necessary. She has also sworn to lead the people back into the desert where they will be safer from Gana and the other Pearl Cities. The response from the clan chieftains has been mixed. As the losses from raids grow and the sheikh seems more consumed by his madness, conflict seems likely.

House of Uqab (League of the Vulture)

The House of Uqab is made up of outcasts from the desert and their descendants. They consider themselves enlightened, but their respect for the Grand Caliph is slight and their reconciliation of the gods fleeting. Like the creature they pattern themselves after, they are scavengers, living off the success of others. They raid caravans and steal horses. Adventurers who encounter them in the desert will not find a welcome—only daggers and arrows.

There are likely no more than 2,500 members of the House of Uqab scattered in small bands throughout the desert, but their numbers grow with each attack and each telling of the tale thereafter. The Vultures recruit savages and mountain tribes to aid in their attacks, but the tribe lets these outsiders do most of the dying so that they can gather most of the treasure.

The House of Uqab is regarded among the civilized tribes as unworthy of acknowledgement. Most other desert-dwellers would rather call upon Fate than admit they had been defeated by this miserable tribe.

The Leader: Sheikh Hanjar al-Haqara (hmT/mt/18).

Important Individuals: Hanjar's chief aid is a flame mage named Solina al-Ganij (hfW/fm/15), a former member of the Brotherhood of the True Fire who turned traitor to her comrades. The brotherhood had planned to assassinate the sultana of Hiyal. Solina turned her comrades in, only to find the sultana's men chasing her as well (the sultana decreed there should be no survivors). Solina fled into the desert, where she was rescued by Sheikh Hanjar. A cowardly, greedy young woman, Solina will remain with him as long as he brings her jewels and gems and wonderful items. She longs to return to civilization, however. She hasn't figured out yet how to make this return without the brotherhood coming after her.

Tribes of the Haunted Lands

The Haunted Lands are home to ghosts and mournful winds. The region they encompass is larger than the High Desert but has even fewer inhabitants. In ancient times, the land was dominated by warring kingdoms, but they are long gone. The remaining people, a few of whom are enlightened, are nomads or wild beings such as jann.

The peoples of the Haunted Lands are more scattered than their brethren in the High Desert. There are fewer enlightened major tribes and a greater number of small, savage bands of nomads who act as raiders and slavers. Of prime value is the overland route from the Ruined Kingdoms to Talab in the Pantheon, leading on to the independent city of Halwa. Smaller routes provide a "back-door" for trade to Hiyal and the Free Cities, though these must pass through the Furrowed Mountains.

Al-Badia of the Haunted Lands survive by raising sheep, goats, and camels and by harvesting isolated patches of dates and figs. They trade livestock and carpets with the lowland countries for weapons,

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metalwork, and exotic fabrics. They also explore the aged ruins that are occasionally revealed in the shifting of the sands. The reward is often great treasure—and great danger as well. Raiding is also common, both against each other and against the outposts along the coastal civilizations. Direct attacks against larger cities have usually resulted in disaster, but a few much-vaunted successes over the generations still encourage the brave and the reckless.

The position of tribal leader is hereditary and is usually passed to the eldest son. The ruling family takes the tribal name instead of a parent's name to identify their position.

The small size of these tribes means that, to be effective against larger targets, they must band together. As a result, charismatic leaders can lead a gathering of diverse nomadic warriors in a plundering raid. Such alliances usually last as long as the leader lives; the associations fade into the desert wind upon the leader's death.

Current major power groups within the Haunted Lands are presented in the following text.

House of Hanif

The largest enlightened tribe of the Haunted Lands, House of Hanif numbers some 10,000 people and is powerful enough to send its own ambassador to the Court of Huzuz. The tribe controls the region surrounding the Ghost Mountains and the Al-Akara Mountains. It also maintains a permanent base in a qal'at that was formerly held by holy slayers, located a day's ride west of Halwa.

As a people, this tribe has an intense loyalty to the throne and is known for rescuing thirsty pilgrims lost en route to Huzuz. The people are brave, honest to a fault, and open to strangers in their lands. The other tribes of the Haunted Lands call the Hanif "Our Grand Caliph's Hunting Dogs"—and not in a complimentary sense.

The Leader: Sheikh Kaldhun bin Hanif (hmF/dr/19) is a powerful, middle-aged man, his stylish beard just beginning to show gray. His wealth affords him two wives, and he has two talented (but egotistical) sons. Sheikh Kaldhun is a sensible, reasonable man, more given to careful decisions than outbursts of passion. He knows his days of greatness are behind him.

Important Individuals: The most prominent of the many people of Hanif are the two sons of the sheikh, born on the same night to different mothers. Mu'awiya (hmF/dr/9) was conceived second and born first, while Yazid (hmF/dr/9) was conceived first and born second. These facts were revealed by a wise woman traveling through the lands 10 years ago. Both men have reached their majority, and each has his supporters.

Mu'awiya bin Hanif is as tall as his father, but gaunt. His manner is calm, and his eyes are soft and caring. He believes that the ways of his father and grandfather are basically sound and that the tribe should continue as a desert guard and aid for the Grand Caliph. Mu'awiya has visited the Court of Enlightenment in Huzuz, where he marveled at the buildings and accomplishments of the civilized peoples.

Yazid bin Hanif is rather short, but he is as strong as his father was at his age. He also has his father's keen eyes and sharp features. Yazid is dissatisfied with the tribe's life, believing they are tethered to the court of Huzuz, and he feels they could build their own enlightened city far from courts and caliphs and merchants. Eight years ago, Yazid was separated from his tribe in a sandstorm and located five days later. He says he spent that time among the jann, who told him marvelous secrets of the future. This is at the core of his romance with the deep desert.

Both sons have loyal and excitable followers among the tribe. As yet, their father has shown no preference for one or the other as heir. Both sons can make a convincing case of rightful claim and leadership ability, and the tribe may split in two if each son chooses to take on the ruling mantle. In addition, the current actions of the House of Hotek to the north is increasing the split between the brothers.

House of Hotek

The core of tribe Hotek is only some 2,000 enlightened people, but Sheikh Ibrin bin Hotek's preaching against the city of Hiyal and its sultana have caused the ranks to swell. Clans that have been oppressed, cheated, or harmed by the sultana and her brood have joined forces with this tribe.

The House of Hotek traditionally roams the northwestern corner of the Haunted Lands. Until recently the members lived in peace with the city.

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Now they move primarily by night, and the people of Hotek and its allied tribes are not as welcome as they once were in the City of Intrigue.

As the raids grow more common, conflict with the other major enlightened tribe of the eastern desert, the House of Hanif, has increased as well. This is contributing to the division between the two sons of the Hanif's sheikh, for Yazid is sympathetic to Ibrin's cause against the Al-Hadhar, and Mu'awiya is concerned for how the attacks upon Hiyal affect the desert tribes' reputation in Huzuz.

The Leader: Ibrin bin Hotek (hmF/dr/12) is one of the charismatic leaders mentioned earlier who are capable of inspiring desert tribes to unite in a larger group. Ibrin is a leader with a vision—to destroy the city of wickedness and oppression. He seeks the collapse of Hiyal, the City of Intrigue. The vision has come to Ibrin late in life. He had spent most of his life trading with the very city he now reviles. He says he was a blind man then who enjoyed the sins of the flesh, but now he is pure and can see clearly the lair of the sultana for what it is—a trap for free people.

Ibrin now gathers new followers with the strength of a man possessed. He leads them in raids against the outposts of Hiyal and the caravans.

Important Individuals: The cause of Ibrin's "conversion" is his new vizier, a kahin named Amene (hfP/k/13). She has showed him that the ways of the City of Intrigue are evil and corrupt. Amene is constantly at his side as his aide and comfort. Some say Amene may replace Ibrin's wife, who died shortly after the kahin's arrival.

Ibrin has a son, Jisaron (hmF/dr/10), and a grandson, Kahlil (hmR/dr/7). Both are dutiful to their sire and stay out of the way of Amene. Jisaron has taken to wandering far afield to avoid his potential stepmother.

Jann of the Haunted Lands

The Jann of the Haunted Lands are wildly crazy and impulsive, dangerous to themselves and to all who accompany them. They are vindictive, insistent, prone to insult, mischievous, and *very* powerful. These tendencies have always been present in the jann and may have something to do with the great destruction of their homeland. A typical janni tribe will number 11 to 31 individuals and will be led by a sheikh.

In the past few decades, the jann's actions have become extreme. Some raid humans or other janni outposts regularly, while others remain allies to various human or janni tribes.

The homeland of the jann is the Great Anvil, the large waste of inhospitable land set in the center of the Haunted Lands. Here lie great ruins of civilization that are now uninhabited, save for the elemental peoples. Intruders are not welcome.

The Jann of the Haunted Lands, under Amir Heidar Qan, have pledged their support to the Grand Caliph. This pledge has been honored time and again to the 14 individuals who have sat upon the Enlightened Throne, but no official representative of the jann has appeared to the current Grand Caliph to renew loyalty. Those few jann who have appeared at court have stated that ill health delays their lord, which gives rise to stories of the Amir's death. The Grand Caliph is most concerned with this matter, particularly with the advancement of Ibrin's forces in the north.

The Leader: Amir Heidar Qan, his most distinguished and respectable master, wise in all matters beneath this sky and other skies, is the leader of the Jann of the Haunted Lands. The amir has not been seen in 50 years, and he is believed to be either dead or dying. His inactivity is reflected in the increasingly wild actions of his servants, who are dangerous at the best of times.

Important Individuals: Other than the Amir, there is one janni known throughout the Haunted Lands. His name is Majnun, and he is being hunted by his brethren. Majnun apparently either stole an item from the Amir or poisoned him (the stories vary) and then fled into the wilds. Now he wanders, disguised as a mystic of great power, but he is cautious around other genies and particularly so around the jann. The one who turns Majnun over to the jann will be greatly rewarded.

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Chapter 5

Gods and Faiths

The gods of Zakhara fall into three groups: major (often called Great), local (often called common), and savage (also called heathen). Savage deities are not recognized in the teachings and tales of the Loregiver. These include the Forgotten Gods of Nog and Kadar, the cults of the islands and the Hill Tribes, and the unfeeling elemental gods of whom the genies speak in hushed tones. Savage gods also encompass the extraplanar trespassers worshipped by outland priests. As a rule, "enlightened" Zakharans do not venerate these savage deities. Many Zakharans are quite tolerant of the misguided folk who do, but others—especially moralists—consider such heathen beliefs an affront to the Loregiver and all that is civilized and good.

Major gods (Great Gods) have the largest, most organized churches in Zakhara, because they recognized throughout the Land of Fate. These include Brave Hajama, Honest Hakiyah (Mistress of the Sea Breezes), her brother Noble Haku (Master of the Desert Winds), Jisan of the Floods, Kor the Venerable, Najm the Adventurous, Selan the Beautiful Moon, and Learned Zann. Members of the League of the Pantheon also consider Jauhar the Gemmed a Great God, though she is recognized only in their area.

Local gods (common gods) are recognized in the word of the Loregiver, but they are not worshipped universally. Well-known in one area or city, a local god may be unheard of just 10 or 20 miles away. The followers of local gods do not gain the benefits of a large church organization. (A DM who wishes to create new deities for his or her own AL-QADIM™ campaign can readily add them to the loosely defined mix of common gods.)

Worship and faith are largely a matter of personal choice in Zakhara. Lay people may worship a number of gods at the same time, or switch from one god to another. (The only true requirement is that one believes in *some* greater power, preferably enlightened.) Members of the priest kits usually devote themselves to a given faith, however. Pragmatists, ethoists, and moralists usually follow a single *enlightened* god or faith, with most moralists belonging to the church of a Great God. Some mystics worship heathen gods, as do outland priests.

The Great Gods are neither good nor evil, lawful nor chaotic. They are beyond such matters. Bravery can be found in the most noble faris and the

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most black-hearted assassin, and who is Hajama to turn his ear from either of them? Individual followers or churches may be good or evil, but the Great gods are above these quibbles. This sets them apart from common gods and heathen deities, who are usually lock-stepped into their believers' alignments.

The subject of Zakharan faiths would not be complete without mention of three important figures: Fate, the Loregiver, and the Grand Caliph. All three are powerful and influential aspects of enlightenment. They are not worshipped, however, for none is a god, and no mosque has been erected in their names. Further, none of these figures can grant spells to anyone who might mistakenly declare him or her a deity.

Fate is often described as the natural force that is a part of every man and woman's future. She is not a goddess, but she does aid those who succeed, and she may comfort those who fail. The gods, whatever their nature, defer to her. While she is not worshipped directly, her name is invoked to show her influence in the world.

The Loregiver is in some ways the handmaiden to Fate, her servant and the director of her will. It was the Loregiver who first defined the Law that binds the society of Zakhara together. The Loregiver is or was recognized as a mortal being, however, and mortal beings are not to be worshipped.

The Grand Caliph sits at the center of the world. He is the descendant of the First Caliph, the one who was smiled upon by Fate, who brought forth the Law of the Loregiver and spread enlightenment throughout the land. While he is respected and venerated, the Grand Caliph is not a god, for he is born of woman like any other being, and will pass with time. Nor does the Grand Caliph demand organized worship and godhood. It is enough to be cheered by the thundering masses, and to benefit from the riches of his far-flung empire.

Patterns of Worship

All enlightened Zakharans share a pattern of prayer, despite the differences in the gods they worship. For example, those who are faithful and enlightened wash before every formal prayer, using a small bowl of water (or sand where no water is available). It is also customary to prostate oneself upon the ground to pray, perhaps rising and kneeling several times. However, all that is truly required is that men and women bow their heads toward Huzuz and pray for guidance along the path of goodness.

Civilized Al-Hadhar pray three times each day to an enlightened god (or gods): at dawn, two hours past midday, and two hours past sunset. Each time, a gong sounds from the mosques, reverberating throughout the community. For the morning and midday prayer, imams in the mosques call from the minarets, inviting devout worshippers to attend services in the temples of their gods. While attendance is encouraged, it is not strictly required. The faithful may pray virtually anywhere.

Enlightened Al-Badia follow a similar pattern of prayer, though no gong sounds to announce the time of day. In the morning and evening, they prostate themselves, facing Huzuz, and praise their chosen gods. At midday, most nomads simply bow their heads for a moment of silent contemplation.

At least once per week, family members commonly attend religious instruction and sermons at a mosque. In areas where moralist attitudes prevail, services for men and women are separate. Elsewhere, all are welcomed to a common service. Mosques that cater to many different faiths may conduct open services honoring many gods, or they may schedule a series of more specialized weekly services.

At least once in their lives, enlightened Al-Hadhar are expected to make a pilgrimage to a glittering Huzuz, the City of Delights, jewel of Suq Bay and the Golden Gulf, center of all civilization. It is here that the greatest mosques and relics of the faithful can be found. More importantly, this is the home of the Grand Caliph—Khalil al-Assad al-Zahir, He Who is Worthy of the Gods, Giant among Men, Scourge of the Unbeliever, Confidant of Genies. Pilgrims go to Huzuz to visit the Golden Mosque, where the House of the Loregiver lies. Almost as great a goal is standing in the Grand Caliph's court, before the Enlightened Throne.

The pilgrimage is always a worthy undertaking, but the experience is especially prized on the Day of Ascension (Yasad) and on the Grand Caliph's birthday. On those two days, His Enlightened Highness is sure to appear before the people. The faithful receive his personal wish that Fortune may smile upon each and

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every one, that the gods may guide them to goodness, and that Fate may guide them to glory.

Many enlightened nomads also strive to make the pilgrimage to Huzuz during their lifetime. For most, however, it is enough to know that a representative of their tribe will make the journey in their names.

Guide to Gods and Faiths

The text that follows describes many of the gods and faiths of Zakhara. Entries for major and local gods include these details:

Symbol. Common symbol of the god (or faith). These symbols are used with great care. While they may adorn official texts and be worn by the faithful, they are not to adorn mosque architecture or be used as an embodiment of the god. Such actions lead to the worship of the item as opposed to the ideal, and that is idolatry. (However, it is not improper to describe a god's physical form in the context of a tale or legend.)

Major Mosques. Locations of the most prominent houses of worship.

Pantheon. Indicates whether a god is a member of the Pantheon. (The Pantheon is listed as a separate "faith" for the purpose of this discussion.)

Ordered Priests. Hierarchy of the church in percentages of pragmatists (P), ethoists (E), and moralists (M) throughout the Land of Fate. Also noted are any special abilities that are awarded to ordered priests of this faith. Bonuses to ability scores, where noted, are permanent.

Free Priests. Listing of the Free Priest kits (kahin, hakima, and mystic) normally part of this faith. Omitted PC kits are not barred from the faith (e.g., a hakima of Kor); they are merely unusual. Also noted are any special abilities awarded to the Free Priests. Bonuses to ability scores, where noted, are permanent.

Ideal. Attribute or feature the god embodies.

Ethos. Brief statement of the god's principles.

Principles. General guiding principles of the faith, suitable for living by, framing, or using in debate with others. If various factions espouse particular principles, they are noted here.

The Faith. A brief description of the areas in which the faith is popular, and the people who belong to the faith.

Great Gods

Zakhara has eight major deities, or Great Gods: Hajama, Hakiyah, Haku, Jisan, Kor, Najm, Selan, and Zann. The section below also includes an entry for the gods of the Pantheon, as well as for the goddess Jauhar, whom members of the Pantheist League consider a Great God.

Hajama the Courageous

Also known as Brave Hajama, this Great God represents the ideal of courage in the face of opposition. In legend, he is described as a stocky man whose long beard is as black as ink. When telling tales of Hajama's adventure in the desert, Al-Badian priests describe a figure who wraps himself in a jellaba as dark as midnight. Al-Hadhar describe a god who comes to the cities wearing lamellar armor that is carved from the night sky itself.

Symbol: None, or a featureless disk. (Bravery is worn in the heart, not on the sleeve.) High-ranking male priests of Hajama also wear long black beards.

Major Mosques: Gana, Hafiyah, Halwa, Hiyal, Huzuz, Kadarasto, Liham, Sikak, Utaqa.

Pantheon: Yes.

Ordered Priests: 20 P, 65 E, 15 M. All gain a +1 bonus to Constitution (maximum 18).

Free Priests: Mystics. Those who worship Hajama may fight with short swords.

Ideal: Bravery.

Ethos: Bravery wins out over opposition.

Principles: Trust your feelings and follow your heart. Always dare to try; cowards fail because their great deeds are unattempted. Bravery takes many forms, the easiest of which is in battle (ethoists' principle). Living through a defeat strengthens the spirit more than dying for an ideal (pragmatists' principle).

The Faith: The faith of Brave Hajama is popular in rural areas, particularly those which border deserts, mountains, or other potentially hostile regions. If a man is said to have "Hajama in his heart and Fate at his back," then he is both courageous and fortunate.

The faiths of Hajama and Najm are on friendly terms, and priests of one faith will attend each other's mosques. In the Pantheon, Hajama is portrayed as one of the sons of Kor, with Najm as his twin brother.

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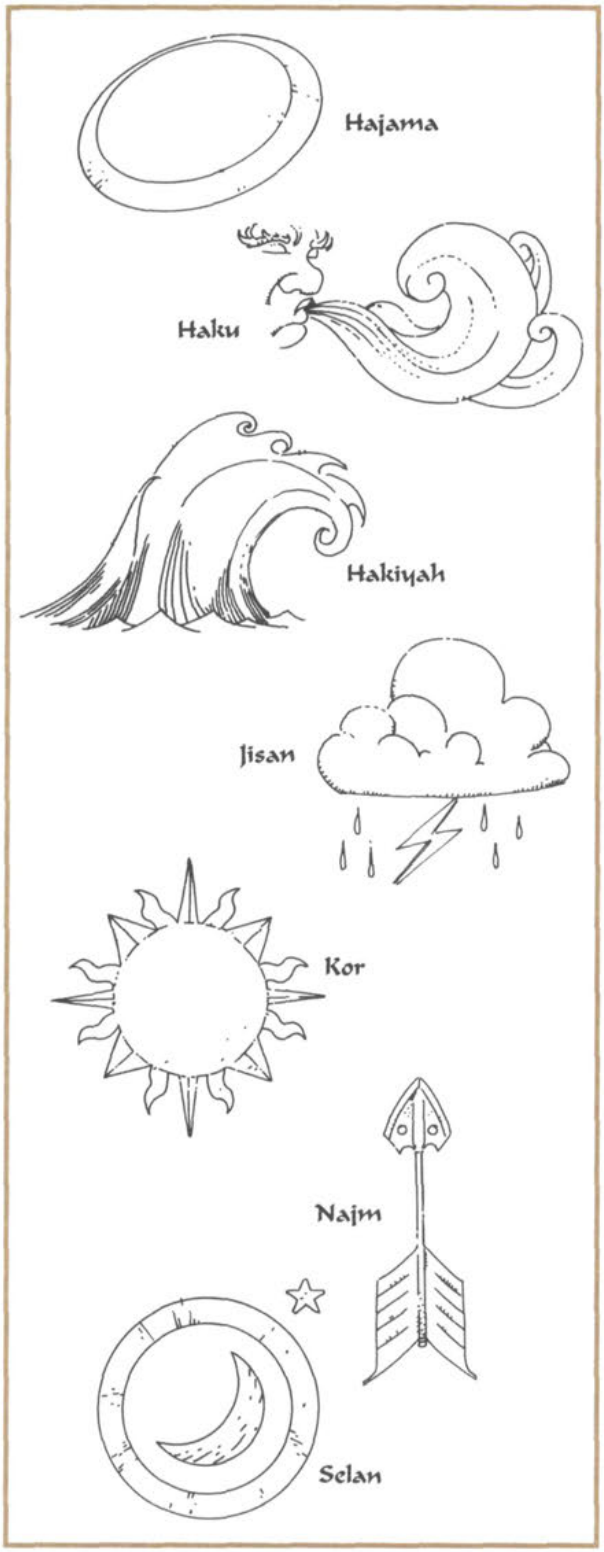

Hakiyah of the Sea Breezes

Also called Hakiyah the Honest, this Great Goddess symbolizes truth. In human form, she wears the trousers, blouse, and vest of a city-dweller. She is portrayed as the calm voice of reason, often correcting and guiding Haku (who is alternately her nephew, brother, and uncle) in his adventures.

Symbol: A cresting wave.

Major Mosques: Ajayib, Gana, Hawa, Huzuz, Jumlat, Muluk, Tajar, Utaqa.

Pantheon: No.

Ordered Priests: 10 P, 70 E, 20 M. All gain a +1 Wisdom bonus (maximum 18).

Free Priests: Mystics and hakimas. Like ordered priests, all gain a +1 Wisdom bonus (maximum 18).

Ideal: Honesty, truth.

Ethos: Truth will always win out.

Principles: Question and check, then check again. People see what they desire to see, not always what truly exists. All men and women may cast illusions—even those who are not sorcerers, and even those who are ignorant of their actions. Danger lies in unquestioning belief.

The Faith: The nature of Hakiyah's worship is calm, meditative, and methodical. Better to take no action than to take one impulsively, it is said. As a result, Hakiyah is popular in the Pearl Cities, particularly among members of the merchant class. Both Hakiyah and Haku have large mosques and universities in the Pearl Cities. In the Pantheist League, neither god is worshipped openly, and their followers are persecuted.

Haku, Master of the Desert Wind

Also called Free Haku, this god represents personal independence. In the old legends, he is always described as a desert nomad, wearing a flowing aba and keffiyeh, with a gleaming scimitar at his side. His words, when recorded by those who receive them, are always proud, self-assured, and even haughty. He implores his followers to apply themselves and to do nothing half-heartedly.

Symbol: A stylized gust of wind.

Major Mosques: Gana, Halwa, Huzuz, Jumlat, Muluk, Tajar, Utaqa, Wasat.

Pantheon: No.

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Ordered Priests: 30 P, 40 E, 30 M. They gain no special abilities.

Free Priests: Mystics. They may use scimitars.

Ideal: Freedom, independence.

Ethos: A man and a woman must be free to be considered alive.

Principles: Do not burden others. Rely on your own talents. Trust the wisdom of your own experiences. Protect those you love and respect, but do not assume that they will be there to protect you.

The Faith: Haku is popular in regions lying in and near the open desert. In the Pearl Cities he is connected with Hakiyah, who is alternately described as a niece, sister, and aunt. Both Haku and Hakiyah's worshippers are persecuted in Pantheist lands.

Jauhar the Gemmed

Representing wealth, this goddess is sometimes called Jauhar the Gem Studded. She is technically a common deity, because her worship is confined to the Pantheist League and a few cities of the Ruined Kingdoms. The heavily moralist League of the Pantheon considers her a Great God, however, taking the place of Bountiful Jisan (whom Pantheists view as common).

Jauhar takes on a physical form only in rare portraits of old—those which Pantheists seek to eliminate. In such legends, Jauhar always appears as a comely maiden with straight black hair and luminous, kohl-rimmed eyes. She wears a dancer's brassiere and pantaloons. The brassiere is covered with coins—allegedly given to her by admirers. The seams of her silken pantaloons are similarly adorned. Old temples scattered throughout Zakhara once contained drawings of Jauhar in this garb. Nearly all of the drawings have been destroyed by Pantheists, leaving only a verbal portrait. Even that has been declared blasphemous by the Pantheists, who describe her as a more modest woman, fully cloaked in a chador, with only the gold dinar on her forehead serving to distinguish her from other moralist women.

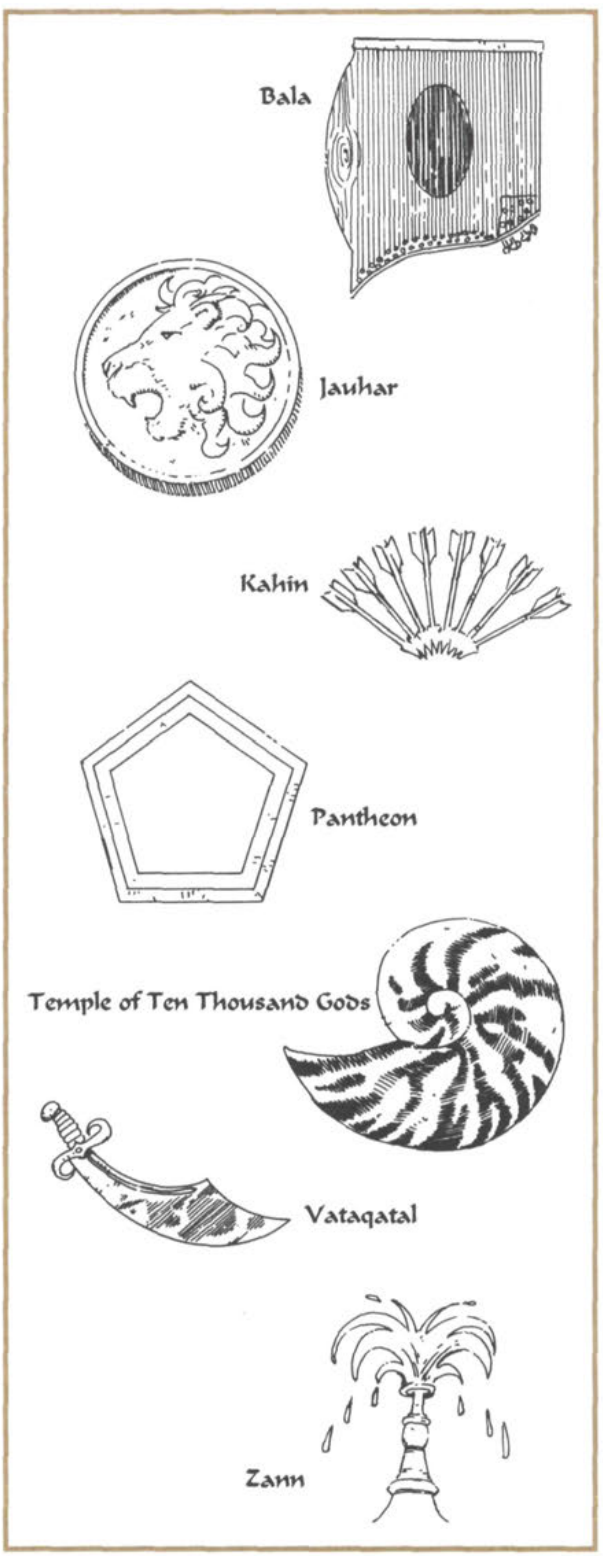
Symbol: A gold dinar.

Major Mosques: Each Pantheist city.

Pantheon: Yes.

Ordered Priests: 5 P, 30 E, 65 M. They gain no special abilities.

Free Priests: Mystics, who gain no special abilities.



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Ideal: Wealth.

Ethos: Money changes everything.

Principles: Work hard and you will be rewarded as you are due. A holy person is a wealthy person. Those who have no food cannot meditate; they think more about their empty stomachs than their empty souls. Wealth is the oil that greases the wheels of the civilized world. Fate gives to those who take.

The Faith: Jauhar represents the industriousness of the Pantheist cities, and she is venerated by merchants and craftsmen of that region. Her worship is tolerated in other areas, though not where Jisan prevails. Jauharites and Jisanites compete for followers, funds, and attention. At times, the competition is bloody.

In the Pantheon, Jauhar is regarded as the beautiful daughter of Kor. This explains a popular Pantheist saying: "Wisdom comes from Strength, but Wealth comes from Wisdom."

Jisan of the Floods

Also called Jisan the Bountiful, this Great Goddess symbolizes fertility and productivity. She may have been a storm-goddess long ago, for she was linked to the monsoon rains and the yearly flooding of the great rivers. From that origin, she became identified with people who prepared for the rains and floods—people who therefore gained the most from the water's passing. In all the tales and legends, no physical description is provided for Jisan; she takes no human or demihuman form.

Symbol: A rain cloud.

Major Mosques: Ajayib, Halwa, Huzuz, Muluk, Sikak, Tajar, Umara, Wasat.

Pantheon: No.

Ordered Priests: 10 P, 50 E, 40 M. They gain no special ability.

Free Priests: Mystics. They gain no special ability.

Ideal: Fruitfulness.

Ethos: Hard work brings abundance.

Principles: Rewards of the spirit and the flesh may be harvested from the act of applying oneself to a noble task. The gold brought from honest labor is repaid a thousandfold in the good it brings to the spirit. A person who does not work, wastes. Fate brings all things to men and women, but only those who are prepared may take advantage of it. If the sky were raining catfish, would you rather have a net or a parasol?

The Faith: Jisan encourages the work ethic. She is venerated by merchants, and her word is carried throughout the Land of Fate to every port. Jisan's worship is nearly universal, though it is most popular in cities that boast thriving bazaars. Members of the League of the Pantheon consider Jisan a common god, unworthy of their worship. Instead, Pantheists worship their own local deity, Jauhar, who is similar (and allegedly superior) in nature.

Followers of Jisan are energetic, industrious, and diligent. They plan for the future and try to play all the angles, such that if one plan fails, an alternative may yet succeed.

Kor the Venerable

Also known as Old Kor, this Great God represents wisdom. He may err, it is said, but he learns from his mistakes and becomes greater still. In parables describing Kor, the other gods ask his advice, as befits his age and wisdom. Old Kor has been described in one tale as a strong, gray-haired man carrying a great hatchet, which he uses to attack the root of a problem.

Symbol: A sunburst. Mystics who venerate Kor may also carry a hatchet.

Major Mosques: Dihliz, Hawa, Huzuz, Jumlat, Liham, Muluk, Qadib, Rog'osto, Umara, Wasat.

Pantheon: Yes.

Ideal: Wisdom.

Ordered Priests: 10 P, 80 E, 10 M. Those who follow Kor add +1 to their Wisdom (maximum 18).

Free Priests: Mystics. Those who worship Kor may fight with battle axes.

Ethos: With age comes wisdom and with wisdom comes strength.

Principles: Always seek out the wisdom of the elders, and heed their words even if you disagree with them. Learn from your mistakes.

The Faith: The church of Kor represents stability, order, and tradition. In making decisions, precedents are sought and elders are consulted. Among the ordered priests of Kor, moralists tend to be stiff-necked and unbending, while pragmatists tend to emphasize the principle of "learning from one's mistakes." Pantheist priests view Kor as a father figure.

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Najm the Adventurous

Adventure and curiosity are the ideals of this Great God and his—or her—followers. In some tales, Najm is female. In others, he is male. In any case, Najm is described as dashing, hot-tempered, fervent, and very much alive (as a mortal might be). Al-Badian tales of this god have common themes: Najm doing the impossible, Najm finding the unfindable, or Najm attaining the unattainable.

Symbol: A single arrow, pointed upward.

Major Mosques: Ajayib, Gana, Hafayah, Hawa, Halwa, Hiyal, Huzuz, Liham, Kadarasto, Utaqa.

Pantheon: Yes.

Hierarchy: 50 P, 40 E, 10 M. All gain a +1 on Dexterity (maximum 18).

Free Priests: Mystics. Those who worship Najm may use short bows.

Ideal: Adventure, curiosity.

Ethos: Make the unknown known.

Principles: Achieve, do, and experience. The journey is more important than the destination. Do not be afraid of new things until you learn more about them. Curiosity leavened with caution never hurt anyone.

The Faith: As might be guessed, Najm's church includes dynamic missionaries who seek to bring enlightenment to the heathen. It also includes explorers who journey into the hinterlands in Najm's name, returning to civilization with tales for the young as well as riches for the church coffers. A Zakharan Priest of Order who is found in a far, foreign land is usually a follower of Najm.

As noted above, only 10 percent of Najm's followers in the church hierarchy are moralists. These are found primarily in the cities of the Pantheon. Pantheist priests of Najm unwaveringly portray their god as male. They acknowledge the goddess Hajama as Najm's sister. Rude jokes to the contrary, implying less platonic ties, are not tolerated by moralist Najmites.

Selan the Beautiful Moon

Also called Selan the Gracious, and Selan of the Garden, this Great Goddess represents divine pulchritude and heavenly grace. She is described as a flawless maiden cloaked in shimmering white, and in the oldest tales, she is said to be linked to the moon. Such tales claim that the moon is her chariot. She rides it across the sky while pursued by ardent suitors, who appear as a cluster of smaller stars, following in her wake.

Symbol: The ringed moon.

Major Mosques: Afyal (Great Mosque of the Moon), Ajayib, Dihliz, Gana, Hafayah, Halwa, Huzuz, Jumlat, Kadarasto, Rog'osto, Sikak, Tajar, Umara, Wasat.

Pantheon: Yes.

Ordered Priests: 10 P, 70 E, 20 M. All gain a +1 bonus to Charisma (maximum 18).

Free Priests: Mystics and some hakimas. All gain a +1 bonus to Charisma (maximum 18).

Ideal: Beauty.

Ethos: There is beauty in everything.

Principles: Reveal that which is pleasing. Accentuate the positive. Kind words can override angry curses. Beauty grows over time. Treat others with the sweetness and goodness they deserve.

The Faith: Selan's followers, like Kor's, tend to be traditional in their outlook, finding joy in what they know to be true rather than seeking out new ideas and new thinking. Deep philosophical thought has never been a strong point of Selanite philosophy. These priests place great stock in appearances, and they usually let initial reactions—which they call "the sensation in the liver"—guide them in their lives.

Selan is much beloved by gardeners and artisans. Her greatest mosque is not in Huzuz, but on the island of Afyal, where her followers make up most of the population.

Zann the Learned

Also called Zann the Marvelous, this Great God is a scholar's deity, for he epitomizes learning and intelligence. Zann has an amazing memory for details. In legend, he is usually described as a man in city dress, carrying a writing tablet and a case of pens, recording all he sees. Study and research are necessary, but a true scholar knows it is just as important to record one's experiences so that others may also learn.

Symbol: A fountain's jet.

Major Mosques: Ajayib, Dihliz, Hiyal, Huzuz, Qadib, Rog'osto, Wasat.

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Pantheon: No.

Ordered Priests: 20 P, 40 E, 40 M. All gain a +1 bonus to Intelligence (maximum 18).

Free Priests: Mystics and hakimas. All gain a +1 bonus to Intelligence (maximum 18).

Ideal: Intelligence, learning.

Ethos: Understanding is the key to all doors.

Principles: Do not destroy what you do not understand. We stand on a mountain built by our fathers, and only a fool would step off that mountain. Learn from the mistakes of others. The written word is our gift to our grandchildren.

The Faith: The universities and libraries built by Zann's followers are the largest and most complete in all of Zakhara. Zannites classify the contents of these libraries using three labels: great texts, common texts, and heathen texts. Great texts are considered "official" documents and histories, regarded by members of the faith as true and wise. They cover all manner of subjects relating to Zakhara's enlightenment (not just the Great Gods). A scholar seeking answers will always consult these official texts first.

Common texts are documents from an unofficial source or of questionable authenticity, including personal letters and diaries, and documents that challenge or disagree with the great texts. Zannites do not believe in denying information just because its veracity is uncertain. As learning progresses, common texts may become great, and vice versa.

Heathen texts come from the world beyond the Land of Fate. Zannites treat such heathen documents with general suspicion. At best, they are considered to be legends or fairy tales.

Gods of the Pantheon

Hajama, Jauhar, Kor, Najm, Selan—these five enlightened gods make up the Pantheon. Priests of the Pantheon recognize only these gods, considering them to be the "true" Great Gods. Members of the Pantheist League (see Chapter 9) do not tolerate the worship of any other deities. All but Jauhar are known and worshipped throughout the Land of Fate. Still, the bond between Pantheists and non-Pantheists of a given faith is tenuous as best. The god is the same, yet the beliefs and practices differ. Pantheists of a given faith have more in common with fellow Pantheists who worship other gods than they do with outsiders who belong to the same faith.

Symbol: Pentagon.

Major Mosques: Kadarasto, Pantheist cities.

Pantheon: Yes.

Ordered Priests: 2 P, 18 E, 80 M. Priests gain the special ability listed for the individual god they venerate.

Free Priests: None.

Ideal: Unity.

Ethos: Strength through unity.

Principles: Only by gathering together, and by combining the best talents of the group, can we succeed. Trust your foes to be jealous of your accomplishments. The gods of the Pantheon are the only true gods. All other so-called deities are common creations, and their followers must be "enlightened." Excessive actions may be excused by excessive circumstances.

The Faith: Unlike worshippers elsewhere, Pantheists do not attend ceremonies tailored only to one god. Instead, Pantheist mosques are similar to open mosques found elsewhere; religious services reflect the variety among the worshippers who are welcomed. There is one key difference, however. Only the five deities of the Pantheon may be venerated in a Pantheist mosque. No other mosques are permitted within the cities of the League of the Pantheon; those which manage to exist are small as well as secret.

The Pantheist church is a united body, devoted to the well-being of all its worshippers. The church works closely with the local rulers of the Pantheist cities to ensure that the needy are cared for, the hungry are fed, and the sick are healed. Pantheist followers are loyal and enthusiastic about their combined faith.

Non-Pantheist priests who worship one of the deities of the Pantheon are regarded with tolerance and general interest. They are "cousins" hailing from outside the Pantheon, welcomed as members of related churches. Even a Pantheist believes that a priest of Kor is still a priest of Kor—even a somewhat misguided Korite from Afyal. Nonetheless, Pantheists would prefer to sway that cousin to a more like mind.

Ironically, a Pantheist may not receive the same welcome when traveling to a sister church outside the Pantheist cities. As a group, Pantheists are regarded

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with suspicion, particularly in the Pearl Cities. If the gods themselves have any precise opinion as to whose views are correct, they have kept it to themselves.

Local Gods

There are more local, or common, gods than there are cities in the Land of Fate. Some are tied to a particular holy site or idol, some are venerated by a particular tribe or community, and some have but a handful of followers. Many of these individual faiths are served by kahins, who may venerate different gods in the forms of icons. The following are covered below: Bala of the Tidings, the kahins, the Temple of Ten Thousand Gods, and Vataqatal the Warrior-Slave.

Bala of the Tidings

Also called Bala of Ill Tidings, this common god of music was openly beloved in Mahabba, long ago. When Pantheists took control of the city, her worshippers were forced to continue their faith in secret.

Bala has been depicted as a middle-aged woman, dressed modestly but colorfully, playing a zither. So wonderful is her music that the genies come to dance for her, and the other gods pause from their work at the hint of a song. Such are the legends.

Symbol: The zither.

Major Mosques: None.

Pantheon: No.

Hierarchy: 10 P, 40 E, 50 M. No special ability.

Free Priests: Mystics. All gain singing as a bonus proficiency (expending no slots).

Ideal: Music.

Ethos: Song lifts the spirit to goodness.

Principles: The voice was made to sing, and the mind to create praise for all things. Bring news to the unenlightened and joy to the suffering. Speak freely and openly among friends. Strike against those who seek to silence our tongues (moralists).

The Faith: The Pantheists have attempted to stamp out the Balanite faction in Mahabba for years. As a result, the faith has spread to several other cities. At least one fellowship of Balanite holy slayers has formed as a result of Pantheist persecution. The holy slayers are dedicated to removing the oppressive yoke of Pantheist rule. Bala of the Tidings has become Bala of Ill Tidings—playing a dirge for those who attempt to crush her followers.

Outside the Pantheist League, a priest of Bala may worship at an open mosque just like any other priest. Within the cities of the Pantheon, Balanites do not profess their faith unless they are sure of the company they're keeping. Meetings and worship are quiet, hidden affairs. "Speak freely among friends" is a greeting by which Balanites can recognize one another, but they also have other, more secret codes.

Kahins

Kahins are idol priests. (Their kit is introduced in the *Arabian Adventures* rulebook.) They believe that divinity is found in all things, and that by worshipping a certain item, place, or even a common god, they may tap and understand the mystical power of the universe. Their faith is ancient, predating most other religions in the Land of Fate.

Symbol: Six downward arrows in an arc.



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Major Mosques: None. Holy sites are scattered throughout the Land of Fate.

Pantheon: No.

Hierarchy: None.

Free Priests: Kahins. No special ability.

Ideal: The universe.

Ethos: Divinity is found in all things.

Principles: There is a great scheme, a master work that encompasses men and women, their creations, the gods, the genies, the world, and even Fate. This scheme is continually changing, like a tapestry becoming ever larger and more complex.

"Practice moderation in all things," say the kahins, "and strive to achieve a balance. Accept that which you have been given. Play your role in life."

The Faith: While kahins believe in a "greater scheme," they do not feel it is necessarily ordered. The future is forming, but it is not set. All actions of the present are taken into account to produce a balance. The future cannot be foretold and therefore must be as yet unrevealed. Whatever will happen will happen.

Kahins are Free Priests, so they are not bound to an organized church hierarchy. Most are independent wanderers, preferring the wilderness to city life. They do share a kinship, however, and each would willingly come to the aid of another. At high levels, some kahins join together as teachers who impart their wisdom to the young. Their organization is still loose, however.

All kahins believe in a divine, overriding force—a force which is the fabric of the universe itself. Its energy permeates the land. The kahins' means of tapping that energy vary. Most individuals worship particular idols, local gods, or holy sites. These things are conduits to the divine force in all things.

Idol priests are well versed in the ways of Zakhara's gods, and many serve as mediators between groups. In general, they council acceptance of differences rather than attempts to convert others. Their nomadic lifestyle and broad knowledge make them ideal go-betweens for desert tribes, some of whom believe in various enlightened gods (such as Haku), and some of whom believe in local deities and forces.

Temple of Ten Thousand Gods

The Temple of Ten Thousand Gods is an oddity among the enlightened faiths. While its members recognize the established gods such as Kor and Najm, they also recognize *any* deity, believing all gods to be aspects of the same divine power. In other words, the many deities, known and forgotten, are but different faces of the same divinity.

Some moralists declare that the Temple of the Ten Thousand Gods is no more than a philosophy, and not a true religion. But priests of the Ten Thousand gain spells in the same fashion as other priests of their class or kit. Someone, or something, must be listening to their prayers.

Symbol: A nautilus shell.

Major Mosques: None.

Pantheon: No.

Ordered Priests: 80 P, 15 E, 5 M. All gain religion as a free proficiency (without expending slots).

Free Priests: Mystics. All gain religion as a free proficiency (without expending slots).

Ideal: Acceptance.

Ethos: All deities are facets of the same divine force.

Principles: The gods are aspects of a greater holy power. Men and women, elves, half-elves, dwarves, and other creatures—all these mortal beings mirror the diversity of that divine power. All are touched by the same holy radiance. Accept your brothers and sisters. Think well of them and treat them kindly, for they, like you, are divine.

The Faith: Followers of the Ten Thousand tend to be quick-witted, cunning, and pragmatic (the faith has the largest number of pragmatist priests of any church). They are often humorous to the point of being sarcastic, and sly to the point of deviousness. It is sometimes hard to discern whether they are telling the truth or whether they are merely toying with someone.

Members of this popular faith tend to be wanderers, curious by nature. While kahins frequent the wilderness, priests of the Ten Thousand usually travel from town to town. As a result, there are few organized mosques for the Ten Thousand. (Those which do exist are, of course, open mosques.) Rather than locating a mosque of the Ten Thousand, it's a small matter for the faithful to worship at another recognized mosque, or to accept the hospitality of a more organized religion.

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Priests of the Ten Thousand are essentially "jacks of all trades" (or all gods). They can debate theology with priests of Kor as easily as they can advise priests of Selan, for priests of the Ten Thousand worship *both* gods and more. Priests who venerate a single god treat members of the Ten Thousand as an interesting diversion in secular life. Some outsiders believe such a broad-minded cleric can bring new light to their own faiths by crossing over the lines between religions. Others view priests of the Ten Thousand as a chattering group of agitators and headache-makers who seek to ridicule the existent gods. In the Pantheist League, followers of the Ten Thousand are outlawed. While these "outlaws" frequently visit the cities of the Pantheon, they are almost impossible to catch, since they freely worship the Pantheon gods. "Outlaws" who are wise simply blend in with the Pantheist crowd.

Vataqatal the Warrior-Slave

Also called Master of the Battlefield, this common god represents duty and strife. He is worshipped in the far north of Zakhara, in regions that border upon "barbarian" lands. Vataqatal's description matches that of barbarian war-gods. He is portrayed as a strong-hewn figure in flowing robes. Beneath them he wears blood-stained lamellar. He carries a great scimitar in one hand. His face is veiled, revealing only his red, glowing eyes. Vataqatal is said to stride onto the battlefield, looking for opponents so that he can test their abilities and spirit.

Symbol: A red-bladed sword.
Major Mosques: Liham, Qudra.
Pantheon: No.
Hierarchy: 10 P, 50 E, 40 M. No special abilities.
Free Priests: Mystics. No special abilities.
Ideal: War, duty.
Ethos: Growth by conflict.
Principles: Attain true spiritual peace through testing one's abilities against another. Thinkers may debate, but warriors speak with the strength of their swords and their hearts. Duty stands above all.
The Faith: Vataqatal's followers acknowledge that their god has a lesser standing than Zakhara's other enlightened gods. This is in keeping with his dual nature—that of a slave and servant, inferior in status, yet stronger in his sense of purpose and will. Those qualities enable him to effectively serve and protect the weak. Vataqatal is most popular among mamluks, farisan, and paladins—warriors who understand the value of duty, and who live to aid others (in one degree or another).

The greatest temple to Vataqatal is located in Qudra, the City of Power. It is the Mosque of Blood, erected by mamluks who used hewn red sandstone and then coated the walls with henna. Smaller shrines are found among the Free Cities, where the mamluk orders are powerful. But none of these shrines compares in size and grandeur to the Mosque of Blood.

Savage Gods

Major and local gods share a common origin in the legends of Zakhara, but there are also beings strange to these civilized lands, whose worshippers have never heard of the Law of the Loregiver, and who do not recognize that law or even the existence of other gods. These strange deities come from a number of areas, mostly from the borders of the civilized world. They have no organized mosques, and their clerics (mortals foolish enough to follow them) are usually considered outland priests. Only a few of the many savage (or heathen) gods are described below.

Forgotten Gods

The great river empires of Nog and Kadar worshipped their own deities, allegedly through foul and inhuman rites. Crumbling edifices and statues erected in honor of those gods still litter the Ruined Kingdoms. While little is remembered about these deities, the following have been identified:

- Kiga, the Predator, who commanded a pride of female were-leopards.
- Lotha, a human-headed spider venerated by evil elves who were burned alive for their sins.
- Migal, also called the Mentor of the Gods in some writings. He had a horde of winged assassins to enforce his orders.
- Shajar, an obese, hippo-headed god of the river.
- His mate, Raggara, who appears as a crocodile-headed woman with bat wings.

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Gods of the Crowded Sea

Many islands in the Crowded Sea have been isolated for decades or centuries. In these exotic climes, strange and mysterious gods have arisen. Some are monsters. Others are heroes raised to mythic proportions. And some are truly gods of a type that has not been encountered since the first genie pledged service to the first sha'ir. Tales from these distant and savage lands include:

- The Drummer, who has no form but travels through the air when his shamans beat great drums made from hollow logs. When summoned by his worshippers, the Drummer can pass through the bodies of his enemies, gnawing the flesh off an unbeliever's body.
- Kar'r'rga, a giant with the head of a horseshoe crab, who is said to live in the deep inlet of an uncharted island. The natives, it is said, give offerings to this immortal creature. In turn, the giant protects their villages from all who attempt to sail into the bay and enslave his worshippers.
- The Lost One, who is said to be an outcast from the land of Afyal itself. Statuettes of this being—portrayed as a great elephant-headed humanoid with a long, flowing mane—are still found upon that island kingdom. When discovered, they are destroyed by the church of Selan (Afyal's prevailing enlightened faith). The Lost One has no name, having abandoned it when he fled Afyal under the assault of priests of the enlightened gods, who were supported by genies. Since then, the Lost One has allegedly confined himself to some island or underwater shoal, where he lurks, brooding and awaiting his return to his homeland.
- Pag, a nature god who provides rich bounty. Pag is said to inhabit every tree and flower on the chain of islands over which he reigns. For this reason, his worshippers eat only fish and seaweed, and let berries rot on the vine.

Wild Gods

The gods who are deemed "wild" by civilized Zakharans watch over the Hill Tribes and others who live at Zakhara's highest altitudes, far above the hot desert floor. These deities are brutal, beastlike creatures who are not native to the Land of Fate. Once, it is said, they ruled the heavens above far-away lands. As a punishment for misdeeds, they were cast



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out, seeking refuge in the outlands of Zakhara. There are as many wild gods as there are tribes and savage peoples, but two of them typify their breed:

• The Beast is worshipped by some Hill Tribes south of the Free Cities. He is said to be a drooling, snarling half-man with the eyes and fangs of a cat. According to legend, he stalks the hills looking for lost and stolen children, so that he may grant them the freedom of death. Shamans of the Beast can whip their people into a fever-pitch to assault the coastlands, resulting in a bloodbath for both sides.

• The Faceless God watches over the evil and malicious yak-men, who dwell in the northeastern corner of Zakhara. These yak-headed humanoids are more deadly than any savage tribe, for they know the arts and magics of civilization, but they wield them without joy, wisdom, or tolerance. They have but one deity—a great giant. Like the yak-men, the god wears heavy, sweeping robes. It, too, has the head of a yak, with great, curved horns. Unlike its followers, however, the god has no face.

Cold Gods of the Elements

Akadi of Air, Grumbar of Earth, Istishia of Water, Kossuth of Fire—these are the cold gods of the elements. Their power is great. Mortals who have seen the phenomenal strength of an elemental monolith know that such a creation is but a slight shadow of the deity born of the same plane.

Despite their power, few creatures look to the cold gods for magic or guidance. These deities are dubbed "cold" because of their attitudes toward men and other "inferior" beings: indifference or outright hostility. The genies, who are themselves creatures of the elements, recognize the existence of the cold gods. As a rule, however, not even the genies would worship them. Occasionally a mad priest or mystic may come under a cold god's spell, but few would set out to do so. And more than one evil mage belonging to the Brotherhood of the True Flame has sought to tame one of these dark gods. Such mages have only courted their own destruction.

Ajami Gods

Some faiths are brought to Zakhara through traders and explorers from far-off lands. To Zakharans, such foreign gods—the ajami gods—are invariably vain and selfish. Their temples are restrictive, for each demands worship in a shrine erected solely in his or her name. Nearly all grant power through their symbols, and allow themselves to be flattered with graphic portrayals at every turn. Often they are carried like a burden by the travelers who worship them. While these gods are many (too many, say Zakharans), only a few deserve mention here:

• Gond is revered by traders from the distant land of Lantan, who evoke his name while conducting business. Such traders occasionally make stops in the Free Cities. Gond makes devices, a poor occupation for a deity, but perhaps there was nothing else left by the time he reached the table of the gods. His symbol is a knobby wheel. It is used to mark devices that are potentially dangerous.

• The Golden God Helam, also called Helam the Watcher, serves as a guardian of the northern barbarian. Helam is the barbarian's shield, much as the great city of Qudra shields the civilized world against a barbarian invasion. In fact, it was at Qudra's door that Zakharans first gained their understanding of Helam. Not long ago, a group of ajami adventurers landed near the City of Power and attempted to claim all ground they spied in the name of their homeland. A few marids and djinn quickly discouraged such attitudes, and the survivors are said to be serving the mamluks as slaves.

• Clang exemplifies the strange nature of distant northerners. Like Gond, he makes things, meaning that northerners have two gods doing the same thing. But Clang is a dwarf god and Gond is a human god, which to a northerner makes all the sense in the world. Tales of Clang have been handed down in the families of dwarves for generations, usually diminishing in the process.

Many other gods from lands to the north and east have drifted through the Land of Fate, carried by the word of the faithful. Most left not so much as a ripple. A few ajamis felt the need to convert others to the "right" way of thinking. Some even managed to create small religious communities that survived as long as the outlanders themselves. More often, the would-be "missionaries" aroused an angry, insulted mob by implying that their ajami faith was superior merely because it was theirs.

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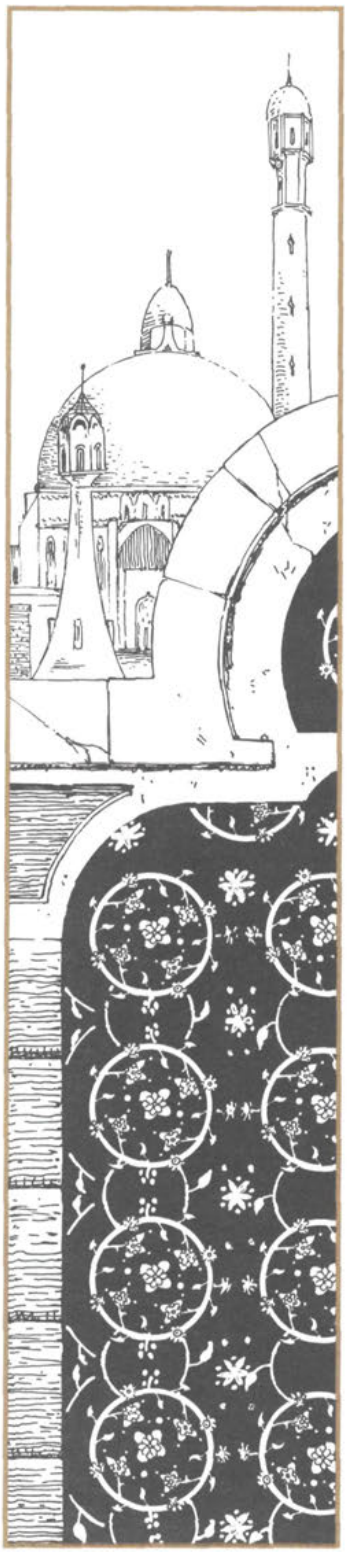

Chapter 6

Cities of the Heart

By traveling from the northernmost waves of the Golden Gulf and onward across Suq Bay, adventurers may begin to know the fabled heartland of Zakhara. This is more than a geographical center—it is also the land's soul. To the south, the region is anchored by magnificent Huzuz, home of the Loregiver and the Grand Caliph. No other city shines brighter than this golden homage to enlightenment and civilization. To the north, the region is anchored by another great city, smoky and mysterious Hiyal, a study in contrasts. Between them is Wasat, a sleepy oasis for the weary traveler. Finally, to the east lies the last city of the heartland: bustling Halwa. Perched near the fiery rim of the Great Anvil, this city still bears the traces of Zakhara's wilder, less civilized past.

Halwa, City of Solitude

Located about 200 miles east of Wasat and Suq Bay, Halwa is one of Zakhara's few major inland settlements. The city is perched on a lonely bluff overlooking the dry bed of the Wadi Malih. With the onset of spring, melting snow from the Ghost Mountains combines with seasonal downpours, turning the wadi into a surging, muddy torrent that washes silt into the lowlands. Within a month, the rains subside and the arid waste quickly returns.

The Ruler: Caliph Hava al-Gatil (hmF/a/12) is a well-meaning but insulated ruler. His main concern appears to be writing his memoirs. Al-Gatil often cloisters himself with his favored scribes, writing (and rewriting) his past exploits as a young warrior, dwelling on those blithe days before he took his father's place as caliph. Al-Gatil delegates most of his responsibility to his chief vizier, whom he trusts above all. The caliph has three beautiful daughters—Sikayah, Rajiyah, and Mahabbiyah—triplets who are approaching the age of majority. While the caliph appears to care for them, the depth of his devotion has never been tested.

The Court: The court consists of Chief Vizier Zarad (hmW/sh/15) and his flunkies. Zarad has served Al-Gatil since the caliph was a child, and he continues to maintain a strangle hold on the caliph's mindset. All of the caliph's orders come through Zarad. And if Zarad happens to add his own

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orders, who would deny they're the truth? Zarad has already made a great fortune through unfair taxation (which he imposed in the name of the caliph and removed two years later in the name of the caliph, without the caliph himself ever detecting it). Now, Zarad lusts after even greater power.

The chief vizier is served by a dao of maximum hit points, who is referred to solely as "Zarad's Pet" (and then only in hushed voices). Zarad himself is easy to identify in court: he always wears black-and-white striped robes.

Population: 60,000.

Features of the City: Despite its isolation, Halwa is bustling little city, serving as a chief trading post between settled Zakharans and the desert-dwellers of the Haunted Lands. Both city and wilderness people mingle on the streets. Abas and keffiyehs are more common than caftans and dolmans, and many of Halwa's merchants have relatives among the desert tribes.

Halwa's caliph is permissive, allowing all activity that does not bring disgrace upon his wise and beneficent rule. An underground slave trade thrives here, and Halwa is a stopping place for caravans en route to Hiyal. Similarly, adventurers and would-be heroes use the city as a starting place for expeditions into the Haunted Lands, where many a man and woman has perished in the search for legendary riches.

As a group, the people of Halwa are known for their haggling skill and sharp-witted dealing. "Never give what can be sold" is their motto, and that applies to favors and information as well as camels and figs.

Major Products: Trade, livestock, slaves, durable goods.

Armed Forces: 3,000-man city guard; 500-man palace guard; 1,000-man mercenary cavalry, hired from desert tribes on five-year contracts. In addition, Zarad has his own 200-man personal guard. In times of need, he apparently can call upon a tribe of 200 jann.

Major Mosques: Hajama, Haku, Jisan, Najm, and Selan. Haku has the largest and most opulent temple, which is a pilgrimage site for the desert tribesmen. A three-day religious festival in Jisan's name is held on the first clear day after the spring rains.

Rumors and Lore: Zarad is said to be everywhere, running the city with a smooth but iron-willed determination. This chief vizier hates nothing more

Cities of Zakhara

Chapters 6 through 8 describe the cities of Zakhara, from golden Huzuz to smoky Hiyal, from chaotic Hawa to the exotic City of the Elephant. Each entry includes the following information:

The Ruler: A brief description of the personality, including a list of his or her official titles.

The Court: Individuals who have the ear of the local ruler or who hold great power in their own right. (Only the most well-known and influential figures are noted. Each court also includes numerous minor figures; in time, some may improve their positions.)

Population: The estimated population, including all sentient races.

Features of the City: Features for which the city is known, such as its products, history, atmosphere, or architecture. (Entries for Huzuz, Hiyal, and Qudra—the three great cities of the continent—include a "tour" of the local sights.) This section may also offer a glimpse of the city's people and their distinguishing features—such as their attitudes or appearance.

Major Products: Products that play a significant role in the city's economy, as well as products for which the city is famed. This is not an exhaustive list. Any manner of export may be noted. (For example, "rebellion" is a major product of one city.) When "trade" is noted as a major product, it means the transfer of goods (imported and exported) are an important aspect of the city's economy.

Armed Forces: A list of the standing military forces within the city. This may include militia, night watchmen, mamluks, barbarian mercenaries, and the palace guard. A city may also boast aerial and magical units. Few cities rely solely on these standing forces in times of need; when a city is seriously threated, half the available population can be mustered to defend their homes.

Major Mosques: Faiths that are prominant in the city—those important enough enough to merit their own mosques. Furthermore, a major mosque always has a priest who can raise the dead.

Key Figures Outside the Court: Prominent citizens. Only the descriptions of Hiyal, Huzuz, and Qudra include this listing.

Rumors and Lore: Local scuttlebutt or history. (DM's Note: These may be serve as adventure hooks; see "Secrets" in *Fortunes and Fates*.)

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than disturbances of his pleasant and (to his mind) just rule, and any problems that arise are dealt with quickly and harshly. He is not above selling an enlightened man into slavery (sometimes by producing a "previous owner" who declares the accused escaped him). Of course, this violates the Law, but Zarad places himself above the Law. Only his marriage to the caliph's eldest daughter will establish him fully as the city's ruler. Sikayah is technically the eldest, for she was born just before her sisters.

Hiyal, City of Intrigue

About 360 miles northeast of golden Huzuz, at the rim of Suq Bay, lies the gray, industrious city of Hiyal. Set in the low valley of the river Al-Wahl, Hiyal is cloaked in the smoky stench of its foundries and kilns. The shroud seems to nurture the clandestine, for in the city's dark alleys and back rooms the deals of smugglers, thieves, and unscrupulous power brokers are made.

The Ruler: Sultana Alurah bint Asrah (hfF/a/18) established her rule five years ago, just after her husband died suddenly at a state dinner, collapsing unceremoniously upon a mound of mutton and rice. In the brief chaos that ensued, Alurah played one faction against another, while remaining in close communication with her allies in the Grand Caliph's court. (Prince Tannous, who prefers a quiet north, is one such ally.) Alurah convinced the Grand Caliphate that she alone could quell her city's rival factions, provide a sense of continuity to Hiyal's rulership, and ensure the continued enlightened rule of her people. She has accomplished all these things. Indeed, the sultana is a competent, industrious, and wise ruler. She is also a dark-hearted schemer, maintaining her family's power through stealth and guile.

The sultana is now 60 and reportedly in ill health. Some attribute her illness to her lavish lifestyle coupled with the city's pollution. Others claim this no more than a rumor—a subterfuge on her own part, designed to lure out those who covet her position.

The Court: The sultana's court consists primarily of her immediate family. Everyone else is a servant, pawn, or enemy (or quite possibly all three). The sultana's brood continually squabble among themselves, stopping only when some outside faction threatens them. Then they pull together to wipe out the threat, after which they resume their internal warfare. The prize over which they fight is their mother's blessing and her throne (they hope to gain the latter after she passes on). Alurah has recognized three sons and two daughters. She has been careful to see that other claimants to the noble bloodline have been placated and (or) removed from the scene.

Prince Anjar bin Alurah (hmF/f/12) is the eldest son and the apple of his mother's eye. Bright, strong, and respectful of his mother's wishes, his one great fault is that he lacks subtlety, being far too direct in his actions. A courtier argues with him and is found the next day face down in the harbor. A coffee house is said to be a haven for malcontents, and it burns down soon after a visit by the prince. A village that hides a fugitive is exterminated to the last being. At best, Anjar is heavy-handed; at worst, he is cruel and tyrannical. However, his mother feels these rough edges can be smoothed and that he will eventually replace her. She has not yet declared Anjar her official heir, but she has appointed him Grand Commander of her armies.

Prince Omar bin Alurah (hmW/sh/14) is the second son, a sha'ir linked to the Brotherhood of the True Flame. Both the prince and the Brotherhood seek to use one another to further their own ends. When those ends have been achieved, each side intends to dispense with the other. Prince Omar is short, nearsighted, and exceedingly jealous of his elder brother. He regularly reports Prince Anjar's mistakes and overreactions to his mother, hoping to replace him. Since he has few accomplishments of his own to boast, she usually pays him no mind. Omar is aided by his personal servant, a female efreeti named Jalas.

Imam Raman bin Alurah min-Najm (hmP/m/16) is the sultana's youngest son. He is also the religious leader of the faith of Najm, and the official keeper of its mosque in the city. A staunch moralist, he has connections within the Pantheist League, who hope to introduce their firm beliefs to Hiyal. Gaunt and calm, Raman is regarded as the most dangerous of the sultana's sons, a planner who launches byzantine plots.

Basically caring and considerate, Princess Hannah bint Alurah (hfPal/f/12) is the best of a bad lot, the white sheep of her family. There is no love lost

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between the princess and her siblings. In the past, Hannah's relatives and others have used her in petty court intrigues, attempting to dupe her with spies and plants. As a result, she has developed a suspicious, almost hostile nature toward strangers. She speaks when she must, acts when she can. Her greatest concern is that her mother will die (or be killed) without formally selecting an heir, and that the resulting bloodbath will spread into the city.

Hannah's current posting is Marshal of the City Guard, and she is dedicated to bringing a just rule to the people. The good citizens of Hiyal are devoted to Hannah, admiring her bravery and wisdom. The sultana knows that Hannah is an unofficial ambassador of good will from her court, helping to appease citizens who disapprove of the two princes.

Princess Alurah bint Alurah (hfW/sh/10) is the youngest of the ruling family, exemplifying its worst traits. Greedy, cruel, and conniving, she gets by on her family connections and her courtly graces. She is quick to turn one family member against another. Without hesitation, she will launch an attack on the innocent to cover her own wrongdoing and hide behind her mother's robes when she is in trouble. A 10th-level sha'ir, Alurah is served by a mischievous djinnling (air gen) named Pin, who acts as her spy.

Tocka (gmT/hs/10) is the sultana's personal servant, confidant, and hatchet-gnome. He was once a member of the Gilded Palm, a defunct group of assassins dedicated to Jisan. The Gilded Palm sought to right economic wrongs (sometimes by eliminating merchants). The sultana's late husband wiped out the group, but the sultana managed to rescue Tocka. Rumors abound that he was responsible for the sultan's death, but nothing has been proved. It is true that even the beggars of Hiyal know Tocka. The populace stands aside in fear as the gnome strides through the city, usually on some mission assigned by his mistress.

Population: 600,000 permanent residents. If beggars and transients are included, the number may swell to 900,000.

Features of the City: Hiyal's trademark is its smoky pallor and unpleasant odor, caused mainly by its foundries and kilns. Its valley setting creates a peculiar

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inversion, literally capping the city with pollution. Not even the breezes from Suq Bay can scrub the city clean. Its buildings are in muted shades of gray, covered by dirt and grime. Only the sultana's palace is an exception, because it is continually and rigorously cleaned by slaves.

The people of Hiyal have a reputation for being untrustworthy, duplicitous, and sharp in their business dealings with each other and outsiders. For the most part, this is untrue, but the taint of such a brush acts as a magnet for less-than-honest individuals who are drawn to the city. In addition to legitimate business, Hiyal is often the site for gray dealings, covert transactions, smuggling, and illegal activities—most of which are carried out by transients with permanent connections in the city.

Newcomers to Hiyal might wish to visit these sites:

• *Great suq*. Much as the mighty bazaar of Huzuz is world-famous, so too is the suq of Hiyal, a maze of covered passageways and enclosed streets. In the main corridors of this labyrinth, all manner of legal goods can be found. In the shadows, all manner of illegal and forbidden goods can be found, too.

• *Foundries*. Located upstream on the sluggish river Al-Wahl, these foundries turn out some of the finest weapons in Zakhara. Each year, the mamluks of Qudra commission hundreds of high-quality swords and spearheads from the foundries. Hiyal pays taxes to the Grand Caliph with the proceeds. Many great weaponsmiths and armorers come to Hiyal to practice their craft. Their fires blaze through the night. Among the respected smiths include the House of Bulad (see "Key Figures Outside the Court").

Major Products: Coal, iron, steel, weaponry, armor, metalwork, slaves (black market), information (black market), pottery.

Armed Forces: 8,000 footmen; 1,500 cavalry; 2,000-man palace guard; 2,000-man city guard; two mercenary barbarian units, 1,800 strong combined; five units of mamluk infantry, 5,000 strong combined; three units of mamluk cavalry, 900 strong combined.

Prince Anjar commands the regular troops. Princess Hannah commands the city guard, including some elite units who are personally dedicated to her. Hannah lacks a mamluk unit, but each of the sultana's other children (and the sultana herself) has a unit personally dedicated to him or to her. Rivalries exist between these mamluk units; the soldiers take their leader's arguments onto the streets.

The sultana has assumed personal control of the cavalry mamluks, using Tocka as her go-between. She also commands both mercenary barbarian units, the palace guard, and the navy. The navy is used primarily to protect personal cargos of the royal family, since the Golden Gulf is patrolled by Huzuz's superior navy.

Major Mosques: The largest temple in the city is an open mosque, where all enlightened people may pray. Only slightly smaller in size and grandeur are mosques devoted to Najm, Hajama, and Zann:

Hajama:	Imam Ramadayah bint Kolos min Hajama (hfP/e/14)
Najm:	Imam Raman bin Alurah min Najm (hmP/m/16)
Zann:	Imam Qonta bin Mala (hmP/e/12)

Each of the three structures has a large number of support buildings, including dormitories, schools, courtyards, and kitchens. The mosque of Najm is the newest of the three, and has seen extensive renovation since the son of the sultana took charge of it.

Key Figures Outside the Court: Harayah al-Mabhum, also called Harayah the Unclear, (hfW/so/16), is a powerful, aged sorceress. She has served, at one time or another, on all sides of the numerous internal conflicts affecting the court. Her specialty is disappearances—making individuals and items vanish (voluntarily or not). In the past, she has removed political opponents, personal rivals, and those who threatened the sultana's immediate family. Most recently, Harayah herself has disappeared, following a visit from Prince Anjar. Immediately after that meeting, Harayah's servants bricked up the entrance to her home from the inside, and no word has been heard since.

Kasit al-Galaba (emB/r/14) is an elf and a bard. He is known throughout the city for both his dulcet voice and his gossiping tongue. Place a rumor upon his lips at dawn, and by evening it will be known from the docks to the palace and out into the wild. (Or so it seems.) Those seeking to disseminate information near and far could not find a better means than Kasit. He has one standing rule, however: He will not blaspheme the names of the sultana's family directly. In thanks for that consideration, the sultana lets him live.

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Obok al-Busaq is a man with two lives. In the broad light of day, he is a pottery dealer. Under cover of night, however, he becomes Obok the Slaver. Al-Busaq operates the heartless black market that deals in "intelligent beasts," from children captured by dark-spirited desert raiders to speciality items such as rare sentient creatures and foreigners who are destined to be displayed as curiosities. He operates this business with the unofficial sanction of the sultana's court. As long as two promises are kept, she will not interfere. First, Obok must keep the sultana's own roster of slaves filled (including the *harim* of her sons). And second, Obok must strive to keep his work as quiet as possible. If proof of his activities were to reach the wrong ears, the sultana would have no choice but to shut down his operation. Obok uses a number of methods to transport his product, including his own great vases.

Fuladayah bint Bulad (hfF/a/10) is the daughter of Bulad the Steelmaker, one of the finest weaponsmiths in the Land of Fate. The blood runs true, for she is as great a weaponsmith as her father, and the mark of the House of Bulad remains a guarantee of fine craftsmanship. Bulad makes long swords, broad swords, cutlasses, and scimitars of such high quality that wielders gain a +1 attack bonus (nonmagical, doesn't enhance damage).

Fuladayah was recently orphaned. Six months ago, her father was found dead, with a crudely-made dagger in his neck. Fuladayah has taken charge of the business, and has made it known to all that she wants revenge against those who killed her father. The magistrate declared it a "death by accident," confirming Fuladayah's belief that someone of power or rank—and their toady—is involved.

The Beggar Caliph (??T/bg/20) is one of Zakhara's mysteries. No one knows for certain the gender and race of this legendary beggar-thief, though many assume he is a human male. It is said that all beggar-thieves in Hiyal send what they hear to him, and he in turn issues orders and gives them information—such as when a particular caravan will arrive, or if the sultana will declare a day of feasting for the entire city. Rumors concerning this character abound, and many theories are espoused. Perhaps the Beggar Caliph is a genie or a disgruntled warrior prince. Or perhaps he is the surviving sultan himself! As long as the Beggar Caliph causes no harm to the sultana's power—and perhaps as long as he eludes her—she allows him to survive.

Rumors and Lore: Hiyal is a city of rumors, buoyed by the constant sweep of this scandal or that secret. Two stories in particular are common coinage on the streets, one recent and one as old as the city itself.

Here is the ancient tale: The maze work of the great suq is itself a gateway into an even greater marketplace, which exists under skies never seen in the Land of Fate. This greater suq exists beside, below, and beyond the covered market stalls that all citizens know. It is a shadow world where lives are traded as common coinage, and all manner of wonders can be purchased, including genies, magical items, and tokens of the gods. Explorers cannot enter this greater suq through any precise door. Instead, they must pass through a number of gateways to reach its strange halls. The noble genies may know of the secrets of the greater suq, but they keep them hidden.

Here is the more recent tale: Prince Omar has demanded (and received) a portion of the Bulad estates and foundries for private research. The seized property has been walled off, save for a single entrance, which is guarded by mamluks loyal to Omar. Efreet have been seen at the site. So too have members of the Brotherhood of the True Flame. The story on the streets is that Omar has involved himself with some form of barbarian magic, and is creating a beast of molten metal to do his bidding.

Huzuz, City of Delights

The City of Delights, nestled between the Golden Gulf and Suq Bay, is one of Zakhara's most spectacular cities. Its shimmering spires can be seen for miles across the water, inviting sailors to approach. Here the first Grand Caliph received the vision of the Loregiver, which contained Fate's wisdom and the Law. Today the city is still the seat of the Grand Caliph, the "heart of the heart" of the enlightened lands.

The Ruler: Grand Caliph Khalil al-Assad al-Zahir (Master of the Enlightened Throne, Most High Sovereign of the Land of Fate, the Worthy of the Gods, Scourge of the Unbeliever, Confidant of the Genies, hmF/f/20) is a middle-aged man whose hair is still black and whose body has not yet gone to fat. He is usually bored by matters or decisions that require

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more than a few moments of his wisdom, and he delegates much to his court. He focuses his attention on the health of his people, and upon producing an heir. (Fate has yet to grant him a son.)

The Court: The Grand Caliph hosts a mighty group of courtiers, retainers, servants, and sycophants, along with a *harim* comprising more than a hundred women of various races and nationalities. (No more than four of them are his favored wives at any one time, however.) There is a great deal of political infighting for the Grand Caliph's ear. Important personages include the following:

Grand Vizier Alyana al-Azzazi (hfW/so/20) is a prim sorceress with strong moralistic beliefs. She councils the Grand Caliph in virtually all matters. Though her size is small, her demeanor suggests power. She always appears in court wearing rich robes and a veil. She does not dwell in Khalil's *harim*, but has quarters that are solely her own, overlooking the palace gardens. She is older than Khalil, and still treats him as if he were a young student. He listens faithfully to her advice, and in return she quietly accepts his rulings—even when they violate her wishes. That does not occur often, however, for Alyana's wisdom has often been proved, and the Grand Caliph usually concurs. She wishes that the Grand Caliph would be more diligent in matters of state.

Tanya bint Perijan (hfT/sl/10) is a native of Gana. She is the Grand Caliph's most valued wife (for the time being, anyway). She rules the *harim*. Tanya set out to reach the court of the Grand Caliph, and to secure her place in his heart through a combination of effort, favors, and a bit of blackmail. She is an opportunist, but she is also devoted to her husband. Her goals in life are to maintain her hold on the Grand Caliph's heart and to be the first to bear him a son. Her son would then be the recognized heir of the Enlightened Throne. Until she bears the first son, however, she is no different from any other wife, only one step above a courtesan. As of yet, she has only daughters.

Jiraad, a noble marid, serves as an ambassador to the genie races. By nature, marids are not interested in the affairs of men, yet the Grand Caliph specifically asked for a marid to fill this posting. After much grumbling (privately), Jiraad accepted the ambassadorship, and he enjoys the company of the Grand Caliph. He wishes Khalil would show more adventure and spine, however, and he often counsels for direct, heroic action. In Jiraad's humble opinion, His Enlightened Majesty should lead with his heart, not with his head. Jiraad's advice is usually balanced by that of the Grand Vizier, who recommends careful reflection and cautious delegation. The two do not get along. In addition to his post as ambassador, Jiraad is in charge of maintaining jann military units. He also serves in the navy as an honorary admiral under Prince Cheddah's command.

Prince Tannous al-Assad (hmF/a/16) is the uncle of the Grand Caliph (and brother to his late father). Tannous currently stands in direct line for the throne; if the Grand Caliph should die before producing an heir, Tannous would assume his exalted position. Prince Tannous acts as the Grand Caliph's spy beyond the palace walls. Little escapes the notice of his sinister eyes. He also gains information through a network of agents and informers in the continent's three great cities: Huzuz, Hiyal, and Qudra. All those who serve within the network remain alert to potential threats against His Majesty. Tannous often travels abroad on behalf of the Grand Caliph, or to his own retreat at the foot of the Al-Akara Mountains.

The Grand Vizier and Tanya despise Prince Tannous. The Grand Caliph, however, is devoted to him, and the prince is always welcome in his court.

Prince Cheddah (hmF/f/W16), another paternal uncle to the Grand Caliph, is a pompous, overweight, and overbearing man. Cheddah commands the city's military. In manner he is a fool, and in tactics he is a disaster. But he is a believer in spit-and-polish reviews and parades, which have been the chief purposes of Huzuz's military forces for the last two decades.

The Grand Caliph dotes on Prince Cheddah. Other major members of the court consider him a bungler who survives mainly on the talents of his underlings. These include Thokkor of the Furrowed Mountains (hmF/mb/14), who is in charge of the mercenary units and cavalry, and Preani Qin (hfF/mk/14), who oversees the slave-warriors. Thokkor is most concerned with the growing military might of the Pantheist League, and is opposed by the Grand Vizier. Preani Qin is both comely and competent, such that she has caught the eye of the Grand Caliph, and has therefore earned the enmity of Tanya, his wife.

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Imam Renn min Zann (emP/p/19), Keeper of the Mosques, is the main representative of the assembled enlightened faiths of the Land of Fate. He is a respected, silver-haired fixture in court life, serving as the conduit by which religious questions and decisions are brought before the Grand Caliph.

Renn's father was a broadminded barbarian elf from realms lying far to the north. His mother was the intelligent but headstrong daughter of a prominent Zakharan merchant. Perhaps because of this eclectic background, Renn became a pragmatic priest of Zann. He quickly gained a reputation for his wisdom and his ability to mediate among squabbling factions. Long a presence in the Grand Caliph's court, Renn has served two previous Grand Caliphs (Khalil's father and grandfather). All members of the present court have a healthy respect for Renn's power, though he has sparred recently with the Grand Vizier, whose moralist philosophies are more conservative than his own.

Population: 800,000 permanent residents. During High Holy Days and on Ascension Day, the population swells to well over a million and a half.

Features of the City: Known far and wide for its beautiful architecture, this city is often called Huzuz the Golden. Its domes and minarets are clad in gold, tile, and inlaid glass, all reflecting the sun. As dawn breaks, the city seems to glow. In the midday heat, it shimmers. And as the sun sinks toward the horizon, the light blazes a path across the Golden Gulf and seems to set the city aflame. Through centuries, the craftsmen and artisans of Zakhara have made the city their showcase. Their hand-painted tiles, intricate mosaics, gilded surfaces, and intricately carved plaster and stone are a tribute to the Loregiver, as well as to an enlightened civilization and the wonders of Huzuz itself.

The people of Huzuz are by nature as tolerant as they are diverse. Racial and religious differences do not present a problem. Even far-removed faiths and ideas are treated with more amusement than fear. Every style of fashion in the Land of Fate can be found on the city's streets. Every type of product made in the enlightened world can be found here, too—along with a vast array from the lands beyond. The populace of Huzuz are confident in their good fortune, and cannot believe that anything evil would happen to the Enlightened Throne and their most puissant Grand Caliph.

A walking tour of this great city should include the following sites:

- *Palace of the Grand Caliph* (also called the Lair of the Great Lion, Seat of the Enlightened Throne, and "the place to which all eyes turn"). Built and remodeled over the course of 500 years, this sprawling palace has become a maze of rooms, courts, and passageways. As the power and personal treasuries of the Grand Caliph expanded, so too did the palace. Old buildings and halls were torn down to provide space for new ones. The palace has maintained its present form for the past three generations of the Grand Caliphate.
- *Public Gardens*. This wondrous expanse of greenery borders the eastern edge of the Grand Caliph's palace. The gardens are filled with row upon tailored row of roses, hibiscus, and other flowers, as well as great orchards of pears and figs. Technically, the gardens lie upon the Grand Caliph's private land. But according to a long tradition, they remain open to civilized men and women throughout the year, and are closed only when the Grand Caliph himself chooses to wander the grounds for meditation (about once a week).

The greatest wonder of the Public Gardens is the Floating Fountain. The fountain's base is an enormous reflecting pool installed by the first Grand Caliph. Recently, Ambassador Jiraad enhanced the pool. The marid created golden bowls which float through the air above the reflecting pool, dancing a slow, graceful ballet. The bowls spout jets of clear, sparkling water, which arch into the air before spilling into the pool below. In times of celebration, the fountains spray colored water instead—and sometimes even fire, steam, or rainbow-colored sand.

- *The Grand Bazaar*. This huge, open-air court is located near the city's harbor. It is one of Zakhara's busiest markets, for Huzuz lies at the crossroads of all major trade routes. Exotic foods, silks, treasures, curios, entertainers, letter-writers, mystics, barbers, individuals looking for employment—all can be found in the bustling court until curfew. After nightfall, lamps aglow with *continual light* spells provide general illumination. Licensed torchbearers appear, offering to escort members of the evening crowd to their sleeping quarters (for a fee). Huzuz lacks an official slave market, but unscrupulous characters are willing to procure that which is desired, as long as the correct price is paid.

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Major Products: Trade, tourism (especially visits to the Grand Mosque and the Court of Enlightenment), bureaucracy (tax records and census for managing the empire), universities, sages, textiles.

Armed Forces: 10,000 footmen; 2,000 imperial cavalry; five 50-man wings of hippogriff cavalry; an imperial palace guard comprising 1,000; three mercenary units (2,100 strong combined); five units of mamluk infantry (5,000 strong combined, with one unit for each of these groups: the Dutiful, the Faithful, the Valiant, the Studious, the Honored); three units of mamluk cavalry (900 strong combined, representing the Dutiful, the Valiant, and the Dauntless); naval base for 40 imperial ships with crews, who are charged with patrolling the Golden Gulf and Suq Bay; plus the Magical Legion, a unit of 75 wizards of varying level, each with a flying carpet. The city also boasts a reserve force of jann warriors, whose exact number is not common knowledge (see also page 27).

Footmen serve as patrols and the city guard. They are led by the chancellor of the city, Makin al-Mutrattab (hmF/a/10). Cavalry, hippogriffs, and the palace guard are under the direct command of Prince Cheddah. Mercenaries are under the command of Thokkor. All mamluks answer to Preani Qin, including the Honored, a detachment of eunuchs used as harem guards in the palace. The navy serves under the command of Grand Admiral Haroun ibn Abbak (hmF/c/15), though they may be led by Jiraad, ambassador from the Genie Courts. Jiraad is also responsible for the jann auxiliaries. The wizards serve under the command of the Grand Vizier, but in battle they are led by the White Agate (see "Key Figures Outside the Court").

Major Mosques and Priests: Huzuz has nine great mosques. Eight are arranged in an arc facing east toward the ninth, like a half-moon whose points reach out to embrace a shining star. Each of the eight mosques of the arc is dedicated to a different enlightened god. The temples, their faith, and the imam in charge are listed below. The sequence follows the arc from north to south.

Kor::	Imam Gogol (hmP/e/19).
Hajama:	Imam Jomhur (hmP/m/19.
Najm:	Imam Effat (hfP/e/20).
Jisan:	Imam Morol (hemP/m/18).
Haku:	Imam Gholam (hmP/e/18).
Hakiyah:	Imam Kerim (hmP/p/17).
Selan:	Imam Lelia (dfP/e/12).
Zann:	Imam Renn (emP/p/19).

With this arrangement, the great arc is bounded on one side by wisdom and on the other by learning. The ninth house of worship, the Golden Mosque, is considered "open." Members of any faith recognized by the Loregiver may worship freely within it, including members of the Temple of Ten Thousand Gods and followers of local deities such as Jauhar and Bala.

The Golden Mosque is maintained by a large staff headed by the Keeper of the Mosques, who in turn is a member of the Grand Caliph's court. Imam Renn, an elvish Zannite and pragmatist, is the current Keeper of the Mosques. His temple takes its name from the lavish gilt overlay which bedecks the pillars and the carved ceiling and wall ornaments. Even the intricate tilework is laced with gold.

The Golden Mosque is significant for three other reasons. First, it is a *haram* (holy site). It is built around the ruins of a house that is said to have belonged to the Loregiver herself. Further, it was here that the first Grand Caliph received the vision to search out the words of the Loregiver. Finally, the Golden Mosque opens to the east upon the Great Court of Enlightenment. The Grand Caliph appears above this court to his people on Ascension Day, and then pays homage to his gods in the Golden Mosque. In worshipping so, the Grand Caliph shows no preference to one faith over another.

Key Figures Outside the Court: White Agate (hmW/sem/20) is a sea mage whose travels to the utter ends of the earth have left his flesh bleached completely white. Some say it was caused by the inhospitable weather he encountered in the Crowded Sea, while others speak of his encounters with dark things far beneath the land of Nog. White Agate has retired as an adventurer and has made Huzuz his home. He now serves as the leader of the Magical Legion. Except for rare appearances in the Grand Caliph's court and at the head of his troop, White Agate is never seen in public. Even those who seek his services and advice do not communicate with him directly. Instead, servants bring the sea mage written questions, and he responds in kind.

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Qirmiz min Hudid (hfW/fm/14) is a member of the Brotherhood of the True Flame (and therefore a staunch believer in the superiority of fire magic over all other types). She occupies a large manor, which is frequently used by visiting flame mages as a base of operations. Rumors persist that worship of Kossuth is a common practice within her walls, but that has not been proved. Qirmiz is a sullen, easily-angered individual who is accustomed to getting what she seeks.

The House of R'maga was founded by seven ogre brothers, six of whom still remain in Huzuz. They pride themselves on their ability as porters and guides. Both they and their employees are well-versed in the history of the city, its layout, and how to get around. The R'maga brothers are in great demand during High Holy Days, when visiting dignitaries command their personal services. The seventh brother, Arkar bin R'maga, disappeared mysteriously a few years ago, and the surviving brothers do not speak of him.

A fixture in the Grand Bazaar for nearly 40 years is the popular barber Gorar al-Aksar (hmB/br/15). He has attended the sick, shaved the hairy, and provided great entertainment. Many people appreciate his talents. Harming Gorar in any way—and a number of strangers have been moved to such violence—is a sure way to incite a riot.

Gorar is a seemingly endless fount of information and chatter. He prefaces every other statement with a caveat, saying, "This may not be true, but. . ." Then he launches into a long and lively account. Merchants who frequent the bazaar claim that half the wild stories and most of the lost treasures of Huzuz and its surroundings have been "planted" by this man.

Gorar enjoys listening to a good tale almost as much as he enjoys telling one. He willingly compensates others for information—offering his services if not his silver. In time, he relates those stories to other customers, suitably embellished.

Rumors and Lore: The tale of Huzuz is closely tied to that of the Grand Caliph. Six hundred years ago, the land occupied by Huzuz was little more than a small village used for trade between desert tribes and merchants along Suq Bay. One fateful day, the young man who would be the first Grand Caliph visited the village. He wandered the streets and soon stood before a simple dwelling, which many claim was the house of the Loregiver. There—at the site of what is now the Golden Mosque—he received a vision of Fate. Fate declared to him that a disaster lay ahead for his tribe, but if he would place himself in her hands, he would rise to greatness.

And so it happened that when the boy and his tribe returned to the desert, a great sandstorm arose, unlike any they had seen before. The young man's tribe attempted to outrun the storm, but they were scattered and separated by the wind, seemingly lost forever. The young man himself did not flee. Instead, he placed himself in Fate's hands, and let his horse take him wherever Fate determined.

After some time, the boy awoke to find himself in the Akara Mountains, resting in a cave. He had no knowledge of how he came there. Upon searching the cave, he discovered a set of ancient scrolls, which he placed into his carpet bag before leaving.

For a time, the boy searched the desert for signs of his tribe. When he found none, he returned to the village where he had received the vision of Fate. There, he deciphered the scrolls, which contained the wisdom that would be known as the Law of the Loregiver. The boy began to share his wisdom with others. They spread the word in turn, and soon, almost magically, Fate's wisdom spread throughout the land like a wildfire. All recognized the wisdom of the youth. When members of his tribe, scattered and separated, heard of this mystic youth, they came together at the village. All had survived, and they realized that Fate had been with them after all.

The desert people and villagers settled the land together and spread the word of the Law. The youth became the new sheikh of his tribe. More importantly, he was soon recognized as the first Grand Caliph. The youth founded the Golden Mosque on the site of his vision, and all who wished to pray to whichever enlightened god they chose were welcome there. And within sight of the mosque he made his home.

Upon his death, the Grand Caliph ruled a small collection of cities. The title of Grand Caliph passed to his son. Since that time, the power of the Grand Caliph has expanded to its present size. And Huzuz itself has grown in population and wonder.

The present Grand Caliph is the eighteenth man to sit upon the Enlightened Throne, and his rule has

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been, for the most part, good. The realm is better under his care than it would be without him. For the people of Zakhara, that is enough.

Wasat, the Middle City

Located at the narrows of Suq Bay, Wasat lies on the major trade route linking Huzuz and Hiyal. Despite its key location, however, Wasat is a rather sleepy town, marked by none of the bustle of the great cities that flank it. The Middle City is but a quaint waystation for ships that travel along this golden trade route, and its residents are content with their position.

The Ruler: Caliph Haroun al-Raqqas, Blood of the First Caliph (hmT/br/12), is a bleary-eyed, bureaucratic courtier. He traded his independence for a soft, secure position, and has come to regret it. The blood of the First Caliph does run in his body, though it is very thin. That blood, coupled with Haroun's quick wit, garnered him a posting in Wasat following the untimely (and apparently accidental) death of the previous caliph and his family.

The Court: The caliph has a modest number of courtiers, some of whom are out of favor in Huzuz or on the run from Hiyal. The caliph also maintains a reasonable *harim*, with a number of possible young heirs (ages 5 and under).

An important member of the court is a newcomer, the great sorcerer Azuah al-Jawwaf (hmW/so/20). Al-Jawwaf arrived two years ago and took up residence in an abandoned monastery overlooking the town. He is a gaunt man with sharp features and fiery eyes. To pay fealty to the caliph, Azuah declared that he came to Wasak to retire from the hustle of the great cities. He also claimed that he wished only to conduct his research in peace. Azuah has given Caliph Haroun a magical ring, by which the caliph can summon him for magical advice. Haroun uses the ring sparingly, and usually sends written word to the old monastery of an upcoming appearance. Azuah, for his part, usually travels to the caliph's chambers using a *teleport* or *dimension door* spell, appearing in a puff of brilliant smoke.

Another frequent visitor to the palace is Prince Tannous, the uncle of the Grand Caliph. Tannous talks long into the night with Haroun. Of late, Azuah has joined them. The subjects of these discussions are not known, but the very fact that this most influential man regularly confers with the local caliph greatly enhances Haroun's prestige.

Population: 90,000.

Features of the City: Most of Wasat's money stems from its business as a waystation for merchants, who stop only briefly. The city produces little in its own right beyond what it needs to feed and clothe itself. A court rawun once called Wasat the Shining City because when the sun shines, the city's white-washed buildings reflect its light. Such days are rare, however. Usually, the city is shrouded in fog or a gray haze. Given the many stunning settlements in Zakhara, Wasat's beauty is seductive only when compared to the stinking cloud that surrounds Hiyal.

The people of Wasat are neither lazy nor diligent, fanatical nor unholy. Their most notable aspect is a refusal to be surprised—regardless of the situation. Located between two of Zakhara's great cities, they seem to exist in a dreamlike and magical world. What does it matter if a flaming fountain should suddenly appear in the suq? As long as the goods (and the merchants) aren't scorched, it matters little to the nonchalant people of Wasat.

Major Products: Trade.

Armed Forces: 800-man palace guard; two mamluk units of 300 men each, representing the Studious; 800-man cavalry patrol, usually outside the city; a three-ship navy. In times of true danger, the city relies on Huzuz for protection, and, to a lesser extent, upon Hiyal.

Major Mosques: Haku, Jisan, Kor, Selan, Zann.

Rumors and Lore: Wasat's sleepiness may be a veneer. Given its strategic position between Hiyal and Huzuz, this city is filled with agents of both the Enlightened Throne and Hiyal's sultana. Prince Tannous's regular visits indicate that Caliph Haroun is the humble servant of his puissant and mighty lord. But representatives of the sultana's children have also been present recently, dealing with some of the more unreliable merchants.

Azuah is a source of rumor as well. The true nature of this wizard's retirement and current "research" has yet to be revealed. Further, it is not known if even the caliph himself is partial to the wizard's full confidence. Strange lights resembling ball lightning have appeared around Azuah's abode, and the ground frequently shudders.

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Chapter 7

Cities of the North

In the northern reaches of Zakhara, where the Great Sea crashes against the shore, are Qudra, the Corsair Domains, and the Free Cities. The great city of Qudra is ruled by mamluks who are fiercely devoted to the Grand Caliph. Also dubbed the City of Power, Qudra is a model of duty and organization. The Corsair Domains, if they can be said to be ruled at all, are the holdings of Zakhara's northern pirates. Typically devoid of central government, the Corsair Domains are a political antithesis to the staunch rank and file of Qudra. Between them philosophically are the Free Cities, a collection of six independent city-states lining the coast, each located at the mouth of a river. These cities—Hafaya, Liham, Muluk, Qadib, Umara, and Utaqa—have come to operate more independently than others who swear fealty to the Grand Caliph. In fact, the loyalty of the Free Cities (and their rulers) to the Grand Caliph is directly proportional to their distance from the armies of Qudra. With savage tribes to the south, wild pirates to the north, and foreigners filling their streets, the somewhat uncivilized bent of the Free Cities is not surprising.

The independence of the Free Cities is heightened by their own standing armies, which fend off attacks by corsairs and savage tribesmen. The cities also use the armies against each other with great regularity. In accordance with a treaty written in Qudra, each Free City's caliph rules the river valley of his or her home. The caliphs, however, interpret this to mean "from one river to the next," so the cities are continually raiding each other's outposts. Qudra allows this uncivilized behavior to a point, intervening only when trade is threatened. During the past 20 years, the emir of Qudra has launched four major armed incursions into territory of the Free Cities, as well as dozens of smaller operations.

The Corsair Domains are a collection of small islands connected by shallow coastal waters. They are riddled with hidden bays, small villages, and secret coves. They are also a hive of illegal activity. These domains have no caliph, nor do they recognize a formal hierarchy, though most of the inhabitants consider themselves loyal (in their own way) to the Grand Caliph in Huzuz. In fact, some corsairs have declared themselves true followers of the Grand Caliph and protectors of the Law of the Loregiver.

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They regard the natives of Qudra and the Free Cities as spiritually impoverished tyrants who are unfit for rulership.

Government, in corsair terms, is simply the rule of the strong over the weak.

In the absence of a greater ruler, anarchy reigns. Strong and self-reliant, each of the small villages dotting these islands is a power unto itself, usually headed by a retired captain who runs the village with the same resolute iron hand that one would expect from a captain of brigands on the high sea.

The corsairs' main sources of income are smuggling, ship-building, and piracy. The third activity primarily affects shipping along the coast of the Free Cities, but many corsairs also range northward into the barbarian seas, in search of adventure as well as plunder. The corsairs are nomads of the ocean, and they practice what they preach: independence, self-reliance, and willingness to fight. They find state-sanctioned slavery abhorrent, due perhaps in part to fact that their main foes at sea are mamluk patrol craft.

While most settlements in the Corsair Domains are too small to qualify as cities, there is one exception: Hawa, the City of Chaos. That city is described in this chapter.

Clothing of the North: Fashion in northern Zakhara differs slightly from that found elsewhere. In Qudra, where mamluks reign, padded armor is a common sight. In the Free Cities, the influence of foreign visitors is clear. Instead of ankle-length pantaloons, men in the Free Cities often wear pants cut at the knee to reveal tall, cream-colored stockings. Turbans and keffiyehs are rare. Instead, men prefer fezzes, worn in a distinctive color for each city. Men may also don sashes in the same color. While these "city colors" are not a uniform worn by all males in the Free Cities, in general a man with a white fez and sash hails from far-flung Utaqa, while a fellow wearing purple hails from regal Muluk.

The men and women of the Corsair Domains typically wear light-weight cotton blouses and pantaloons, with supple black boots. Veiling for either sex is a matter of personal taste and protection from the elements rather than any moral predisposition. Personal weaponry is commonplace. Even the youngest corsair lad wears a dirk, and even the most lithe young dancer may have a knife tucked away.

Hafayah, City of Secrets

This Free City draws its water from the river Al-Kufr, upon whose banks it is built. No tourist's paradise, Hafayah is a dark, somber place whose residents favor black in their dress and their architecture. A recent bloody coup and the ongoing machinations of rival factions have left Hafaya's citizens suspicious and seemingly joyless toward strangers.

The Ruler: Prince Saba is the legitimate ruler of Hafayah, soon to be its sultan. Since he is only 8, the "gnome in power" is the Most Holy Regent Uqban min Najm (gmP/e/9), who is the prince's advisor as well as his guardian and protector. Prince Saba's short life has been marked by tragedies in "three's." Three years ago, the boy became the sole surviving son of the former sultan, who was poisoned. A bloody and futile coup erupted upon his father's death. The prince had three elder brothers and two elder sisters, all of whom perished during the factional bloodshed, which lasted three weeks. Fearing the worst, Father Uqban, a priest of Najm, had wisely spirited little Prince Saba away to safety. When the other heirs were dead, and word began circulating that a fleet from Qudra was approaching to "restore order," the priest returned to Hafayah with his ward. Persuaded by the threat of a lopsided battle and a cry of public support for the prince, the surviving factional leaders recognized Prince Saba as heir to the throne, and recognized the gnomish priest as the boy's regent and vizier.

Uqban has proved a cagey and wise ruler, though he spends most of his time turning one potential group of troublemakers against another. His information-gathering service is first class, aided by the churches, who prefer that their followers refrain from killing each other over temporal power. Uqban is also aided by wealth, for the upper regions of the terrible Al-Haul River have provided a wealth of agates and other semiprecious stones.

Prince Saba is just eight years away from his majority and the throne. At the moment, he does not want to be sultan. He wants to be a desert rider, a hero of the old tales who blazes a legend across the wastelands, freeing people from tyranny and defeating great monsters. His guardian is distressed by this, but none

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of the prince's tutors has been able to sway him from this idea. They have eight more years to work on it.

The Court: Favored members of the regent's court are few and far between. The turnover of courtiers, tutors, advisors, and others has almost become routine, for Uqban does not want anyone (aside from himself) to become firmly entrenched in the bureaucracy. Usually, those working closely with the regent do so only until the first mistake, at which point they find themselves demoted, exiled, or in extreme cases, arrested.

The exception to this general rule is the regent's chief scribe, a female gnoll named Jamalia. A descendent of a tribe of desert gnolls, she has been loyal to Uqban since his days as a rector in the faith of Najm. Uqban grants her the run of the palace. Those seeking the ear of the regent or heir often try to cultivate Jamalia. While she appears simple, open, and honest, she is as cunning as her master, and often works with the gnome to set one party against another.

Population: 120,000.

Features of the City: Hafaya's official color is black, both in clothing, tilework, and architecture. The rich mud of the Al-Haul River bakes dark, and the granite stonework gives the city an oppressive, sinister feeling.

That sinister feeling extends to the people as well. Not enough time has passed since the internal combat following the old sultan's death, and all remember "the Time when the Streets Bled." Intense loyalties are hidden beneath subterfuge, and no one is sure if a comrade would come to his or her aid in time of need. Suspicious and somber, the citizens of Hafaya give out information sparingly. The proximity of the rival city Qadib—stuffed with genies, sha'irs, and members of the Brotherhood of the True Flame—makes the people of Hafaya even more suspicious.

Hafaya is known for its wealth of semiprecious stones, which are harvested from the riverbanks. Most are exported for sale elsewhere. Allegedly, precious stones have also been found, and are in the possession of Uqban min Najm.

Major Products: Clothing, rice, agates and other semiprecious stones.

Armed Forces: 5,000 infantry; 1,200 cavalry; three units of mercenary barbarians, totaling 1,800 men; two units of mamluks of the Youthful, totaling 1,200 men; fleet of ten ships, small but extremely fast.

Major Mosques: Hajama, Najm, Selan.

Rumors and Lore: The facts behind the poisoning of the Old Sultan, at a dinner entertaining a delegation of ajami wizards from parts north, have never been established. The ajamis were among the first to perish in the bloodshed as the elder children gathered their private factions and forces and turned against each other. The person responsible for the sultan's poisoning has never been identified.

Prince Saba is the surviving direct heir, but some of his brothers had children. Any of these cousins would be willing to take the reins should the prince perish as mysteriously as his father. Uqban is aware of this danger, and he has headed off a number of earlier attempts. In such matters, the priest prefers to work with adventurers who are not tied to the city, especially loners who have few loyalties. The priest can easily deny their actions, or, if need be, dispose of them.

Hawa, City of Chaos

Hawa is the only sizeable settlement among the Corsair Domains. Seamen who have never seen Hawa know its reputation for chaos, given the pirating bent of its inhabitants. The people of Hawa have also dubbed it the City of Stilts, for nearly half its buildings are built directly over the water.

The Ruler: Currently, no single man or woman rules Hawa. Occasionally, a self-proclaimed "pirate king" has achieved power, ruling for a handful of years—which is as long as he can bully or bribe the city's council, the city's only stable governing body. Years ago, Hawa was ruled by a pirate queen, whose reign outlasted that of those who have succeeded her. According to rumor, the council arranged her unlikely death: she drowned.

The Court: Hawa is ruled by a council of the most powerful corsair leaders, some of whom have retired from life at sea. Active corsairs with a seat on the council aid in policy decisions only when they are in port, and their concerns are primarily along the lines of protection rackets and treasure splits. Retired corsairs (who have sprouted land legs) run bars and inns on Hawa, or own ship-building and repair

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facilities. Some also manage protection rackets. The concern of these "retirees" is keeping Hawa afloat both financially and militarily. They have been very successful against the slave-troops to the south, chiefly because the land-bound slaves have no love of water. Important members of the council include the following:

• Jayani al-Jasir (hfF/c/14) is one of the legendary figures of the islands. She controls much of the tavern-trade in Hawa, and any shops which she herself does not own must pay a small gratuity for permission to exist. Jayani is allegedly in her nineties, though except for a graying at the temples, she does not show her age. Most people assume she guards her looks with some form of magical enhancement.

During her years at sea, Jayani raided up and down the Free Coast. For a decade she worked out of a pirate base on the back of a great zaratan (a sea-turtle as big as an island). Then an attack by Qudra's mamluks spooked the creature and dragged her base to the bottom. Her hatred for the slave-soldiers and their minions knows no bounds, and foes who seek to infiltrate Hawa had best know that every tavern has Jayani's spies.

• Grima al-Auni min-Kor (hill giant mP/e/8) is a priest of Kor, trained in the City of Delights and dispatched to the city of Liham. He never reached that city, however, for corsairs under the command of Jayani captured the hill giant en route.

Grima soon found his "true" calling by bringing enlightenment to the corsair peoples. His main concern is protecting the children of the oft-violent corsair society. He hopes that these youngsters—the next generation of corsairs—will unite Hawa with the enlightened world, making it a respected city-state. (He encourages them to focus their efforts on the unenlightened.) Grima has been fairly successful and convincing in the past decade, owing primarily to his soft and resonant voice, calm and thoughtful manner, and a right hook that can smash through a ship's hull.

• Akura al-Hiyali (hmW/sh/15) is an active corsair captain. His upbringing and abilities are not those of a warrior, yet he has become one of the most successful pirates on the coast by using his training as a sha'ir. A water gen serves as his familiar. He is said to have no genie under his control at present, but in his time, Akura has summoned more than a few of these elemental creatures to wreak havoc upon his enemies. He is aggressive and bold—as likely to attack another corsair as any merchant vessel. He fancies himself the next pirate king, and claims his legend will exceed that of Jayani. The illustrious Jayani, of course, disagrees, and the two battle constantly, both in council and through their followers on the streets of Hawa.

Population: 50,000 (?). Bad weather as well as drives by the mamluks cause wide swings in Hawa's population. Most inhabitants have outlying holdings to which they flee during emergencies.

Features of the City: Hawa is a sprawling city built out over small islets of Chaos Bay. Half the city is on stilts. The bay is littered with coral reefs, making navigation for outsiders nearly impossible. Even seasoned sailors have difficulty, for sea-elf magicians regularly move the razor-sharp tropical growths through their wizardry. The city proper is a hodgepodge of different buildings. Often one structure is built upon the rubble of the previous one, so rumors of sunken and flooded treasure chambers abound. Beyond the city walls are the retreats of many retired corsair captains, each controlling a small, well-fortified (and often well-concealed) refuge.

The people of Hawa are independent, self-reliant, and dangerous, much like those of the Free City of Utaqa, with whom they have good relations. In fact, many residents of Hawa have blood relatives in Utaqa, and vice versa. The people of Hawa welcome newcomers, but they are not so foolish as to trust them. Strangers who cross a man or woman of Hawa have a price to pay, for once betrayed, Hawa's citizens are as savage as any native of the Crowded Sea, doggedly seeking revenge.

Major Products: Trade, smuggling, piracy.

Armed Forces: 2,000-man city guard; 15-ship navy, comprising ships of retired captains sold to the city. Those numbers are misleading, however. Every landholder has his or her own personal guard, ranging from a few leg-breakers to a small army. During an invasion, half the city of Hawa will be up in arms (while the other half heads for the hills with the valuables). Further, each corsair crew is a fighting force unto itself, and nearly all would battle to protect the city. At any given time, 20 or more pirate and smuggling vessels lie

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in port. If a major armada is heading up from the south, that number doubles or triples.

Major Mosques: Hakiyah, Kor, Najm. Reportedly, there is a secret cult of Ishtishia in the city, venerating a living idol set in a flooded basement on the mainland. This has not been proved.

Rumors and Lore: In the narrow waters north of Chaos Bay, a new island is said to have risen—an island that drifts with the tide. If the reports are true, it is probably a zaratan, and it could even be Jayani's old base. That base sunk with great treasure aboard, and the riches may well have survived. Akura has brazenly staked his claim to the island, but only the one who locates it first will gain it.

Liham, City of Soldiers

Located where the Al-Sari River spills into the Great Sea, Liham is the southernmost point in the lineup of Free Cities. Following the coast, a sailor would journey about 200 miles to the southwest to reach Qudra. The Free City of Umara lies about the same distance to the northeast. Though Liham's strong military force—which includes mamluks from Qudra—has earned it the title "City of Soldiers," it is also called Liham the Red, because crimson is a prominent color in the clothing of its residents.

The Ruler: Caliph Harin al-Hayif (hmF/a/10) is a timid soul who writes poetry of great quality. The caliph is rarely abroad, confined to his own court by his advisors.

The Court: The caliph's chief advisor is Marshal Imar Abd al-Amin (hmF/mk/12), a mamluk of the Faithful. Al-Amin's orders come directly from Qudra. Members of the Faithful serve as palace guards, insulating the caliph from external dangers.

Population: 120,000.

Features of the City: Red is the unofficial color of Liham. Fashionable men wear red fezzes and, to a lesser extent, red turbans. Many also wear red sashes at the waist. The women of Qudra don a riot of red shades in their gowns, shirts, and pants, accented with black and white. As the residents mill through Liham's Grand Bazaar, they form a wavering, flickering red mass, after



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which the bazaar has been dubbed Al-Mauqida, "the Hearth."

Some folk have another name for this city: Liham the Lapdog. Because of its proximity to Qudra, Liham is closely scrutinized by the powerful mamluks. It is said that Liham's caliph won't even comment on the weather without first checking with Qudra's emir. Qudra's mamluks maintain a strong presence in Liham; units of the Valiant, the Dutiful, and the Faithful regularly visit the city. While this adds to Liham's protection, it also severely limits its autonomy.

Major Products: Trade, pottery, coffee.

Armed Forces: 6,000 foot soldiers; 600 cavalry; detachments of mamluk units from Qudra—typically three units of 200 mamluks each, more in times of crisis; mamluk palace guard, representing the Dutiful. (The city has no native mamluk or mercenary organizations.) Seafaring forces include a three-ship coastal navy.

Major Mosques: Hajama, Kor, Najm, Vataqatal.

Rumors and Lore: Two rumors are regularly afloat in the City of Soldiers. Both concern its relationship with Qudra. According to the first rumor, Qudra's mamluks will soon drop all pretense and take full control, deposing Liham's timid caliph and creating a rulership of slave-soldiers in his stead. Then Liham would serve as Qudra's forward base in dealing with other Free Cities and the hill tribes. Only the combined might of the Free Cities, and, surprisingly, the popularity of Al-Hayif's poetry in the court of the Grand Caliph, prevent this from occurring.

The second rumor that appears regularly is as follows: The people of Liham—with the support of Umara, Utaqa, and factions from other cities—will rise up and overthrow the present government and cast out the mamluks. Such an uprising is not likely, considering the profitable trade that Liham has with its larger neighbor to the south. But the rumor has gained new life with talk of a leader who claims to be the unrecognized son of Liham's caliph. This mysterious son is allegedly hidden away, much as the father, waiting for the uprising. The mamluks in general, and Marshal al-Amin in particular, are interested in locating this missing prince before such an event might occur.

Muluk, City of Kings

This Free City takes its name from the long, unbroken line of rulers whose history predates the Enlightened Throne. It is also known for its unusually regal purple dyes, produced from local indigo plants. Centrally located at the mouth of the river Al-Zalim, Muluk is flanked by Umara to the south and Qadib to the north.

The Ruler: At the helm of this city is Caliph Aswiyah al-Muftahir (hfF/a/15), eldest daughter of her father, from whom she inherited her position. Her family has ruled Muluk for nearly a millennium, or so they claim. Aswiyah (who prefers the title "caliph" to the more traditional and feminine "calipha") has all the craft and canniness of her predecessors, male and female. She is a consummate politician. During her reign she has successfully allied alongside and against each of the other Free Cities in turn, always for the good of Muluk.

The Court: The caliph is grooming her daughter, Princess Hadra bint Aswiyah (hfW/sh/9), to ascend the throne in the event of her death. A sha'ir, the princess holds the rank of Sorcerer-General within Muluk's army, and she has led attacks against both Qadib and Umara. Hadra's generalship was in part the reason for the palace revolution in Umara.

Population: 90,000.

Features of the City: Indigo grows in abundance along the shores of the Zalim river. The purple dye produced by Muluk's craftsmen is unmatched throughout Zakhara as well as the barbarian nations of the North. By fiat of the Grand Caliph of Huzuz, all citizens of Muluk may wear this shade freely; as such, purple is the official color of the City of Kings.

The people of Muluk are proud of their city's history and noble tradition. They tend to look down their noses at the citizens of other cities, and always expect the finest wine, the best seats, and the most comfortable conveyance. To say that they are effete snobs would be an insult to their long tradition of civilization and enlightened rule, but it would not be far off the mark. Truly it may be said that Muluk has better leaders than it deserves.

Major Products: Trade, indigo dye, purple cloth and clothing.

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Armed Forces: 2,000 regular footmen, 5,000 militia, 1,000 cavalry (all under the command of Princess Hadra, the Sorcerer-General). Also, 1,500 mamluks of the Respected (including 500 cavalry), under the command of General Oman abid-Hazim (hmF/mk/10). Finally, a 20-ship navy (including four large dhows purchased from Umara), used primarily to escort the "fabric fleet" of indigo cloth to Qudra for the trip south.

Major Mosques: Hakiyah, Haku, Jisan, and Kor. In addition, a monument of Aswar al-Mutiq attracts the attention of kahins and mystics as a holy site.

Rumors and Lore: Muluk was a well-developed trading city long before the coming of the Law of the Loregiver and the creation of the Enlightened Throne. As city after city fell before the wave of faith and understanding, many of the older emirs and sultans were toppled by their people. Caliph Aswar al-Mutiq heard the tales and was troubled, and when the first mystics and warriors brought enlightenment to his city, he asked for a private audience. For five days and five nights the messengers met with the caliph in his private quarters, telling him of the Law of the Loregiver. Then the caliph deliberated by himself for five more days. At the end of this time, he welcomed the Law into his city, recognized the Grand Caliph for his puissant wisdom, and stepped down, joining the messengers to spread the Law still further. His eldest child succeeded him as was custom, and since then, Muluk has remained the oldest continual dynasty in the Free Cities.

Qadib, City of Wands

A visit to this northerly city on the river Al-Haul can be magical, for Qadib is home to more sorcerers, elemental mages, and sha'irs than any other locale in northern Zakhara. In the entire Land of Fate, only Huzuz and Rog'osto boast more residents of a magical bent.

The Ruler: Sultan Kamal al-Hadi (hemW/sh/15) is an ancient, skeletal half-elf who has outlived several wives, his children and grandchildren, and is likely to outlive his great-grandchildren as well. His slowness in movement and speech conceals a mind that is still among the greatest in the Free Cities, and he is usually two steps ahead of everyone else as a master planner and conspirer. "The Hand of Fate strikes all," he wrote in his biography, "but most fortunate are those who can help direct its touch." He has shown a preference for human wives, and as a result all of his offspring have been human.

The Court: The sultan's court is expansive, comprising representatives of all the magical universities and colleges. Two individuals of importance are the leader of the University of Flame Mages, Badiyah al-Sa'id al-Sahim (efW/fm/10), who is reportedly a secret member of the Brotherhood of the True Flame, and Prince Anir al-Walad al-Hadi (hmF/f/12), the current heir apparent to the sultan's court. The prince is decidedly nonmagical in attitude, preferring to hunt and hawk rather than attending affairs of magic. The court believes that Sultan Kamal will (or must) live long enough to bring a more suitable heir into the picture.

The sultan's court also hosts a large number of genies, in particular jann, who are owned or hired by the sultan's family. These jann often serve as the sultan's eyes and ears in the outside world.

Population: 50,000.

Features of the City: As noted, Qadib is a city of sorcerers, elemental mages, and sha'irs. It is also a city known for its universities, for which it is often called the City of Sages. Qadib's universities are dedicated not only to each of the elemental provinces but also to legends, alchemy, astrology, divination, optics, algebra, and all the arts of civilized people.

This city has a third distinction as well: its dye-makers produce and export a fiery yellow-orange pigment called Uther, which residents use to dye fabric, especially felt. In the city streets, natives can be identified by their yellow fezzes and golden robes.

In general, the natives of Qadib are intelligent, conversational, and well-informed, as one would expect in a center of learning. They may be too much so, however, for a Qadibi rarely uses one word when seven are possible. Quite often, even simple questions spur great debates in the streets. The people of Qadib are also noted for presenting their own opinions as stated facts. There is a saying on the northern coast: "If you want answers, seek them in Qadib. If you want truth, seek it elsewhere."

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Major Products: Sages, information, scrolls, trade, magicians, dye (uther), fabric (especially yellow-orange).

Armed Forces: 2,000-man city guard, 100-jann sultan's personal guard, 500-man cavalry outriders under the command of Prince Anir, five-ship navy. 700 mamluks of the Studious military society. In addition, each university is expected to contribute about 100 members who become part of a "defense force." While schools of optics and algebra might provide 100 pikemen, the magical schools will provide about 100 low-level mages led by a tutor of 5th to 9th level, making it a very potent force.

Major Mosques: Kor, Zann.

Rumors and Lore: Legends of forgotten magics and mysterious artifacts are common trade in the City of Wands. Reportedly, catacombs and caverns snake through the ground beneath the city, and it was in these passages that the first mages met to teach their students before the Enlightenment. The catacombs are said to run for miles, to connect with every major building (including the sultan's palace), to have gateways and wells leading to far places beyond the Land of Fate, and to be inhabited by savage monsters.

Qudra, City of Power

Overlooking the Great Sea about 300 miles northwest of Hiyal, Qudra is Zakhara's bastion against the uncivilized realms beyond. The city's defenses have been built over the course of centuries in response to pirate raids and barbarian incursions. Today Qudra is the best-fortified city in enlightened Zakhara, presenting a stern gray face to the north.

The Ruler: Emir Hatit Abd al-Wajib (dmF/mk/20). Long ago, in the time of the eighth Grand Caliph, an evil and dissolute man was appointed emir of the City of Power. He oppressed his own people and overran Zakhara's northern cities, taxing them unjustly until they rebelled. He forwarded only a pittance of the moneys he gathered to the Grand Caliph, sending instead honeyed words of loyalty and trust. At last he planned to march south and take control of Huzuz and the entire Land of Fate.

It was at this time that the mamluks in his charge, who had sworn loyalty to the Grand Caliph, rebelled against the evil emir. Though they were outnumbered by the emir's troops and his mercenary barbarians, the mamluks prevailed through discipline, and they overthrew the evil ruler. When word of the victory reached the eighth Grand Caliph, he was humbled by the valiant nature of his slave-soldiers. He asked them to chose among themselves the next emir who would rule them. They selected one of their bravest leaders, a man who ruled Qudra until his death.

A tradition was born, and so it continues today. Each of Qudra's emirs has been chosen by the generals of the city's mamluk units. Hatit, slave to duty, is the most recent of these mamluk-emirs. The term of the office is life or 20 years, whichever comes first. Hatit has ruled 13 years thus far.

A clean-shaven dwarf, Hatit wears the tattoos of his mamluk organization, the Dutiful, on his cheeks and forehead. He is a master of fortification and redoubts, a rarity in a land that boasts little in the way of siege machinery. He has spent much of his tenure examining and shoring up the walls of Qudra, looking for holes in her armor. He is particularly interested in the warfare of other lands, especially lands to the north, from which any major barbarian attack would probably come.

The Court: The court of Qudra is a military council comprising all the major mamluk organizations. Each organization sends its own representative to the council. Emir Hatit is expected to confer with them on all matters of importance, and inform them of all military matters. All mamluk organizations of greater than 200 men are represented here, some 40 in all. Only mamluks may serve on the counsel, though each of the chamber members has his or her own advisors.

Emir Hatit presides over the council. Other members include the following:

- General Ekuriyah Abd al-Wajid (hfF/mk/14) represents the Dutiful in chambers. Hatit's protege and a capable officer, Ekuriyah is viewed as the most likely choice as the next emir. However, she herself doubts the wisdom of such a choice, concerned that she lacks her dwarven mentor's eye for detail. (She has not yet seen anyone else who she feels is worthy to replace Hatit, though.) In purely social situations, Ekuriyah is shy and reserved. As a leader, she has exceeded all of

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Hatit's expectations. She personally heads recruiting drives into the Furrowed Mountains.

• General Adun Abd al-Amin (hmF/mk/18) represents the Faithful in chambers. An older, more experienced soldier, General Adun sought the personal glory of the emirate 13 years ago, even to the point of canvasing other members and reminding them of his military triumphs against the corsairs, the hill tribes, and the rebellious Free City of Utaqa. Such bragging not only gained him the effects of the evil eye, but also caused the council to pass over him for Hatit. The anger in his heart from the slight has never died, and he is continually looking for flaws in both the emir's and General Ekuriyah's behavior.

• General Okin Abd al-Talib'ilm (emF/mk/16) represents the Studious in chambers. This venerable elf was crippled in battle almost a century ago. Though his wounds eventually healed, the spirit went out of him as a warrior. He soon found his place among the researchers and battle tacticians of Qudra. He has become among the best of his profession, able to combine textbook tactics with hands-on experience. Okin speaks slowly, pausing oddly in the middle of his sentences, but when he speaks, all (including Hatib) stop to listen. A staunch Zannite, General Okin is the only member of the chambers who does not worship Vataqatal.

• General Kalin Abd al-Bas (hfF/mk/14) represents the Valiant in chambers. Kalin is the youngest member of the council, and she engenders great support from the younger members of all the mamluk societies. Many years ago, one of the Valiant's greatest warriors, Abyad Abd al-Bas, was marked by a natural streak of white in his hair. Kalin's hair has a similar streak, just as she shares that famous warrior's natural power. Her attempts to cultivate her position as heir to a legend, however, are undercut by her excitable nature and fiery temper. Many of the battles in which she carried the day were needless, inspired only by her own poor planning.

• Admiral Dus Abd al-Dawwar (gbmF/mk/5) represents the Wanderers in chambers. This goblin is the only naval representative in the council. He feels hamstrung and frustrated, for although Qudra's fleet is the largest of any Zakharan city's, it is only powerful on paper. Most of the ships have been badly maintained, and only about half would be suitable for fleet action against the corsairs. Of course, current military thinking is defensive for the most part, with the fleets to be used only to transport warriors to battle along the Free Coast. While he is in port, Admiral Dus spends many sullen hours in tobacco houses and cafes. When the anchor is weighed, he regains his true nature: quick, alert, and crafty in naval combat. Unfortunately, he spends only one month a year at sea, when his fleet escorts Zakharan craft past the Corsair Domains.

• Colonel Akir Abd al-Himaya (hmF/mk/10) represents the Defenders in chambers. Al-Himaya is in charge of defending the city against attack whenever the mamluk armies are abroad. In reality, his organizations act as a city guard as well as mediators, settling arguments between members of the other military societies. The colonel's position is slightly weaker than that of other mamluk leaders, so he must often trade favors (such as valiant assignments or secret information) in return for action on their part.

Population: 500,000.

Features of the City: Qudra is the greatest fortification in the land of Fate—a mass of gray, heavy, brooding, stone overlooking a deep-water harbor. The harbor itself is protected by a great chain pulled across its mouth. With few exceptions, the city lacks the graceful spires and domes typifying Zakharan architecture, as well as the ornate gilt and tilework. Instead, the city's builders borrowed techniques of other lands to produce the massive battlements that ring the city. Within the stalwart outer wall, smaller interior walls divide Qudra into defensive quarters. These interior walls have never been tested, since the great outer wall has never been breached.

The people of Qudra are by and large obedient, hard-working, and honest. Surprisingly, they are not warlike, for that role is taken up entirely by the mamluks. The mamluks are both slaves (owned ultimately by the Grand Caliph) and rulers of Qudra, and they form their own elite rank within the city population. The remainder of the population works hard to support its military organization.

Visitors to this great city should make note of the following sites:

• *City Walls*. A marvel of engineering, the walls of Qudra are carved out of granite from the Furrowed Mountains. The foundation was laid by order of the

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first enlightened emir. The walls have been improved and strengthened by the mamluk rulers who followed him.

Today, the city's outer wall measures 40 feet high and 40 feet thick. The wall is not solid, however. Twenty feet from the exterior, a 15-foot-wide tunnel snakes through the center. The wall is breached by three gates, each leading south toward the mountains. Otherwise, the only gap in the wall occurs at the waterfront. The outer wall curves around to embrace and protect the harbor, ending on both sides with a 50-foot-high tower. The twin towers hold the great chains that seal the harbor from invasion.

Atop the wall, members of the mamluk guard patrol the battlements. A different unit is assigned this duty each month. Great cauldrons are positioned along the walls and over the gates. During an assault, the caldrons hold burning "oil of stars" (Greek fire), which the guards can pour upon assailants below.

• *Slave Market*. Qudra's ruling mamluks enforce high standards in the authorized slave market. As a result, its slaves are of the highest quality, are not mistreated, and are usually capable and talented. Members of hill tribes are sold here along with northern barbarians, as are criminals who have been enslaved for breaking the Law of the Loregiver. An elvish wizard and two hakimas (see "Key Figures Outside the Court") have been appointed to oversee the market, ensuring that it operates in a reasonable, enlightened fashion.

• *Mosque of Blood*. Qudra is home to the greatest temple erected in the name of Vataqatal, a warrior-god venerated by many mamluks. The temple takes its name from its outward appearance; its rough-hewn sandstone walls are stained red with regular applications of henna, honoring the good men and women whose blood has been spilled in battle.

• *Open Mosque*. As a reward for the city's valiant mamluks, the eighth Grand Caliph sent many of Huzuz's finest architects and tileworkers to Qudra, where they erected a graceful mosque in the Zakharan tradition. This blue jewel stands in stark contrast to the brooding gray stone of the city's walls and other buildings. It is frequented by natives who do not venerate Vataqatal with the same fervor as the mamluks.



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Major Products: Slaves, mamluks, armor, trade (Northern goods), Greek fire (oil of stars).

Armed Forces: 25,000 mamluk infantry; 6,000 mamluk cavalry; 400 special air troops, broken down among 20 major mamluk military societies; navy of 50 ships (effectively 25; see below).

A major mamluk society consists of 200 or more men, answering to one commander. Most units are purely infantry, while others are a combination of infantry, cavalry, and air. Spellcasters are either hired under long-term contracts or recruited from the priesthood of Vataqatal. In either case, they serve as support units for larger infantry formations. The idea of wizards amassed against enemy forces using magic has proved to be a military blunder.

Formally, all of Qudra's mamluks belong to the Grand Caliph, for they are slaves. They may not serve another ruler without the express permission of the Grand Caliph. Having received that permission in the past, Qudra's mamluks have entered into long-term service with a number of local rulers, who in turn serve the Grand Caliph.

Qudra's navy consists of 50 ships, but half of those are rotting at the docks, their sails and usable wood stripped for the other half. Morale is poor among the mamluk navy, as it has been since an aborted attempt to conquer the Corsair Domains a decade ago. The fleet attempted a direct assault against Hawa, City of Chaos, without sufficient magical support. Qudra's mamluk force was repelled with great losses. That display of weakness has not been forgotten by the members of the council, because it encouraged the city of Utaqa to rebel.

Major Mosques: The largest temple in the city is the Mosque of Blood, carved of red sandstone and coated regularly with henna. It is dedicated to Vataqatal, a local god. His church is approved by the Grand Caliph, and his worshippers venerate him much as followers of other gods venerate their own. (They have no unusual rituals or ceremonies.) Qudra also has an open mosque, described above.

Key Figures Outside the Court: Qazim al-Satir (hmW/wm/14) is the one wizard of whom it can be said, "He is good enough to be a slave"—and have it meant as a compliment. Members of the council hold Qazim in high regard. While he is not a member himself, his advice is often sought in matters of magic. It was Qazim who saved the remnants of the fleet ten years ago in the Battle of Hawa, and the generals remember. Qazim prefers to not leave his comfortable manor in Qudra's suq district, but he will respond to any call from the council.

Shams al-Ezai (hemW/so/8) is a half-elven sorcerer who works in the Slave Bazaar as a qadi. He is assisted by two hakimas, Tau'am and Tum bint Nisr, who are twins (both hfP/hk/10). Together, this trio attends the public slave auctions, attempting to maintain the honest balance of trade—ensuring that would-be slaves are well-cared for, are not ensorcelled in any fashion, and are not free men or women captured against their will. (Obviously, the twins' powers of true sight are invaluable.) Shams enjoys his work. He rarely has to exert his power, however, since Qudra imposes many other tight controls on slave-trading. For this reason, Shams and the hakimas are the last line of defense for someone captured by raiders and sold into slavery in the city. He is a member of the magical reserve for the Studious, and could be called into active service in times of need.

Mad Asham (hmW/sh/10) is a curious character who wanders the streets of Qudra. Old soldiers remember him as a magical advisor to the Dauntless (a mamluk group). Decades ago, he and a raiding party disappeared while conducting a recruiting mission on the borders of the Haunted Lands. Six years later, he stumbled back into the city alone, his robes tattered and his mind wiped clean. No magical aid would roust him from his babbling, and even the genies who agreed to examine him could not bring about a change.

Today, Mad Asham usually can be found in the suq district of Qudra, grabbing passersby and warning them of some grim fortune to come. The natives are accustomed to him, and kindhearted souls offer Asham food and a crude shelter when he needs it. Newcomers, however, may be surprised to find a ragged wizard grabbing them by the robes and speaking of "the Whispering Doom that comes from the Desert." Asham's madness appears permanent. Through the years, magical cures have proved useless against it, as have *wish* spells and all attempts at curse removal.

Another well-known figure, Bahramiyah al-Musafir (hgfT/mr/15) oversees the great caravans that bring

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weapons from the great forges of Hiyal to Qudra. She has done so for 40 years. While Qudran steel is good, Hiyal's is superior, and each mamluk unit seeks to arm its best forces with Hiyal's weapons. Today, Bahramiyah is a grumbling old woman. The day-to-day business of selling steel has been taken over by her sons and daughters, but she still makes the annual journey to Hiyal and back, traveling by camel and sambuq.

Rumors and Lore: Mad Asham (see above) has been babbling about his journey through the desert for decades. Most of Qudra's residents are immune to his cries about "the Whispering Doom"—even though this is the only aspect of his ranting that has remained consistent over the years. Some, however, believe that a kernel of truth lies beneath Asham's madness.

Further, rumors persist that over the past few years, increasingly fewer youths have been recruited from the Furrowed Mountains and the mountains bordering the High Desert. Qudra's mamluk rulers now must either go farther afield for their next generation of warriors or consider recruiting townspeople. The third choice, diminishing the size of the army, is considered to be no option at all.

Umara, City of Knights

Situated on the mouth of the river Al-Yatir, about 170 miles northeast of Liham, Umara is a jewel of a coastal city, noted for its distinctive blue textiles and tilework. Though it appears peaceful today, its recent past is marked by the bloodshed of a barbarian incursion—an incursion which still lingers on the minds of those who dream of revenge.

The Ruler: Caliph Ubar khel Muhif, Khan of the Astok people (hmF/mb/12), is the former leader of a barbarian hill tribe. He was recently enlightened and enlisted in the service of Umara's former caliph. After a disastrous series of battles with the city of Muluk, Khel Muhif staged a palace revolution, deposed the old caliph, married the caliph's daughter, and re-established order before Qudra's troops arrived. Faced with the choice between a long siege and recognizing the coup, the mamluks hailed Khel Muhif as the new leader of Umara.

To the surprise of many, Khel Muhif has proved himself a capable ruler, though his court is still stocked with other barbarians. His only wife, Princess Maran ber Ubar, is his confidant and advisor.

The Court: Khel Muhif relies heavily on the advice of his wife, Princess Maran ber Ubar (hfF/a/8), daughter of the former caliph. Though he married Muran to claim the throne, he has come to admire her wisdom, and considers her the beloved jewel of an enlightened land. She, in turn, uses her position of power to integrate the Astok people into the population and to preserve the rights of the former nobles and merchants in the city. She loves the Khan as he does her. Though her rights are in some ways diminished, she likes his people's customs of having a single wife and no permissible divorce.

Opposing the princess is ur-Khan Mostok (hmF/mb/10), a faithful follower of Khan Ubar. (He never refers to his old friend as "caliph.") Mostok feels his leader has become soft, decadent, and perhaps even "bewitched" by the love of his wife. When the revolution came, Mostok expected a quick bit of looting and debauchery before fleeing back to the hills. Instead, his leader remained in Umara, and, out of loyalty, he stayed too. Mostok is as uncomfortable with the city people as they are with him. He distrusts them, and awaits the day Umara's citizens will turn on his kind. He suspects that the princess is part of some larger plot along these lines. If Mostok is to save his friend, he may have to remove her from the scene.

Population: 100,000.

Features of the City: Umara is noted for its blue dyes. Distinctive shades of cobalt and turquoise have become the unofficial city colors, bedecking tilework, clothing, and particularly the city's world-renowned carpets and textiles.

The native people of Umara are fairly typical of the coastal regions. The men are clean-shaven but keep their moustaches. The women, while unveiled, are modest in their dress and wear their hair in long, single braids that hang down their backs.

Today, mingling among these natives are the newly-enlightened people of Astok—for the tribesmen who successfully conquered the city later brought their families to the verdant coast. The barbarians are slightly larger and hairier than the coastal natives, and the men like to keep their full beards. Otherwise, it would be difficult to distinguish the Astoks by their

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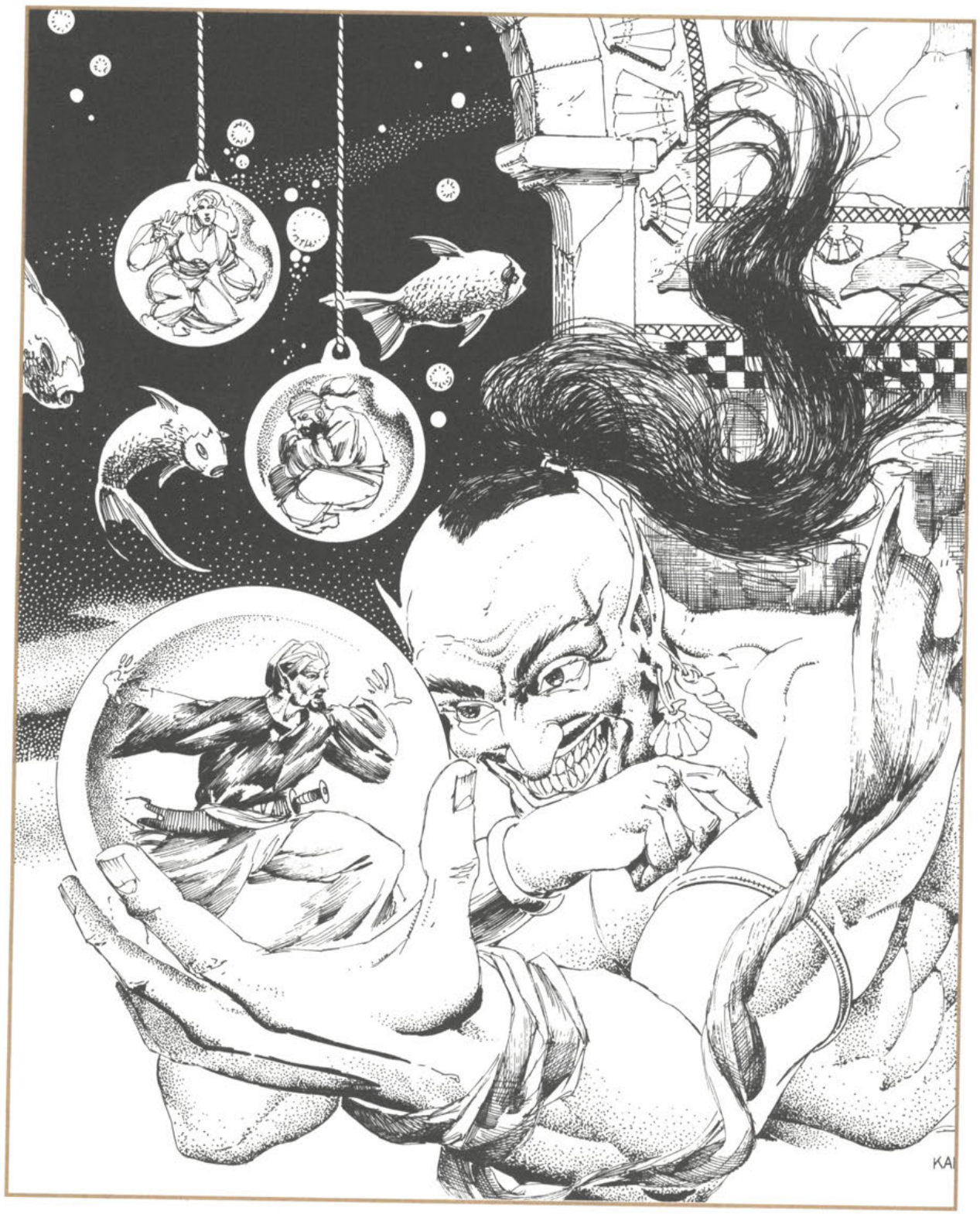

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appearance alone. The Astoks do have their own language, however, and speak Midani with a harsh, almost threatening accent. Most natives have grown accustomed to these invaders. But former political heavyweights—holy leaders, courtiers, wealthy merchants, and military personnel—are irritated that these sweating barbarians are not only among them, but are adapting quite well.

Major Products: Carpets, trade, clothing, tapestries, goats, goat cheese, dye.

Armed Forces: 3,000-man elite palace guard, all members of age of the Astok tribe; 2,000-man mercenary force, comprising other tribesmen, no unit larger than 400 men; four separate mamluk military societies of 500 men each; a 2,000-man local militia; a 600-man cavalry, officially disbanded; a six-ship navy, officially disbanded (formerly had ten ships, but four have been sold to the city of Muluk).

Major Mosques: Botu'Astok, Jisan, Kor, and Selan. Botu'Astok is a legendary figure worshipped by the Astoks, who claim he is the primogenitor of their people. The caliph has decreed that Botu'Astok must be worshipped in the mosque as other deities; as such, Botu'Astok is considered a common god. Apparently, Botu'Astok does not object to his new surroundings, for his priests continue to receive their spells. In fact, many Umaran natives have taken to Botu'Astok as a god representing change and rebirth, and they hope the installation of a new ruling family will bring about a favorable change in the city's fortunes.

Rumors and Lore: Officially, the former caliph was slain when Ubar took the throne. However, a local legend says that Princess Maran pleaded for her father's life. Touched by her sorrow, Ubar sent the man into exile in the far south by way of magic. Now the former caliph is said to be gathering his own force to challenge the man who captured his daughter and usurped his power.

Closer to home, the forces of the entrenched bureaucracy (headed by Princess Maran) and the new invaders (championed by Ur-Khan Mostok) continue to vie over petty issues. While no blood has flowed since the coup (except that which is shed during tavern brawls), it is only a matter of time before one of the two must go.

Utaqa, City of Free Men

Located at the mouth of the river Al-Zulma, Utaqa is the northernmost point in the line of Free Cities stretching along the coast of the Great Sea. Its closest neighbor, Hafayah, lies nearly 200 miles to the southwest. Every citizen feels Utaqa's distance from civilization, for the city has a decidedly independent spirit.

The Ruler: Caliph Agara al-Gandar (hmT/mr/13) was a merchant with a thriving business and diluted blood-ties to the throne of Utaqa. During the most recent insurrection in the city, the previous caliph and his family were put to the sword by Qudran mamluks. The people of Qudra installed "Agara the Dandy" as their puppet, exerting their influence in Huzuz to receive the Grand Caliph's confirmation of their choice. Qudra had one goal: to provide a safe and fully compliant fortification at the opposite end of the Free Coast, bracketing the cities.

It has not worked out exactly as they planned. Al-Gandar quickly discovered that in order to get anything done in the city, he had to return to the citizens and merchants a measure of the autonomy they had previously known. As long as the people of Utaqa are allowed to do as they see fit, they are content. Huzuz has not interfered; as long as Utaqa continues to pay its respect and its taxes to the Grand Caliph, the Grand Caliphate is also content. Nor has Qudra interfered to date, for as long as Utaqa's caliph assures Qudra's emir that the northern tip of the empire is secure, the emir is also content. The only unhappy man in the entire situation seems to be Agara al-Gandar, who must balance the desires of these factions to retain his position. The lines on the caliph's face deepen with each passing month.

The Court: Caliph Agara al-Gandar is blessed with an overabundance of advisors and aides, most of whom have their own interests in keeping Agara on the throne. As a result, they will gladly bend the truth, lose paperwork, and deliver bribes and favors to keep the status quo. Here are three of those people:

- Chawus al-Rark (hmF/c/10) is a prominent merchant. He made his fortune among the wilds of the north, and he maintains it by dealing with the Corsair Domains. His arrangement with the corsairs is as

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follows: he helps them smuggle goods, and in turn they leave the ships that fly Utaqa's colors alone—for the most part.

• On-Basi al-Garn (hmT/mr/12) is the court's chief scribe. He is responsible for the glowing descriptions of Caliph Agara that are sent to the courts of Qudra and Huzuz. His descriptions are often too glowing, however, because they result in additional demands being placed on Utaqa. On-Basi does try to control his tendency to embellish, but he is at heart a boaster and a tale-spinner. His most recent error: he reported Caliph Agara's victory over an incursion of yak-men. Eventually, this tale reached the ears of those evil creatures in the World Pillar Mountains. In response, the yak-men sent several angry dao to Agara's bedroom.

• Allena al-Ajami (hfW/aj/14) is the court's chief vizier. A foreigner from the distant North, she is apparently on the run from one or more powerful individuals in that region. Allena relates well to other outlanders, and problems concerning outsiders and mercenary barbarians usually fall into her lap. She supervises the coordination (and more importantly, the payment) of mercenary barbarians in Utaqa.

Population: 70,000.

Features of the City: More than any other city in the north, and perhaps even throughout the Land of Fate, Utaqa is a place on the edge of civilization. The combination of barbarian and enlightened views have produced a very independent attitude toward the world that is neither of Zakhara nor of the world outside. The city's people are basically honest and blunt, often to the point of seeming rude. They are pragmatic in that they recognize the need for some sort of government, so they feel they might as well make the most of it. All of the clergy in the major mosques are pragmatists, a rarity in the Land of Fate.

The Utaqans are also stridently opposed to slavery, in all its forms. In particular, they oppose the mamluks, whom Utaqans describe as "the tattooed attack dogs of oppression." Slaves brought into the city will be rescued (whether they want to be or not). Mamluks are rarely found in the streets except as an occupying force. Visiting merchants who own slaves grant them temporary freedom while in Utaqa, paying them as employees until both leave the city, when they resume their relationship as master and slaves.

Utaqans see themselves as good and decent folk confronted with decadent authority and tyrannical rule. The city's official color is white, symbolizing their purity (to their detractors, it also symbolizes the color of surrender). Smuggling and similar acts are illegal only by declaration of a far-off power. "A man should be ruled by his own internal Law" is the unofficial Utaqan motto.

Major Products: Trade, smuggling, mercenaries.

Armed Forces: 4,000-man city guard; 30-ship navy; ten units (10,000 men) of mercenary barbarians who make Utaqa their home base, of which about half are present at any time. The city has a large mamluk fortification upstream on the Al-Kufr River, which houses three units of 900 trained men (2,600 total), representing the Studious, the Valiant, and the Dutiful. Ostensibly, these units are strategically positioned to aid the caliph in times of need. The real reason for their proximity: to capture the city if the Utaqans get out of hand.

Major Mosques: Hajama, Hakiyah, Haku, Najm. The city also boasts a number of temples devoted to savage (unenlightened) gods, and such temples are a rarity in the civilized world.

Rumors and Lore: Intrigue abounds in Utaqa, on a level which even rivals that of Hiyal. A regular crisis involves rumors from Hafayah, claiming that an inspector from Qudra is traveling incognito, looking for corruption and excess. From the viewpoint of mamluk-ruled Qudra, all of Utaqa is corrupt and excessive. But perhaps that's the only way the city can function. Top-heavy with outlanders and barbarians, a normal system of government would crumble here, as it has done in the past. The inspector on his or her way to Utaqa may not agree, however, and the sagacious heads of court are looking for him, hoping to shut his mouth with either gold or steel.

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Chapter 8

Cities of the Pearl

The Pearl Cities line a coast bordering the Crowded Sea and the western shores of the Golden Gulf, tucked between the cool, shimmering waves and the hot sands of the High Desert. These cities—Ajayib, Gana, Jumlat, Sikak, and Tajar—are among the wealthiest in the Land of Fate. Only Jumlat and Gana actually produce pearls, but all maintain a rich trade in these objects of beauty, as well as in frankincense, coffee, valuable metals, spices, fine fish, woods, and exotic wares from far-away lands.

Trade, in fact, is the second law of the people of the Pearl. Frequently it gives the true Law, that of the Loregiver, strong competition. Lending institutions and speculative ventures are common. So are usurious loans and unseen charges. A traveler in the lands of the Pearl should remember that nothing is truly free and heed this rule of conduct: Ask questions first, haggle second, and buy last.

Some of the richest members of Zakharan society live in the Pearl Cities. Here too are some of the poorest. The wealth of the upper class would make a Free City's ruler jealous; their luxurious pavilions and palatial manors dot the surrounding countryside. At their feet are the beggars and exploited workers, who far outnumber the rich. Slavery *per se* is not common in the Pearl Cities, but it has been replaced with a form of economic tyranny that keeps the lower classes firmly in their place. As long as a person is not poor, life holds great promise. The impoverished have little to look forward to but another day of erasing old debts while incurring new ones.

The minority with control over the money flaunt their wealth, both in their manner and their dress. Wonderful feasts are thrown for minor reasons, with the remains distributed to the poor. Bright and often conflicting colors are common, in stripes and rich brocades.

As a group, the people of the Pearl Cities are proud, almost haughty, and easily insulted. They do not tell the full truth at all times, and rate with the genies in their cunning. All of this endears them not in the least to their moralist brethren across the Golden Gulf. In the eyes of the Pantheists, the gaudy peacocks of the Pearl Cities are little more than decadent law-breakers who have forgotten the nature and spirit of the Loregiver's Law.

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Ajayib, City of Wonders

The westernmost of the Pearl Cities, Ajayib is situated at the base of rising hills. The steep slopes have been terraced and cultivated into great gardens. Higher up, there are coffee plantations, and their harvest is famed throughout the Land of Fate.

The Ruler: Caliph Halima al-Wahsi (hfF/a/16) is a tall warrior-queen with a face more perfect than the brightest moon, eyes darker than the deepest well, and a smile that, when given to a faithful follower, may set fabric on fire at fifty paces. Her long, thick hair hangs to the small of her back, and she wears it loose in court. In combat, she coils it into a tight, whiplike braid. Yet it is not by her beauty that she rules Ajayib, for her mind and her sword are quick and sure. Halima is active in the day-to-day rule of her city, and she takes all decisions (and all comments) personally. But Halima is a warrior at heart, not a statesman. She enjoys nothing better than to ride out and do battle against the savages of the Al-Suqut Mountains, putting off courtly bureaucracy for another day.

The Court: The two most important individuals in the caliph's court are a priest and a genie. The priest is Imam Mojos al-Yunqani min Selan (hemP/e/12). He is 40 years the caliph's senior, and often balances her passion and sense of adventure with a voice of relative reason. He would prefer that the caliph address matters of state as opposed to western savages. Imam Mojos keeps a careful eye on ambassadors from the other Pearl Cities, whom he considers a greater threat.

The genie is a noble dao, Zaheb al-Zidq, the Righteous One, His Most Respected Majesty and Puissant Hetman of the Mighty Khan. The dao is apparently smitten by the caliph's beauty. He is constantly at her side in court, composing bad doggerel and "protecting" her from the advances of other suitors. The caliph, in turn, treats the dao as a favorite pet. Given the natural tendency of dao toward humans, this is most unexpected, and it has been surmised that Zaheb is under some spell or charm. Whatever the true case, Zaheb is a combination of personal body guard, confidant, and enforcer. The caliph has no husbands, and Zaheb discourages all but the bravest of suitors.

Population: 70,000.

Features of the City: The coffee, or *mocha*, of Ajayib is renowned throughout Zakhara for its dark, rich, powerful flavor. To the north of the city, the land dries out and becomes dotted with frankincense trees, from which resin harvesters also bring in rich rewards.

Ajayib is known as the last stop for enlightened civilization. Beyond it to the west, the Al-Suqut Mountains plunge into the sea, creating a foreboding coastline—the hiding place of mad wizards, savage inhuman tribes, and sea-going brigands. It is the gathering spot of the bold and brazen: adventurers preparing voyages to the south and west, civilized men who are weary of civilization, sorcerers seeking solitude, and criminals on the run.

The people of Ajayib are proud of their frontier nature. They are independent, strong-willed, and opinionated. Rich colors are common in their dress, though herders, coffee growers, and resin-gatherers prefer a duller and more utilitarian costume. Women and men may be veiled or not; this is a matter of personal choice as opposed to a community standard.

Major Products: Coffee, fruits, frankincense and other aromatic gums, bright dyes, trade.

Armed Forces: 8,000 city guards; 2,000 cavalry; an elite unit of 300 1st-level farisan under the command of the caliph herself; six-ship navy used against western raiders.

Major Mosques: Jisan, Hakiyah, Selan, Zann.

Rumors and Lore: Ajayib is where adventures begin and old legends come to die. It is the youngest of the Pearl Cities, having officially set up an enlightened mosque only a decade ago. The caliph is the second enlightened ruler of the city; the first perished in combat against the savages. Halima was one of her predecessor's best officers, and stepped in to replace him.

The local legends tell of another city which occupied this site in distant times, one built into the walls of cliffs overlooking Ajayib. This was said to be a dark and ruined place, looted and destroyed by civilized men generations ago. But, the legends say, the original survivors of this dark race still claw their way through the darkness, dreaming of revenge. The cliffs overlooking Ajayib are riddled with caverns and passages. No one has brought proof of the legends, though treasure-seekers still comb the cliffs for new discoveries.

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Gana, City of Riches

Like Jumlat to the northeast, Gana is a true "City of the Pearl," devoting five months each year to the pearl-fishing industry. Because this city also lies near the Realm of Bleeding Trees, its inhabitants can turn to the frankincense harvest when the pearling season has passed. Its people are generally wealthier than the residents of Jumlat. Even the lower classes of Gana are proud to call their home the City of Riches.

The Ruler: Sultan Yusef bin Ahmad al-Wadi (hmF/a/15) is known as "Yusef the Just" for his wisdom in matters of the law. This venerable ruler encourages trade and industry in his city. He discourages power from concentrating in anyone else's grasp for an extended period of time. As a result, talented individuals, adventurers, and merchants continually pass through his court, with few of them remaining there long.

The Court: The only permanent member of Al-Wadi's court is his chief vizier, a human sea mage named Al'ia bint-Hazir (hfW/sem/16). She has served at the sultan's side for several decades. According to a well-known rumor, the sultan once proposed marriage to her, but she responded that she would rather serve at his side than at his feet. The sultan has never married, nor has he officially recognized any of the sons and daughters from his *harim* (a matter which many find disgraceful). Rumor also says that Al'ia has secretly borne Al-Wadi several sons over the years, and that she has spirited them away for training in far lands. Now as old and wizened as the sultan himself, Al'ia continues to rule at his side. She often advises compassion over harsh justice.

The position of chief judge has been held by a long series of people in short succession. Justice cannot be bought in Gana, but it can be rented for reasonable rates. As a result, when there is a scandal or outcry, the chief judge is quickly replaced (and banished). The smart judges serve about five years, then retire. The current chief judge is a dwarf named Ghaliyah bint Borga min Suq (dfP/h/10), Gala of the Marketplace. She has held her position for three years. While Ghaliyah can see the truth, she does not always speak it.

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Finally, there is an honorary position within the court, awarded to those who complete the Great Task of the Pearl (see below). Such a position is usually temporary, lasting no more than a year, and may be surrendered voluntarily or upon the will of the sultan. A number of great heroes, male and female, have attached the sobriquet "Warrior of the Great Task" to their names, and served the sultan in this fashion.

Population: 100,000.

Features of the City: In addition to its successful pearl business, Gana is Zakhara's trade center for frankincense and other aromatic gums that are harvested from the Realm of Bleeding Trees to the west. The wasteland in which the shrublike trees grow is good for little else. It is inhabited by herdsmen who bring the gum into Gana for trade.

Gana has a looser control over its pearl trade than Jumlat; its captains are more independent and its merchant class is larger. The quality of captains ranges from fair to average (instead of harsh to horrid, as in Jumlat). Most of Gana's captains practice the type of economic slavery that is common in Jumlat, but Gana also has a few progressive captains who practice more humane methods of pearl diving. There are even several cases in which Gana's captains have retained a sea mage to cast *airy water* around the divers, allowing them to remain beneath the surface for prolonged periods without ill effect.

Such regular use of magic is not cheap. As a result, the independent captains often break (or at least severely bend) the vow that keeps them out of the pearl beds seven months a year. Gana's ships and divers are sometimes caught by the sea elves and locathah that migrate into the pearl beds from the west. Such divers work at their own risk.

At the close of the pearl season, Gana holds a three-day celebration known as the Festival of the Pearl. This is the time when accounts are settled between the pearl divers and captains, and a great feast is distributed among the people by the sultan and the mosque officials. The celebration is marked by dancing in the street, skyrockets, and the occasional breaking of the Law (such as public insobriety or lewdness)—giving Gana a reputation as a wild city. Once the pearl season is officially over, a number of ships and their crews become available for hire to adventurers and merchants. Still poor, most divers join such crews or migrate to harvest frankincense. A handful will have saved enough money to support themselves until the next pearl season. Very few will have saved enough to afford a small boat and become a captain themselves.

The end of the Festival of the Pearl marks the official beginning of an annual challenge or contest conducted by the sultan: the Great Task of the Pearl. The "task" is to bring some wonder or marvel from abroad to the city and present it to the sultan. Those interested have seven months to complete the task before the inauguration of the new pearl season. During this period, a number of adventurers and other wonder-workers pass through the court, bringing all manner of strange beasts, fantastic treasures, and mighty and unique magics. The chief judge verifies that the items are safe and secured before presentation. Whoever produces the most wonderful item is awarded with great treasures, magics, positions in courts, or favors from the sultan. (For example, one noted pirate gained a full pardon upon delivering the head of a sahuagin queen.) All other items become the property of the sultan, regardless of their value. (That's the price one pays for participating in the Great Task of the Pearl.)

Major Products: Pearls, trade, sea crafts (shells, buried treasure, and the like), aromatic gums, frankincense, myrrh.

Armed Forces: 5,000-man city guard; 2,000-man mercenary infantry; "official" navy of 30 ships, which protect the pearl-diving vessels in the banks; a supplemental rookery of five rocs with riders, which operate out of the mountains east of the city. The court of Gana has been accused of employing privateers and raiders to harass craft from Jumlat, but often such raids are the conducted by individual captains.

Major Mosques: Hajama, Hakiyah, Haku, Pantheon (a moralist faction), and Selan.

Rumors and Lore: Like Jumlat, Gana has recently been plagued by the sudden disappearances of divers and boats in the pearl banks—and these events have hampered the city's trade. Most residents believe that the "shark monster" described by divers from Jumlat is no more than a ruse, designed to drive Gana's ships from the area. The sultan of Gana has offered 50,000 gp and a ship to the adventurer who either destroys the creature or proves that it does not exist.

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Jumlat, City of Multitudes

Jumlat is one of the two "true" Pearl Cities, along with Gana, City of Riches. (Only these two actually have fleets that harvest the pearl beds, which are located between them.) While both cities thrive, Jumlat claims supremacy, for it has the greater population and gathers more pearls from the beds.

The Ruler: Jumlat is ruled by Sultan Kara al-Zalim, the Fierce Sword of the Sea (hmF/c/15). He is only the nephew of the previous sultan, yet he was chosen over the sultan's own children as heir to the throne. This has proved to be a wise choice as far as the moneyed classes are concerned, for the current sultan has all the cunning and ruthlessness of his favorite uncle. Sultan al-Zalim cut his eye-teeth in raids against Gana's fleets, and he has no love for the City of Riches. The sultan spends most of his time in his palace overlooking the harbor, and he is rarely found among his people.

The Court: There are two breeds of courtiers in the Sultan's court: informers and merchants. The former is headed up by the sultan's chief vizier, Agat amir-Doth (emW/so/15). This middle-aged elf has a taste for intrigue and a fondness for human maidens. Agat's spies are everywhere, particularly among the poor. One of his favorite sports is to select a young woman and, through his power and ability, remove each member of her family in turn, at last taking her into the *harim*. Many merchant families know of his predilection, and give up their daughters rather than risk their own arrest and death. Veils are more common among women in Jumlat than in other Pearl Cities.

Of the merchants, the most powerful is Ragi al-Makruh (hmT/mr/19), a hulking and ill-mannered brute who has surprised everyone by not destroying his family's business upon taking its reins. He has more money than brains and more brains than charm. He spends most of his time paying homage to the sultan and chief vizier in return for favors. Al-Makruh, through a set of corrupt money-lenders, controls most of the pearl fleet ships.

Population: 300,000.

Features of the City: The pearl harvest that distinguishes Jumlat lasts only five months each year. By decree of the sultan, in accordance with the nomadic sea peoples who live in the Golden Gulf, the

Pearl Diving

Spring marks the onset of the pearling season in Zakhara. Hundreds of pearl boats dot the coastal waters between Gana and Jumlat. For five months, divers search the ocean floor for valuable pearl oysters. Summer brings a period of dead calm and intense heat to the area, making work difficult for everyone on deck.

Each pearl boat (typically a sambuq) carries a crew of about 50 men. Most divers are male. Only half the crewmembers actually dive. The other half, mostly boys, serve as attendants. Their job is vital; an attendant holds a rope to which the diver is tethered. If danger arises, the attendant must quickly haul the diver to the surface.

The divers themselves have little equipment. Each wears a wooden nose-clip, a finger-guard for dislodging oysters from the bed, and a small basket for collecting oysters (which usually hangs around his or her neck). A safety rope is tied around the diver's waist. Otherwise, a male diver typically wears a loincloth. A female also dons a swath of wool that serves as a cropped shirt. When jellyfish and other stinging creatures pose a hazard, divers may opt for black woolen "bathing suits" that cover their bodies from head to toe. Gloves protect their hands, and eyeholes allow them to see.

Dives usually occur in water up to 90 feet deep, with an average depth of 30 feet. Nosebleeds are common. To descend swiftly in depths greater than 20 feet, each diver steps on a large stone, around which a rope has been tied (apart from the rope at the diver's waist). When the diver reaches the seafloor, the attendant hauls up the stone.

A skilled diver remains on the seafloor for nearly three minutes before returning to the surface, signaling the desire for a swift ascent by tugging on the rope at his or her waist. In shallow water, some divers forgo the safety rope and simply dive from the surface. (Given the dangers that often lurk nearby, this may prove foolhardy.)

Diving is a harsh existence. The work begins at dawn on the docks, when each diver counts the previous day's harvest and removes the pearls. The captain of the boat watches carefully and—after crediting the diver for a fraction of the pearls' worth—claims all. Pearls that are large, luminous, faintly pink, and well formed have the greatest value. Only the rare black pearls of Zakhara may command a better price.

After the pearls have been counted, the boats depart. Divers have only coffee for breakfast, then begin their descents. Each man and woman may perform dozens of dives each day. Lunch is a handful of dates and a short break. At sunset, the boats return to port. The divers eat a meager evening meal, say a prayer, and then retire.

Nearly all divers are severely indebted to their captains. During the off-season, the divers must borrow money to support their families, promising to return for another year's work. A diver's catch must be exceptional in order to pay off his or her debt.

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season begins as soon as the monsoons subside. During the next five months, pearl divers work daily to bring the pearls to the surface, often in dangerous conditions. While the risks are great and the rewards for the divers are few, it is through their lung-power and blood that the great City of Multitudes survives.

Jumlat is a large, rather unattractive city that depends on pearls for trade. It is only half as populous as smoky Hiyal, but it is equally crowded, for the city is compressed onto a smaller amount of ground. A small minority of wealthy nobles, merchants, and townsmen live comfortably off the wealth of the pearl trade. The majority of Jumlat is reduced to poverty and indebted heavily to the merchants who control the trade. When the pearl season has ended, Jumlat has the greatest number of beggars of any city in the Land of Fate.

Major Products: Pearls, trade, sea crafts (shells, buried treasure, bright dyes), beggars.

Armed Forces: 10,000 city guard; 1,000 mercenary cavalry, all desert riders from the High Desert; an "official" navy of 30 ships, patrolling the pearl banks. The "unofficial" navy typically includes 10 to 30 ships—all sailed by corsairs and privateers who are hired to protect Jumlat's pearl diving ships or to destroy those of rival Gana.

Major Mosques: Hakiyah, Haku, Kor, Selan.

Rumors and Lore: Life in Jumlat revolves around the pearl banks, and that life has recently been threatened by some monstrous creature. The nature of the monster is not yet certain. What is certain, however, is that during the past three years nearly 10 boats and four times as many divers have been destroyed or lost to the sea. For some time, Jumlat's pearl merchants assumed that Gana was responsible. Jumlat was on the brink of declaring war against its neighbor to the south when one survivor, missing his legs, washed up on the beach and told his tale. The man soon died, but not before he had described his attacker: a ghostly shark-creature, huge and savage, with tentacles around its gaping maw. This creature moved with intelligence and purpose, said the dying man, picking off divers and then hunting down the boat itself. The number of captains willing to go out to sea declined for a short time, but "bravery" returned after the sultan offered a reward of 100,000 gold dinars to the Jumlati captain who destroys the beast. The reward, of course, has yet to be claimed.

Within the city walls, another danger threatens the established lords. A new bandit-leader has appeared among the poor, known only as Zulmat, "The Darkness." Rumors of this bandit are conflicting. No one is sure whether The Darkness is a man or a woman, a human or a genie. Some say The Darkness is a secret society, and not a single individual. Whatever the truth, the bandit leaves no track other than his or her victims: money-lenders with broken hands and torn throats; cruel captains found on the shore like flotsam, their lungs filled with the sea; and city guards who have been stripped of their armor and weapons and dumped unceremoniously into the river. The chief vizier has yet to discover the identity of The Darkness. That failure creates another, more troubling possibility: The Darkness, perhaps, has powerful magical aid.

Sikak, City of Coins

This city takes its name not from any thriving trade in coinage, but for its most famous industry, fishing. The waters off the coast of Sikak and surrounding nearby Maribar Island are teaming with swordfish, turbot, grouper, drum, and croaker; and the shallows are alive with skates, mullets, and small blue octopi. The scales of the larger fish are often as big as silver coins, symbolizing the great wealth they bring to Sikak.

The Ruler: Sultan Magar al-Azim (gmT/mr/13) is the fifteenth gnome to sit on the Throne of Coins since his family first came to power during the First Caliph's rule. Al-Azim spent his boyhood working with fishermen, as his ancestors did before him, and as his children do now. This training taught the sultan the value of work, honesty, and fellowship. He is a popular ruler, and when he appears in the streets, he is often swept up in crowds of well-wishers. Ten ogres serve as his bodyguards, protecting him at all times.

The Court: Sultan Magar al-Azim maintains a *harim* of the most beautiful women in Zakhara, all gnomes. His children number over 20. Indeed, Magar comes from a large family himself, and his uncles, cousins, and siblings handle most of the paperwork and bureaucracy in the city. In addition, Magar's relatives hold high positions in the clergy and the armed forces.

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The heir apparent to Magar's throne is Prince Jeygar (gmF/c/10), a dashing young figure who heads up the fishing fleet on its voyages to Huzuz. He is said to be a favorite in the Grand Caliph's court.

Also of import is the sultan's sister, Imam Reya al-Affif (gfP/e/11), caretaker of the mosques and priestess of Hakiyah. She is known for both her impassioned speeches and her distrust of strangers to the land.

Population: 60,000.

Features of the City: Like Tajar to the north, Fate has blessed Sikak with a series of artesian wells, which provide most of the water for the city. These wells began to fail some 40 years ago, and only through careful negotiation with a group of dao and marids has the supply of fresh, cool water been maintained.

The people of Sikak live from the sea. Dress is informal and suited to their occupation. Men usually go bare-chested and wear loose, lightweight pants. Even the female crew-members don little more than a light blouse and billowing pantaloons. This carries over into the city itself, where there is little cause for pretense or ostentation, save for great feasts.

The settlements to the north and south of Sikak are wealthier and more powerful, and Sikak's residents feel somewhat threatened. They are thin-skinned about the notion that any way of life may be superior to their own. The outlanders scatter lies, say Sikak's fishermen—lies claiming that Sikaki sailors smell of their catch, and that they send less-than-fresh fish to the Grand Caliph's palace. To insult a native of Sikak is to insult his or her family, boat, and entire people, and the natives react accordingly.

Major Products: Fish, boats, nets, ropes.

Armed Forces: 2,000 infantry; 3,000 mercenary barbarians in three units; 500 cavalry; an imperial palace guard of 200 ogres, armed with halberds and long bows; a 20-ship navy, which includes mostly small boats for shore patrol; 400 marines trained in shipboard fighting.

Major Mosques: Hajama, Hakiyah, Jisan, Selan.

Rumors and Lore: Two mysteries are currently troubling the City of Coins. First and foremost, a holy slayer of the Grey Fire has made a public attempt on the sultan's life. This occurred when the sultan was among the people, and only the heroic action of an ogre guard spared the sultan's life. The assassin was caught and killed, but further investigation—led by the sultan's sister, Imam Reya—has proved fruitless. No one knows who hired the assassin or why.

Sikak's second mystery concerns a shipwreck. Word has it that the remains of a single ship or multiple ships, whose origin and age are unknown, were recently discovered by adventurers on the far side of Maribar Island. The wreck allegedly holds the skeletons of many gnomes, along with great wonders. Prince Jeygar is overseeing the exploration and recovery of the wreck. Whether this is in any way connected with the attempted assassination is unknown.

Tajar, City of Trade

The northernmost Pearl City, Tajar lies about 450 miles west of Pantheist Hilm, with the Golden Gulf's glittering expanse between them. The title "City of Trade" is well deserved, for Tajar is awash in riches from throughout Zakhara and beyond. Rare spices, strange condiments, richly woven carpets, gleaming swords from Hiyal, wonders of the Crowded Sea—all are gathered in one location to assault and delight the senses. In its sheer variety of goods, Tajar is the wealthiest city on the Gulf.

The Ruler: Tajar's ruler is Sheikh Ali al-Hadd, House of Bakr (hmF/dr/16). He is the son of the former sheikh, Kori al-Zafiri, House of Bakr. Before the rule of Al-Zafiri, Tajar was governed by a dark-hearted sultan. That sultan despised the desert tribes and sought to enslave them through unfair trade. The leader of the Bakr tribe, Al-Zafiri, led a rebellion against the city, receiving the merchants and the poor whom the sultan had oppressed. With the rebellion underway, Al-Zafiri sent Ali, his most talented son, to gain an audience with the Grand Caliph. When the great fleet of Huzuz arrived in Tajar's harbor, it did not carry reinforcements for the embattled sultan. Instead, it carried investigators, who quickly revealed the sultan's true nature. The sultan was taken to Huzuz in chains, and Al-Zafiri became Tajar's leader. Both he and his son, Ali al-Hadd, prefer the simple title "sheikh."

When Al-Zafiri passed away, Ali al-Hadd succeeded his father. The son has proved himself to be equally valiant and wise, capable of dealing with Tajar's many factions of merchants, traders, nobles, and supplicants.

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The Court: The bane of Sheikh Ali's existence is his only son, Afzal (hmF/a/6). Afzal's mother died in childbirth. The sheikh did not remarry, and he has not recognized any other heir. Afzal was born and raised in Tajar, in the lap of luxury, and he has turned his back on his desert heritage. He is foolish and pompous, and surrounds himself with men and women who speak of little other than his greatness. He has just reached his majority, and is honorary commander of the cavalry. Al-Hadd has assigned a dao and a djinni as his son's personal servants and bodyguards. The sheikh hopes that direct contact with the people may teach his son wisdom. So far this has failed.

Sheera bint Tanar (hef/sh/10) serves Sheikh al-Hadd as a magical advisor. She is his unrecognized daughter, born to him by an elven courtesan in his court. Sheera is responsible for overseeing genie activities in the city, and for maintaining a good relationship with the jann.

Also prominent in the court is a rawun who is known only as Dulcet Riqqiyah (hfB/r/14). An adventurer who arrived in town four years ago, Riqqiyah charmed the sheikh with her knowledge and wit. In time, she became both a trusted advisor and a second daughter to him. Sheera is not jealous of the rawun, for the pair are close friends, and Riqqiyah acts as the young half-elf's mentor. Afzal is taken with Riqqiyah, but she wants nothing to do with the young popinjay. Of the bard's origin and background, nothing is known. She wears magical devices that fend off divination magics.

Population: 180,000.

Features of the City: Tajar is a major trading site in the Land of Fate. Here the caravan route from far-off Akota (an exotic place beyond Zakhara) meets the merchant armadas of the Golden Gulf. And here the tribes of the High Desert come down to trade their wares with agents of the Grand Caliph. Only the suqs of Huzuz, which bear the finest produce in all of Zakhara, can rival Tajar's marketplace.

The people of Tajar reflect this meeting of cultures. Abas and keffiyehs are as common as caftans and turbans, all the more so since the ascendency of Sheikh Ali. The impoverished residents dress in whatever rags and tatters they can manage, but even the poor of Tajar are better off than most. The riches are so abundant, and the need for labor so great, that anyone capable of work can find it if he or she looks.

Tajar is further blessed by having several natural artesian wells. The largest of these wells lies at the base of the sheikh's palace. The wells supply most of the city's drinking water with little strain on their capacity. Only the poor use water from the Al-Adib River, and the city quarter bordering that area is a slum of shoddy housing, dangerous beggars, and characters hoping to disappear behind the veil of dust and poverty.

The Tajari are proud, boisterous people, quick to take offense. Street music is common here, and volume outweighs proficiency for most minstrels. Merchant haggling often leads to drawn swords, and daggers are driven into the walls to underline a point. People of Tajar regard the colder, more cultured natives of other realms as repressed and unfeeling.

Major Products: Trade, spices, carpets, metalwork, swords, livestock, horses.

Armed Forces: 4,000-man city guard; 3,000-man cavalry patrol, which is built around a core of Bakr desert riders, an elite force of 800 men. In addition, Tajar has 300 jann of the High Desert on retainer.

Major Mosques: Hakiyah, Haku, Jisan, Selan.

Rumors and Lore: No one in Tajar misses the old sultan, a skinflint and tyrant who was last seen being dragged off to Huzuz. Some years later, the story of what became of him filtered back to Tajar. It is said that he (wisely) renounced his evil ways and became a priest in the hill country above Wasat. One of his children survived the revolution in Tajar, and eventually relocated with him to that city. It is therefore likely that heirs to the previous throne are still active. Most of the populace is quite happy with the present rulership, but a few are concerned about Afzal's wisdom, and they would prefer that the sheikh either recognize Sheera officially or discover if any capable candidates exist among the original sultan's descendants.

Outside the court, the greatest local news is the arrival of Suelasta the Magnificent (hmT/mr/12). This merchant-rogue has gained a grant from Sheikh Ali to establish a menagerie of fantastic creatures. Having secured a suitable location in a garbage-ridden area near the river, he has put out an announcement that he will pay money for "wonders of all lands, safely contained and suitable for viewing by the enlightened."

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Chapter 9

Cities of the Pantheon

The League of the Pantheon, or Pantheist League, is a cluster of cities on the Crowded Sea and along the eastern side of the Golden Gulf, backed by the mountain ranges of Al-Akara and Al-Sayaj. These cities share a common outlook above and beyond that of other cities paying ultimate creed to the Grand Caliph.

Pantheists recognize only five gods: Hajama, Kor, Najm, Selan, and a local deity named Jauhar (whom Pantheists consider a major god). Within these cities, the worship of other gods is forbidden. According to the Pantheists, only the five deities of the Pantheon deserve the worship of civilized men and women. These are the gods whose priests first swore allegiance to the Law of the Loregiver. All other deities are "latecomers," inferior at best. This conservative religious belief is the force that binds the Pantheist cities into a cohesive whole—into a refuge for "those who know the truly enlightened gods."

Politics and religion are tightly interwoven in the Pantheist League. The church is powerful, and secular leaders are often religious leaders as well. Staunchly moralist, Pantheists are almost hidebound in their traditional values. The traditions of the past guide their actions in the future. That which is new is deemed dangerous, and that which is different is suspicious. Both men and women cover their faces in public and conceal the shape of their bodies beneath billowing robes, lest the sight of the opposite sex cause anyone's thoughts to stray from the moral path. (Women, in fact, usually don the traditional chador, behind which not even their eyes—a most tempting feminine feature—can be clearly seen.)

Apparently, this system works well for the Pantheist cities, for they are successful and prosperous. Unlike the Free Cities of northern Zakhara, the closely knit Pantheist communities are not hindered by continual efforts to conspire against each other in petty wars. And unlike the Pearl Cities, the cities of the Pantheon have fewer beggars and impoverished citizens on their streets. All citizens are guaranteed a satisfied stomach and a roof over their heads (provided those citizens adhere to Pantheist beliefs). Vanity, usury, pride, savagery—these are alien concepts to the Pantheon. In the Pantheists' own eyes, and by many other yardsticks, citizens of the Pantheist League are

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the most civilized people in the Land of Fate.

The Pantheist belief system segregates these cities from the rest of Zakhara just as it binds them together. Characters who wield political power strive to diminish other faiths and—should a rebellion against the Pantheon occur—to crush all unbelievers with force. This attitude does not make Pantheists popular in regions where enlightened gods such as Jisan, Haku, Hakiyah, and Zann are venerated (not to mention local enlightened deities). An uneasy balance exists between the League of the Pantheon and the more liberal areas of Zakhara.

The headquarters of the Pantheist League and home of the League Conclave is the city of I'tiraf, to which all other Pantheist cities send an ambassador and representatives. (Each Pantheist city also sends representatives to Huzuz.) According to many, the League's greatest imam, Rimaq al-Nimar, Most Humble of the Pantheon's Servants, is second only to the Grand Caliph in power (though even many Pantheists would rank him third or fourth, behind themselves or other members of the Pantheon).

Pantheist cities work in concert, setting common prices and seeking to even out crop shortages in one town with surpluses in others. Most importantly, they provide a common defense. From Hilm to Mahabba, each city is guarded by Pantheist troops, members of an army called the Sword of the True Gods. The "Sword" is culled from the best warriors throughout the League. Pantheist troops are always headquartered near a city's main mosque, and they have posts throughout the community.

A Pantheist soldier is never allowed to serve in his or her home city. Instead, he or she will be stationed elsewhere in the League, serving all other cities in turn. This practice helps underscore the concept that the Sword of the True Gods is loyal to the League of the Pantheon as a whole, not to any one city. The practice also arouses many citizens to view Pantheist soldiers as guests—people to be treated well—in the hope that each city's own fighters will be cared for equally well during their assignments elsewhere.

The people of the Pantheon are studious, solemn, respectful, polite, and industrious. As individuals, most are deeply shocked by the behavior and decadence that occurs elsewhere in Zakhara—even in the Grand Caliph's palace itself. They are insulted by the idea that the gaudy revellers of the Pearl City could decry slavery, yet imprison their own people in economic shackles that deny the protection that slaves otherwise enjoy. Pantheists hope to bring about changes in the Land of Fate so that one day all may be enlightened to the same degree. Some hope to do it by example. Others realize that only force may decide the issue.

Fahhas, City of Searching

Located roughly 90 miles north of I'tiraf (as the roc flies), at the mouth of the river Al-Naqus, Fahhas is the most somber city of the Pantheist League. Its people are searching for enlightenment and truth, and perhaps for the happiness both would bring.

The Ruler: Caliph Amel al-Yuhami (hmP/m/15), Humble Servant of the Enlightened Gods, is a moody, reclusive figure. Tall and broad-shouldered with well-chiseled features and a thick black beard, he looks more like a warrior than a priest. Al-Yuhami is said to be among the strongest men in the Pantheist League. The caliph's strength is mainly physical, however, since he is given to fits of melancholy and deep depression, caused by both the sin in the world and by the death (five years ago) of his aged advisor and mentor, Jamila al-Muhib.

Caliph Amel is a man who sees matters of faith in ultimates: you are either saved or you are damned. Devotion to the Pantheon is supreme in his court. Would-be wrongdoers should beware, for those who defy the Law of the Loregiver must suffer the maximum penalty. In Fahhas, disfigurement and even torture are more common punishments than enslavement and banishment.

The Court: The court of Fahhas has no high-ranking or highly influential characters beyond the caliph himself. Caliph Amel spends most of the day in solitude and meditation, particularly since the death of his chief vizier, Jamila al-Muhib (hfW/sem/17). The lesser courtiers, scribes, and bureaucrats walk softly and speak in deferential tones when summoned before their caliph. And when they speak, they watch their words carefully, for no one knows when an ill-phrased remark will result in a tirade of abuse and possibly arrest.

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Of these lesser bureaucrats, the city's chief judge is most prominent. He is a harried dwarf named Mungu al-Ristat (dmF/a/12). Al-Ristat is overworked; he serves his caliph by carrying out each and every order to the letter. He would rather let half the city die at the executioner's hand than be forced to fill out the paperwork for a pardon, or to approach his lord with a direct question.

Population: 110,000.

Features of the City: Fahhas reflects the mood of its caliph; its people are sullen, brooding, and joyless in their tasks. The city is prosperous, however, due to its natural gifts. The grasslands to the east are grazed by sheep and goats, and dotted with orchards of oranges, dates, apricots, and pears. The rich clays of the river Al-Naqus make some of the finest pottery and china on the Golden Gulf, and the location of the city makes it a convenient port for boats from Huzuz and the north.

Major Products: Fruit, livestock, trade, pottery, china.

Armed Forces: Pantheist troops include 2,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry. Other land forces: 2,000 city guards; a unit of 150 clerical reserves (priests of levels 1 to 6) from the Pantheon mosque and university; and 3 units of mamluks of the Devoted society, totaling 900 men. Seafaring forces include a navy of 5 large vessels, plus a shore patrol of 10 smaller ships.

Major Mosques: Pantheon.

Rumors and Lore: The grief of this city's caliph is understandable. He greatly loved and respected his chief vizier, Jamila al-Muhib, who brought Amel from the ranks of the clergy to a position of power and respect. Yet to many the length and the depth of his grief seem extreme, for it has been five years since Jamila's passing. She died of a fever that not even the best healers of Talab could abate. In the years since then, Caliph Amel has banished his counselors, disbanded his *harim*, and he now wears a brooch that prevents the approach of any genie within 10 feet.

Today there is a rising tide of fear for the caliph's health. Many wish to see him restored to his previous strength and demeanor. An equal number wish to see him step down and be replaced by a more reasonable leader. However, because Caliph Amel commands the loyalty of both the mamluks and Pantheist troops—and because the League Conclave of I'tiraf is unwilling to move against the Caliph of Fahhas—there seems to be no answer to the city's woes but to appeal to Fate, and to accept that which is given.

Hilm, City of Kindness

Hilm is the northernmost city of the Pantheist League, and perhaps the most liberal. Located nearest to Huzuz, it is a stopping point for many pilgrims traveling overland to the Court of Enlightenment. Its streets are spartan but spotless, lacking in color and (for the most part) crime. It is a stark contrast to the lively city of Tajar across the Golden Gulf.

The Ruler: Caliph Abir al-Farhan (hmP/m/15), Humble Servant of the Enlightened Gods, represents the Pantheist League at its best. Considerate and concerned about the well-being of his people, the caliph is a diligent protector of the faith, and he sees to the needs of even the most poverty-stricken members of his flock. His wide belly and short stature belie a powerful and wise individual who will stop at nothing to protect his people.

The Court: Most important in the court is the caliph's grand vizier, a sorcerer named Shoroz (hmW/so/13). Tall but stooped, Shoroz shares Abir's vision for Hilm and works diligently at his lord's side. Often, the pair don disguises (usually magical in nature) and go out to mingle among the people of Hilm. The disguises are designed to help them discover what the people are truly feeling, for a man may change his voice in the presence of one who can stop it forever. The pair may at first appear to be two dwarves, or perhaps two traveling merchants or pilgrims. Nonetheless, they frequently give themselves away by their actions.

The apple of the caliph's eye is his eldest daughter, Ola (hfP/m/5). She has been schooled in the ways of the church and, with the permission of church officials, would marry the next caliph of the city in order to continue the line and preserve her father's interest in the people. Ola spends most of her time with her books of prayers and parables, segregated from the outside world. The people of Hilm share her

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father's devotion to her. When she appears in public, the multitudes applaud and throw flowers at her feet.

Population: 180,000.

Features of the City: The people of Hilm are even-tempered. Unlike the citizens of other Pantheist cities, they are relatively patient even with the "unenlightened" (which, to them, includes all who fail to recognize the gods of the Pantheon exclusively). The hospices of Hilm are legendary within the Pantheist League for their cleanliness and hospitality. Because of their quality, many pilgrims journeying to Huzuz choose the overland route as opposed to the more expensive (but more direct) ships from Fahhas. While such pilgrims know they should not flaunt their adherence to any faith that contradicts the beliefs of the Pantheon, they also know the people of Hilm will not hunt them down like mad dogs for such beliefs.

Hilm is Pantheist moralism as it is meant to be. The city's residents are well fed and well tended. There are no beggars in the streets or marketplace, and even the poorest members of society have clean robes and satisfied (if not full) bellies. Entertainments include mystery plays of common legends (all bearing serious moral lessons beneath their humor and jibes) and bards reciting great poems in the name of the Pantheon. Work is regular throughout the year. If people are not needed to harvest or plant, they can renovate and rebuild houses in the city itself. If the people of Hilm seem a bit smug, it is because they have something to be smug about.

The city is peaceful, though trouble often arises from those who bring it with them: thieves, barbarians, confidence artists, and misguided individuals. The chief job of the city guard and the Pantheist troops is to keep such troublemakers from disrupting the lives of the people of Hilm.

Those who come to the city intent on foul play or mischief are first cautioned, then arrested if warnings are ignored. A Pantheon priest (from levels 2 to 8) is attached to each patrol of the city guard, aiding in the capture of disruptive individuals. Trials are quick. If the individual shows true penitence, they are also just. In Hilm, enlightened but misguided criminals who venerate a god outside the Pantheon are rarely put to death. Instead, they may be enslaved for a number of months, fulfilling their sentence by serving the church.

Major Products: Grain, livestock, horses, tourism (pilgrimage).

Armed Forces: Members of the Sword of the True Gods include 2,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry, most of which are concerned with the protection of the farmers and travelers through their area. Additional warriors: 1,000 city guards. From the Pantheon mosque and university: a unit of 120 clerical reserves (priests of levels 1 to 6). The caliph's personal guard includes 3 units of mamluks (900 soldiers), all members of the Exalted society.

Major Mosques: Pantheon.

Rumors and Lore: According to legends told both in the Pantheist League and elsewhere, Hilm was the first city to receive the Law of the Loregiver after Huzuz. As such, Hilm has a special status for being so honored by Fate. Indeed, the Pantheist creed notes that, at the time, the first gods who became enlightened were those of Hilm: Wise Kor, Brave Najm, Adventurous Hajama, Beautiful Selan, and Diligent Jauhar. It is from those gods that the faith of the Pantheon takes its direction.

Hudid, City of Humility

Among the more tolerant of the League's cities, Hudid is located outside the Golden Gulf, on the shores of the Crowded Sea. (Only Mahabba, about 90 miles east, shares this location.) Outsiders know that the tariffs and laws of Hudid take into account their own misguided ignorance of the Pantheon's ways, and that has made the city a prime trading area for exotic items.

The Ruler: Caliph and Most Revered Mother Sajah al-Munsif (hfP/m/15) is the only woman to guide the faith of a city in this generation. Within the League, she is known as the Quiet Caliph, for she rarely acts or speaks directly. Instead, she leads by example and talks in parables that may at first seem to wander from the point, but, in the end, reveal a basic truth that allows the listener to attain enlightenment. As a young woman, Sajah served as a representative to the Grand Caliph's court, where she impressed His Enlightened Majesty with her wit and wisdom. He appointed her a caliph 10 years ago. The Conclave gave its unanimous approval.

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Sajah has proved herself to be a wise and capable ruler. Her firm yet open policies have prevented the spread of Balanite heresy up the coast. Her people are well fed and, on the average, better off than their cousins across the Golden Gulf in the Pearl Cities. The caliph will frequently don her chador and go out to mix with the people, hearing their needs and interests and using them to guide city policy.

The Court: Sajah bore twin daughters while she was in the court of the Grand Caliph. Although she maintains a *selama* (equivalent of a *harim*), she chooses to bear no other children.

Of Sajah's daughters, one chose to remain in the church. That daughter has risen steadily in rank; she now serves as her mother's chief aide and advisor—Sajah's legs and mouth among the people. She is Inara (hfP/m/8), a woman very much like her mother: well educated, polite, and preferring to teach by illumination and example. Of the other daughter, Jinara, nothing is known. She left her family when she came of age, declaring herself independent. Effectively, Jinara vanished.



Population: 90,000.

Features of the City: Hudid has the greatest university in the Land of Fate. Prince Tannous, the uncle of the Grand Caliph, studied here as a lad, as have many notable viziers and learned figures throughout Zakhara. The university is for the most part moralist in nature, in keeping with the Pantheon. Compared to other organizations in the Pantheist League, however, it is quite open and will tolerate members of other faiths as well as pragmatists, ethoists, and even Free Priests. The sciences, particularly optics and alchemy, are the university's strong points, followed by the subjects of magic and poetry. In fact, some excellent poets and rawuns have studied at Hudid's university.

The people of Hudid have warmed to the caliph and her rule, though at first many were concerned and even offended by the nontraditional posting of a woman in the caliphate. When the walls failed to tumble in and the city prospered under her rulership, most changed their opinions. They look forward to her daughter Inara carrying on the tradition of a female caliph in Hudid.

Caliph Sajah has made the city of Hudid a safe haven for travelers of all walks of life (not a difficult task for one with such an enlightened populace). Hudid still has its perils, however, often around the docks or in the university, where differing ideas may clash with violent results.

Major Products: Students, trade, glass lenses and telescopes, writing, books.

Armed Forces: 1,000 Pantheist infantry; 500 Pantheist cavalry; 2,000 city guards; 200 clerical reserves (priests of levels 1 to 6) from the Pantheon university. In addition, the first three ships of an official navy have been built. Their mission: to deal with increased piracy on the Crowded Sea.

Major Mosques: Pantheon.

Rumors and Lore: Of late, the greatest concern in Hudid is the Balanite heresy in Mahabba, which lies directly east along the coast. Many refugees from that city have fled to Hudid, and the caliph of Mahabba, Ma'mum, believes that Balanite followers and holy slayers may have supporters in Hudid. Caliph Sajah has three times refused Ma'mum's request to conduct investigations in Hudid regarding this matter, and if it

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can be proved that the followers of Bala are indeed active in Hudid, great turmoil will ensue. As a result, one of Inara's chief tasks is to investigate these accusations herself. So far, she has turned up nothing official.

I'tiraf, City of Confessions

I'tiraf is the site of the League Conclave, the governing body to which every Pantheist city sends representatives. Located at the mouth of the river Al-Hadi, I'tiraf lies almost directly east of Jumlat, a wild and "uncivilized" Pearl City for which I'tiraf has little respect. I'tiraf's people take pride in living in one of Zakhara's most moral and upright settlements. This is not to say that evil or misguided men and women are not found here. However, once such dastards have been revealed, they are quickly punished, reformed, or (as is likely) both. Ferreting out such undesirables is one reason I'tiraf is known as the City of Confessions.

The Ruler: Emir and Most Revered Father Rimaq al-Nimar (hmP/m/20), Most Humble Servant of the Enlightened Gods, is the ruler of I'tiraf. He is also the head of the League Conclave. Without question, Rimaq is the most powerful man in the League of the Pantheon. He is the fourth of his line to serve as Most Revered Father of the League—the son of Ali, grandson of Kura, and great-grandson of Exanaroth the Unifier. The emir is the dominating religious and secular force in the lands of the League. His word is law.

The most powerful man in the Pantheist League lives simply in a small manor adjoining the Conclave buildings. He rarely appears in public, and when he does grant audiences, the only priests who may be present are moralists of the Pantheon ("One of the few benefits of rank," he is quoted as saying, "is refusing to meet with fools"). Outland priests and Free Priests such as hakimas, kahins, and mystics are forbidden to enter his court. Moreover, even ethoists and pragmatists of the Pantheon are banished from his presence.

The emir has a great dream: that, in time, Pantheist teachings will prevail in Zakhara, dominating life in every corner of the land. To that end, the emir is a regular correspondent with the Grand Caliph's chief vizier, Alyana al-Azzazi. Alyana shares the Most Revered Father's moralist attitude, but flatly rejects his Pantheist dogma. Still, the chief vizier is Rimaq's best means of making the needs and complaints of the Pantheon known. The Grand Caliph is currently heirless. If he dies in that state, the resulting confusion may allow Rimaq to expand the control of the Pantheon and perhaps even dominate the Land of Fate.

In the Pearl Cities, rumor has it that the Most Revered Father Rimaq al-Nimar is responsible for many intrigues and disasters that occur there, from the great Tentacled Shark of the pearl beds to the assassination attempt on the sultan of Sikak. In truth, Rimaq is not a malevolent force scheming to destroy the Pearl Cities. Their troubles are to the advantage of the Pantheon, however, and anyone who creates difficulties for the Pearl Cities may be welcomed (or at least used by) Rimaq and the Conclave.

The Court: The League Conclave is the court of I'tiraf. Delegates from each of the Pantheist cities are present at all times. Each delegation consists of 1 to 6 midlevel priests of the Pantheon (levels 3 to 6) and 3 to 18 low-level priests (levels 1 to 2). The Conclave building is one of the largest structures in the League, exceeded only in wonder and size by the Great Mosque of the Pantheon.

Current delegation leaders from other cities are Ahmad al-Rahib of Hilm (hmP/m/12), Aksonkor al-Daris of Talab (hmP/m/9), Reisah al-Bakir of Fahhas (hfP/m/10), Yazid al-Walid of Hudid (hmP/m/12), and Hisham bin Ziyad of Mahabba (hmP/m/10). I'tiraf's own representative to the Conclave is Osham al-Budan (hmP/m/12). He and most delegates look to the Most Revered Father Rimaq for leadership.

Population: 250,000.

Features of the City: I'tiraf's residents are staunchly moralist, extremely lawful, and exceedingly gracious—at least to one another. Veiled men and women conduct their business with little fear of beggars, thieves, or rogues. They believe that all people who come from outside Pantheist territories are no better than savages. It is folly to argue about this point, for I'tiraf's citizens are confident in their beliefs, and argument only confirms their opinions on the rudeness and quarrelsome nature of "misguided" people.

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The people of I'tiraf look to their religious leaders and the emir for guidance. To find success here, as elsewhere in the League, even warriors, wizards, and rogues must take on the mantle and the creed of the Pantheon. Traders, craftsmen, and merchants within the city all prefer to deal with other moralists. Caravans and ships from far-off lands experience (at best) a cold reception and (more likely) a large amount of duties and taxes. Merchants from the Pearl Cities often use "captains of convenience" when dealing with I'tiraf: moralist (though not necessarily Pantheon-worshipping) individuals.

Life in I'tiraf revolves around the Great Mosque of the Pantheon. This mosque is one of the largest structures outside Huzuz. One of the most beautiful structures as well, it is made of polished blue stone excavated from the Al-Sayaj Mountains, inlaid with gold, and set with precious and semiprecious gems. Mamluks guard the mosque. This is a haram (holy site) in its own right, and is a gathering point for pilgrims from the south who are journeying north to Huzuz.

Major Products: Glassware, crystal, sages (religion), priests (moralists of the Pantheon).

Armed Forces: Pantheist troops include 8,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry. Other land forces: 2,000 city guards; a unit of 300 clerical reserves (priests of levels 1 to 6); and 6 units of mamluks, totaling 1,800, with 3 units each representing the Exalted and Devoted societies. Seafaring forces: navy of 16 ships, with more baghlahs (large dhows) under construction.

Major Mosques: Pantheon.

Rumors and Lore: The veneration of Most Revered Father Rimaq al-Nimar and his ancestors stops just short of personal deification. Most of that which is good in the city (and in the League) is attributed to Rimaq. Most of that which is bad is attributed to the work of slackers, fools, and the miscreants who seek to topple him.

Every few months, a rumor sweeps through I'tiraf, creating a war fever. The rumor is always the same: a fleet has been spotted advancing toward I'tiraf, hailing from the Pearl Cities, or from Afyal, or from some sorcerous trough in the Ruined Kingdoms. Street riots ensue, during which a few foreigners always perish and the ranks of the city guard and Pantheist forces always swell. In particular, more ships are added to the official navy of the Pantheon (which is based in I'tiraf). Then the scare subsides, and life returns to normal (though the surviving foreigners are more cautious from then on).

Mahabba, City of Charity

Like Hudid, about 90 miles to the west, Mahabba lies well outside the Golden Gulf, on the shores of the Crowded Sea. There the similarity ends, however. While Hudid is relatively accepting of outsiders, Mahabba has become a closed society under occupation by its own military forces. Most of the city's people are ashamed of a non-Pantheist history that they cannot seem to forget. Mahabba's secondary title, "City of Charity," has lost its meaning. Of late, more people call it the City of Silence.

The Ruler: Caliph and Revered Father Ma'mum al-Sahnan (hemP/m/14–F/f/16), Humble Servant of the Enlightened Gods, is a fatherly half-elf with a gray, closely cropped beard. Ma'mum first established himself as a warrior in battles against the savage tribes of the Ruined Kingdoms; only later did he enter the priestly orders. First and foremost a strict disciplinarian, he was judged by Rimaq al-Nimar as the best man for his current position, and Rimaq's voice carried in the court of Huzuz.

Ma'mum is kind and fatherly to the devout, but merciless to the misguided and the unenlightened. In the latter group he places the Balanites, followers of the cult-god Bala of Ill Tidings (see Chapter 5). The caliph's operatives are everywhere, seeking to crush not only the cult, but also the fanatical brotherhoods of holy slayers that the Balanites engender.

The Court: Ma'mum favors fighters in his court: warriors, as well as mages and priests who have had front-line battle experience. To Ma'mum, a man and a woman (of any race) have not reached their potential until they have been bloodied in holy warfare against the heathen foe. The city's position as the last civilized outpost in the League territory reaffirms the need to be ever-vigilant and watchful.

Ma'mum's chief vizier is a warrior, Tanatha of the Glittering Blades (hfF/f/13). She has served at his side through a number of campaigns. For a brief time they were married, and she bore him three sons. Two have

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fallen in combat, and the third is undergoing clerical training in I'tiraf. Tanatha and Ma'mum were divorced when it became clear that both wished to remain in the field as warriors. They are still close emotionally, and Ma'mum maintains no *harim*. Tanatha is a cavalry soldier. She prefers clear-cut battles to the twisted and myriad skirmishes of the streets, but she serves where Fate and the Pantheon think she will do best.

Ma'mum's chief judge is also his chief informant and master spy. His name is Othmar bin Jaqal (hmW/sh/16), the son of the jackal. An oily, evil sha'ir with an efreeti servitor and suspected ties to the Brotherhood of the True Flame, Othmar is a devout Pantheist who believes in burning out the taint of heresy.

Tanatha and Ma'mum are both accompanied at all times by detachments of 20 mamluks of the Exalted society, all 3rd level. Othmar has only his efreeti, Zet, as his bodyguard, but is said to carry more than enough magical protection to ward off any attack.

Population: 100,000.

Features of the City: As noted above, Mahabba is a city under military occupation by its own forces. The Balanite heresy fought by the caliph is so great as to make frequent patrols and checkpoints common. The city's strict curfew begins at nightfall. The Balanite threat is real: these heretics have set fires, destroyed supplies, and assassinated prominent merchants and officials. Even the Enlightened Throne, so far distant, is concerned with the damage. The Grand Caliph has urged that this uprising be put to an end, whether through negotiation or the sword.

Mahabbans are fearful of strangers and, to some degree, their own rulers. While Ma'mum remains popular with his people, the presence of Othmar ferreting out the guilty makes many nervous, and most feel that Othmar mixes personal feelings (and enjoyments) with his persecutions. To speak out, however, is to attract Othmar's unwanted attention.

Mahabba has recently been dubbed the City of Silence. Since the heresy began, music (except for martial bands) is rare. It is by music that the shadowy Balanites are said to spread their evil. Bards in



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particular are unwelcome in Mahabba; rawuns and other singers who visit the city may wish to report to the local guard and acquire a personal moralist bodyguard for the duration of their stay.

Major Products: Wood, trade, rebellion.

Armed Forces: 4,000 Pantheist infantry; 1,000 Pantheist cavalry; 2,000 city guards; 50 clerical reserves (priests of levels 1 to 4); and no navy. Wide-ranging patrols, which formerly ventured into the hinterland as far as the Gray Jungle, have been discontinued in light of increased rebellion.

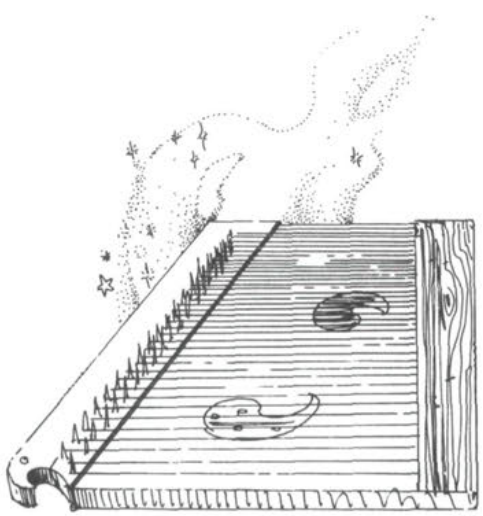
Major Mosques: Pantheon.

Rumors and Lore: The most important story out of Mahabba is that of the Balanite heresy. In the early days of the First Caliph, the cities of the eastern coast formed the League of the Pantheon and pledged their fealty as a group to the First Caliph and to the Law of the Loregiver. The gods worshipped in these cities became the five enlightened gods known as the Pantheon. Mahabba joined the League shortly thereafter and declared their god, Bala of the Tidings, a musical spirit-idol, enlightened as well. The clergy of the Pantheon protested, and their armies invaded Mahabba, crushing the initial heresy.

As a result of this conflict, the First Caliph sought knowledge in the Law on what constituted an "enlightened" god. Eventually, many local (common) gods came to be recognized as enlightened, standing apart from the savage gods. However, for Mahabba the damage had already been done. The faith had been driven underground.

Over the next five centuries, the Balanites rose in rebellion and were crushed several times, with each suppression more bloody than the last. The followers of Bala formed their own groups of holy slayers, committed to the ousting of Pantheist rule. Some of these groups attempted to bring down the entire League of the Pantheon. Of course they failed, but the assassinations of several Pantheist leaders have been attributed to Balanite slayers.

The most recent rebellion began seven years ago with the assassination of Mogan bin Ahmed, the previous ruler of Mahabba. The Conclave appointed Ma'mum as an interim commander to impose martial law. Two years ago, he was confirmed by Grand Caliph Khalil as the official ruler of the city.



Talab, City of Questing

Travelers who follow the river Al-Muti east from Hilm, heading nearly 100 miles into the scorched wilderness, will reach the river's source. This is also the site of Talab. Dubbed the City of Questing, Talab is the most common starting point for adventurers entering the Ruined Kingdoms and Haunted Lands from a Pantheist city.

The Ruler: Caliph Kia al-Sadid (hmP/m/13), Humble Servant of the Enlightened Gods, is a mousy, stoop-shouldered bureaucrat whose appearance does not suggest the great power he wields within the city. His voice is soft, yet his words convey his wisdom. He was installed as an interim caliph by the Pantheist League following the assassination of his predecessor. (The murder was allegedly performed by the Storm Which Destroys, a group of holy slayers based in the Al-Sayaj Mountains.) Caliph Kia has proved to be a capable administrator, and he does not interfere with the traders and merchants. Though he is rarely seen in public, the force of his pronouncements are felt throughout the city.

The Court: The caliph's chief assistant is a priestess of the Pantheon, Aranah al-Mursal (hfP/m/10). Aranah serves as scribe, librarian, and record-keeper. She oversees the official documentation of all trade,

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including slaves. Bookish and quiet, Aranah is often sent to Hilm as a representative of Talab. She also visits the outpost forts in the role of an inspector.

A remarkable addition to the court is Hanyar al-Muhif (hmF/mb/12), an enlightened Pantheist who hails from the unenlightened tribes of the Al-Sayaj Mountains. Hanyar serves as the caliph's emissary to the mountain tribes. His people, sweating in their furs, are often seen in the nearby countryside. Hanyar is a sly, secretive individual who prefers to remain in the background, from which he can carefully observe life in the court.



Population: 70,000.

Features of the City: Without the work of men, Talab could not survive. The city's water is brought from wells in the Al-Sayaj Mountains to the south through underground conduits. The impressive manmade conduits lead to Talab's reservoir, which is the source of the river Al-Muti. This water is the lifeblood of Talab. A mamluk organization known as the Parched is charged with protecting the reservoir and its conduits. They have no other duty but this, yet they are fiercely proud of its importance.

Like Halwa to the north, Talab is a meeting place of cultures. Tribes of the Ruined Kingdoms come here, though most are unwelcome. A healthy slave-trade has sprung up in the city, and if enlightened men are locked in shackles, Kia's men look the other way. Caliph Kia's predecessor rigorously persecuted illegal slaving, and this may have led to his demise at the obsidian blade of the holy slayers.

Talab is the site of a major university staffed by moralist barbers and Pantheist priests. The university is devoted to theology, priestly magic (Pantheist, of course), and healing. Many of Zakhara's most knowledgeable minds on these subjects were schooled at Talab's university.

The natives of Talab are insular and secretive. They keep private matters private and show a public face of reserved concern. Of late, outlying areas have suffered numerous raids, and Talab's citizens are particularly suspicious of desert tribes and their riders.

Major Products: General trade, slaves, fabric, sages (medicine), healers, barbers.

Armed Forces: 3,000 Pantheist infantry and 2,000 Pantheist cavalry, most of which are concerned with the protection of trade and patrolling the pass into the Ruined Kingdoms. Additional forces: 1,000 city guards; a unit of 100 clerical reserves (priests of levels 1 to 6); 900 mamluks of the Parched society, charged with protecting the water supply.

Major Mosques: Pantheon.

Rumors and Lore: At any time, 100 merchants catering to transient adventurers roam the streets of Talab, selling "true" maps to "great treasure" in the wilderness. A visitor can usually find about 50 tribe members here, all eager to share a tale of wonder and amazement—about mountains of pure iron, dreadful cities ruled by the dead, and ancient but still-living idols worshipped by debased peoples.

Caliph Kia pays little heed to these stories. He does, however, have a keen interest in health and disease. He has ordered the mamluk guard to regularly check the reservoir and pipes for dangerous contagia and creatures known to cause or carry maladies. And he insists that all slave-traders guarantee that their slaves from the Ruined Kingdoms are clean and without taint. People with information regarding new diseases—excluding those who actually display symptoms, of course—are expected to report their knowledge to Aranah (the caliph's assistant). Of particular interest to the caliph are diseases, curses, and pseudo-diseases that defy magical cures. Caliph Kia has promised to share any discoveries based on his research to the leaders of other Pantheist cities, especially those of Hilm.

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Chapter 10

Cities of the Ancients

Long, long ago, when the giants ruled and the Haunted Lands were said to be verdant, the lands now called the Ruined Kingdoms held mighty human empires. These were powerful river-empires, of which, say the sages, there were two (though some suggest there were at times as many as a seven). Zakharans know these two kingdoms as Nog and Kadar. Yet a third great empire, which once dominated the isle of Afyal, is now also remembered by its ruins. Its relation to the first two, if any, is unclear.

Why these kingdoms fell is a matter of conjecture. It could be that their people exhausted their resources, or that the land became wet and drove the folk to drier ground. It could be that the people battled themselves to oblivion, or fell to savages or great monsters. The truth is unrevealed.

Of the original inhabitants little is known. Their descendants may walk among today's tribes of the Ruined Kingdoms, the Haunted Lands, and even among the people of Afyal and Sahu. All that the original inhabitants of these empires have left behind are their works: huge structures which have fallen into disrepair. On the islands, there are great temples dominated by hippopotamus- and crocodile-headed gods. Throughout the valleys of Nog and Kadar, monolithic monuments are common, canted at odd angles like teetering headstones, their inscriptions mostly eroded away.

Once well tended, the land of the great river valleys is now overgrown with low underbrush and dense scrub. The soil has become dry and hard in the absence of irrigation. Consequently, the Mighty Nogaro, the Kadan, and even the Al-Iltifat regularly leap their banks and flood the surrounding countryside.

Officially, the kingdoms of Nog and Kadar extend from the southernmost land under Pantheist control to the forest bordering the Foreigners' Sea. Inland, the kingdoms extend as far as the highlands of the Haunted Lands. Of this territory, most is wild and unexplored. A scattering of small towns and encampments lie among the ruins, but only three major cities are found, all in the southeastern quarter. Two of these cities—Rog'osto and Kadarasto—are built on the ruins of old capitols. The third city, Dihliz, is relatively new, closer to a modern city than the others. Of the rest of the land, few can say what riches the weeds, vines, and undergrowth conceal.

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The inhabitants of the Ruined Kingdoms came to enlightenment late (and often unwillingly). Other Zakharans view them as a moody, sullen, and untrustworthy group who have not left their savage gods and heritage fully behind them. Living in the shadow of their ancestors' palaces and tombs, it is easy to see why they are impressed with ancient powers. Most believe that their ancestors still thrive somewhere in the hidden lands and underground chambers of the dead empires, planning for their return. Slavery is a common practice here, particularly in the hinterland. Travelers are warned that savage slavers, who sell their wares at Halwa and Dihliz, are not choosey about the nature of their prey.

Dihliz, the Gateway City

Located on a broad plateau about 50 miles up the Nogaro River, Dihliz is the only major city in the Ruined Kingdoms that has not been built on the wreckage of an older metropolis. Dubbed the Gateway City, it is a popular debarkation point for those seeking fortune and high adventure in the Ruined Kingdoms of the continent. It also serves as a major trading center between the inland towns and the civilized world.

The Ruler: Emira Hassana Alim al-Gaib (hfT/sl/18) was recently a merchant from Afyal. Upon the recommendation of the padishah of Afyal, she was appointed emira by the Grand Caliph for a provisional period of five years. It is now year four, and Hassana is busy hiding away her riches for her inevitable retirement.

The emira operates a wide-open town, the sort favored by adventurers (especially foreigners). Interpretation of the Law is loose, and usually to the advantage of the emira and her cronies.

The Court: The Ministry of Secrets registers and catalogs all ruins and treasure sites between the borders of the Pantheon and the Sempadan Forest. It is headed up by the emira's long-time associate, an unenlightened native of the Haunted Land named Amin Nur (hmF/mb/12). By insisting upon continual reorganization and review, Amin guarantees that the Ministry of Secrets is always in a shambles. Scrolls and reports are frequently misfiled, stolen, or lost, but suitable amount of gold always seems to bring the needed document or information to light. Individuals who visit the ministry in hopes of obtaining a map or a license to plunder often bring dinars instead of scribes.

The Ministry of Riches is responsible for detailing and applying a minor tax to all treasure extracted from the ruins. The ministry is run (and fairly responsibly run at that) by another of the emira's companions, Jel al-Galiz (hfW/sh/13), who holds the title "Minister of Riches." Conscientious and dependable, Jel realizes that most of the treasure hauled from the river valley alone disappears overland, or is smuggled out of the area, with no reports made whatsoever. She focuses her attention on ancient magics, striving to control (or at least regulate) their flow. In particular, she watches for useful or dangerous magical items. Her bureau imposes only a 1 percent tax on monetary treasure, and the ministry pays full price (5 times XP value) for most of the rare magical treasures that are brought to it. Further, individuals who work with the system—and with Jel al-Galiz—often receive grants to explore newly discovered ruins (or to investigate other, nonpaying tomb-raiders).

In keeping with Afyal's tradition, the emira has four husbands (see "Medina al-Afyal" below for details). One husband serves in the court of Afyal. The second serves in the court of Huzuz. The third maintains the family's trading route between Afyal and Jumlat. The fourth and youngest, Ebu min Hassana, commands the cavalry forces of Dihliz. Min Hassana is a former desert rider from the Haunted Lands. The cavalrymen he leads are charged with protecting the city and seeking out those who clandestinely rob the ruins (as opposed to those who work with the Ministry of Secret's knowledge). About three times a year, Min Hassana takes a band of his riders up past Kadarasto for several weeks of patrolling.

Population: 80,000.

Features of the City: Given its physical position as well as its politics, Dihliz is a frontier city, uncivilized when compared to other Zakharan settlements. It is the clearing house for goods looted from the ruins of Nog and Kadar. In theory, each ruin or site of treasure is registered with the Ministry of Secrets, and the treasure removed from those sites is registered with the Ministry of Riches. In reality, however, plunder flows as freely from the Ruined Kingdoms as the Nogaro

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River itself. Those who register with the ministries do so to create a thin veneer of legality (obtaining some protection) and to avoid arousing the suspicion of city patrols, who might then discover the most valuable (and truly secret) treasure vaults.

The buildings of Dihliz are a collection of baked brick and distinctive stone. The stone was hauled from a distant temple, or so it is claimed, for the city radiates a low level of magic, sufficient to scramble most *detect magic* spells. The palace and ministries, made of stone from Afyal, are exempt from this effect. Other divination spells, including *identify* and *legend lore*, are not affected by the temple stone.

The Gateway City is a melting pot, home to natives of the Ruined Kingdoms, people who have emigrated from Afyal, and treasure-seekers from around the Land of Fate. They are energetic, curious, progressive, and, above all, acquisitive. Those who visit Dihliz should heed the following recommendations: keep your eye on your equipment, your hands on your valuables, and a short leash on members of your household.

The Gateway City was established 100 years ago at the will of the padishah of Afyal, Alonka al-Aqil, for two reasons: (1) regulating the flow of magical antiquities out of this land, and (2) providing an interim base for trade to and around the Pantheon cities. Since then, the Grand Caliph has regularly assigned a new caliph to Dihliz about every five years—or as soon as the corruption becomes obvious yet again. Part of the problem: the Grand Caliph appoints each new emir upon the recommendation of the padishah of Afyal. The past two generations of rulers from that island nation have been more interested in appealing to courtiers—and in continuing to receive their share of the treasure haul—than in exerting the force of civilization.

Major Products: Trade, antiquities, rice.

Armed Forces: 1,000 city guards; 1,000 cavalrymen under the command of Ebu min Hassana; navy (term used loosely) of 8 river barges with rowers.

Major Mosques: Kor, Pantheon, Selan, Zann.

Rumors and Lore: Dihliz is said to be built on some sort of holy or taboo site of the lost civilizations of the Ruined Kingdoms. The site is unusual because it lacks the ruins found elsewhere throughout the region. All cut stone in the city was imported.

Kadarasto, City Most Sinister

By following the Nogaro River about 100 miles inland from Dihliz, a traveler reaches the sinister city of Kadarasto. It is an ancient, alien-looking place, perched upon the bluff overlooking the river. The city's architecture—heavy, angular, and depressing—is unique in the Land of Fate. Some sages believe Kadarasto was once the capital of ancient Kadar, which may or may not have existed at the same time as Nog, and may or may not have been its enemy.

The Ruler: Khedive Aman al-Qasi abu Nari (hmF/a/15) is a sly and snakelike man. Around many a campfire in the wilderness, tales are told of an evil caliph whose mouth intones the prayers but whose heart is as black as ebony. Abu Nari lives up to his own legend. His father was one of the Grand Caliph's lesser viziers, and his mother was a native of noble descent. The khedive gained only the worst possible traits from both: the Byzantine politics of the court and the savage heritage of his mother. It has been said that his mother was secretly a priestess of Shajar, and that his father belonged to the Brotherhood of the True Flame.

The khedive was born in Kadarasto, a fact which, in the eyes of natives, places him above many other rulers who are imported from far-off courts. Powerful and harsh, the khedive has put down rebellions with little more than a word (and the help of a few elite mamluk units). The poor of Kadarasto fear him, but they also see him as a force who can oppose the foreign, moneyed classes. The wealthy, on the other hand, despise him, yet they tolerate the khedive, for they desperately need his army and his ability to command the common people.

The Court: Nari ibn Aman (hmF/a/10) is the leading (and it has seemed for some time, the only) supporter of his father, the khedive. Hot-tempered and intense, Nari commands the city's armed forces. His popularity among the poorer members of the city far surpasses that of the khedive himself (not a difficult feat). In fact, Nari is viewed as a local hero—a hero who cuts down illegal tomb-robbers, strikes out against the sanctioned thieves of the emira of Dihliz, and strives to exterminate all those who plunder the heritage of the Ruined Kingdoms. Nari applauds the aid that Ebu min Hassana provides with his raids, but

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wishes that the emira and all foreigners would leave his "country" in peace, allowing it to develop into a power in its own right.

Population: 120,000 (estimated).

Features of the City: Kadarasto is a base for individuals seeking to explore the valley of the Nogaro River. All ruins within two days' ride have been mostly revealed and gutted, and the landscape and fields are littered with defaced and toppled statues and monuments to forgotten gods. Beyond that, the brush and scrub conceals a great deal. There, discoveries are yet to be made—from simple ruins such as baths and watchtowers to greater finds such as tombs or temples.

The most recent version of Kadarasto proper is built upon the ruins of at least 12 other cities, all situated upon the bluffs above the Nogaro. Despite its newer construction, today's Kadarasto has the same haunting nature of its ruined predecessors: windowless architecture; hulking and oppressive city walls (broken only by a pair of gates); and odd, five-sided towers and rooms.

Kadarasto is overrun with its heritage. The ruins of many buildings remain. Most of the graven icons of the ancient ways have been destroyed, their statues crushed to rubble. Nonetheless, the city has a savage, idolatrous atmosphere, for a number of these icons survive in the back alleys and as part of existing buildings.

The city's people, mainly natives from the surrounding wilderness, have received enlightenment only in the past few generations. Kadarasto's lord still takes the ancient title "khedive" (unique to the Ruined Kingdoms), though he professes his allegiance to Huzuz and the superiority of the enlightened gods.

Most of the city's money lies in the hands of interlopers—a few adventurers who were lucky at tomb-robbing, a handful of merchants who exported (and smuggled) rare items from this region to Talab, and courtiers who have offended the padishah of Afyal. (The people of Afyal have a saying: "Better to live without a hand than to be posted to Kadarasto.") The native classes, distinctly poorer, harbor a deep resentment toward these prosperous outsiders. Were it not for the swords of the mamluks and the hired mercenaries, a rebellion would occur and blood would flow in the streets.

The split between Kadarasto's natives is represented in the opinion that other Zakharans have of Kadarasto. To the rest of the world, this city's native people are savage and secretive, still worshipping their old icons when they can. Kadarasto's leaders, on other hand, are viewed as tricky, suspect, and greedy. Only from a position of strength can more civilized Zakharans hope to control both groups and maintain the fragile balance between them.

Major Products: Trade, antiquities, rice.

Armed Forces: 2,000 city guards; 1,000 cavalry; 3 mamluk units of the Devout, totaling 900 men, all under the command of young Nari.

Major Mosques: Hajama, Pantheon, Najm, Selan. Also secret cults of Kiga, Raggara, and Shajar.

Rumors and Lore: Legends persist that the ancient passages and catacombs of the city's past have survived. Followers of the old cult-gods are said to use these places in the secret worship of their savage idols. Such idolatry does not officially exist in Kadarasto, so the khedive does not go looking for it.

Medina al-Afyal

Afyal, the island kingdom dominated by this city, is one of the Enlightened Throne's most distant outposts. It is also among the most prosperous. Located north of Sahu Island, the Isle of the Elephant is a convenient stop for traders from the distant East. This island is also blessed with great natural resources—including precious metals and exotic hardwoods. As a result, its capital, the City of the Elephant, enjoys a richness that rivals that of Huzuz itself.

The Ruler: The island of Afyal has been blessed by Fate with its riches, so perhaps it is only fair that it suffer a dearth where its rulers are concerned. The House of Alon founded the kingdom and its capital city soon after the Law of the Loregiver spread throughout the continent of Zakhara. That house took great pride in the fact that the blood of the First Caliph also flowed in Afyal's first padishah, just as the blood of the current Grand Caliph flows through the veins of today's padishah of Afyal. The mix is thin, however, and so is the genetic link. Afyal's padishahs have always been erratic, perhaps because it takes the will of a madman to create a new city in the wilderness. The present ruler exceeds his predecessors in madness, however.

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Alad bin Alaq bin Alonka of Alon—His Most Enlightened and Resplendent Majesty, Servant of the Grand Caliph, Blood of the Conquerors, Padishah of Afyal, Father of the Multitudes, Wise and Sage Master of His Own Destiny (hmF/f/13)—is a certifiable loon. Some say it is the blood of the ruling class running thin after 500 years. Others say that Bin Alonka was born with a sound mind, but he encountered some great horror in the Ruined Kingdoms as a youth. His father (perhaps lacking in faculties himself), failed to recognize the extent of the damage, and named Bin Alonka his heir.

Whatever the cause, the padishah of Afyal is known for his eccentricities and whims. He has appointed peasants and wandering adventurers to be his ambassadors to far-off lands, simply because he liked his beneficiaries' looks. He has thrown long-standing and loyal courtiers into exile (or worse, to a posting in Kadarasto) as punishment for a remark that he overheard by chance (and perhaps even misunderstood). The padishah has ordered buildings destroyed only to order them rebuilt within a week. He has approved expeditions to the Ruined Kingdoms and for the settlement of Sahu, then forgotten to approve any moneys for these actions. And when the holders of such grants asked for the gold, the padishah had them thrown into prison for their troubles.

Despite these flaws, the padishah of Afyal is a sweet, endearing, and friendly man, particularly with his own people. When he rides through the city in a procession, they cheer. Their ardour may not be for him personally, however. He rides on a floating palanquin complete with great magical pots, which shoot forth streams of silver and copper pieces.

One of the padishah's many titles is "Father of the Multitudes." He lives up to the reputation. The padishah has no wife (much to the chagrin of the Grand Caliph), having divorced or failed to marry every woman to whom he was attracted. But he maintains a large *harim* and has a huge brood of children from age 22 on down. He has recognized all of these children as his own—a practice which will inevitably lead to bloody conflicts in the event of his death.

The padishah's first-born son, Alakbar bin Alad bin Alaq, disappeared on a voyage south into the Crowded Sea four years ago. No word has come from (or about) him since. Given the tendencies of his father, this may be for the best.

The Court: The Mad Padishah has a relatively stable, contented court and bureaucracy. (Otherwise, the petty nobles and merchants would have turned him out long ago, "heir to 500 years" or no.) Many of these personages pass through phases like the waning moon, sometimes being in the padishah's favor, and sometimes not. Members of the court have a saying: "If you do not like the padishah's ruling, wait five minutes and ask again. By that time he may have forgotten."

The most important person in the court is the padishah's trusted chief vizier, Anwar al-Makruh (hemW/sh/13). Al-Makruh served as the padishah's tutor as a youth. The chief vizier is an acid-tongued half-elf who marvels aloud at the fact that men, meaning humans, have managed to accomplish so much—especially given his liege as an example. Such bouts of honesty result in the chief vizier being banished from the city on a regular basis. The chief vizier retreats to his own palatial estate in the wilderness for a month or two of uninterrupted research, after which the padishah inevitably cools down and reinstates him. A 13th-level sha'ir, Anwar al-Makruh has an air gen as a familiar. Al-Makruh is partial to djinn when he works. Many islanders assume that djinn act as the sha'ir's spies while he is in exile.

Also important in the padishah's everyday life is his aunt (his father's sister), the Empress Alia Jamal, or Umm Jamal (hfP/m/12). Though he would prefer she played no role in his life whatsoever, the padishah cannot banish her. Once, it is said, a witty courtier noted aloud that the lean, vulturelike woman tried to join the Pantheon, but she was too conservative even for them. Now the empress allegedly has that courtier's tongue as a keepsake.

Empress Alia's current mission in life is to present her son Jamal bin Alia (hmT/sl/4) as the next candidate to ascend the Elephant Throne. The padishah has been resistant to this idea, if only because his own first son is missing. But Empress Alia is a hard woman to thwart. She presses her son into adventuring so that he can establish a name and reputation for himself. Jamal, a slight and impressionable young man, is unsure about his mother's chosen role for himself, but he realizes it is easier to agree with her than to fight her.

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Should the padishah's son Alakbar never return, and Jamal fail to be recognized, the throne would fall to the padishah's eldest daughter, Alina bint Alad (hfW/so/6). Alina is an intense young woman. She is also a serious student of magic, and often uses the chief vizier's manor (provided he is *not* out of favor at the time). Alina does not want the life of a ruler, so she hopes to see her elder brother return.

Finally, persons of note include the representative of the Merchant Houses, Najiba al-Aqil (hfT/mr/15). Al-Aqil is one of the few sane and reasonable people in the court, a calm voice in an otherwise chaotic place. She is the spokeswoman for Afyal's many and varied merchant houses, which provide the lifeblood of the kingdom by bringing in supplies and civilization from western Zakhara. As is typical for the ruler of a merchant house, Najiba has four husbands—the maximum according to local tradition. All are busy with trade or exploration. One is currently assigned to finding the Crown Prince.

Population: 130,000.

Features of the City: The island of Afyal is verdant and wild, with rolling hills and thick jungles, which are untamed outside the capital city. Wild creatures lurk in the wilderness, virtually at the City of the Elephant's door.

The capital is the only settlement of significant size on the island. Because the jungles yield the rich woods that are the island's main export, a few small villages dot the wilderness, all of them stockaded. A few craftsmen dwell in these villages, but most of their inhabitants are harvesters who bring the wood to the City of the Elephant. There, the finest woodcrafters of Afyal do their work, creating furniture and objects of art in which the wood appears to be almost liquid, flowing in elegant, graceful curves.

No other city in Zakhara is quite like Afyal's capital. For the most part, it lacks the blue tilework of many cities to the west. Yet it is no less impressive, for the city's architects and craftsmen made liberal use of polished marble and gleaming hardwoods. Its greatest structures—the Great Mosque of Selan and the Palace of Alon—flank the city.

The mosque, which boasts an attached university, is the largest temple devoted to Selan in the Land of Fate. The priests operating this mosque are strict moralists, but pragmatists and ethoists may study here, and it is the center of worship for Selan's followers.

The padishah's palace is a sprawling collection of small buildings, many of them linked by causeways, dotted with a half-dozen spires and domes. It is one of the greatest architectural wonders of the Land of Fate, combining magical and conventional methods of construction. It is said that five dao work continually to maintain the walls and bridges of the palace.

The people of Afyal range from the richest merchants to the poorest beggars. The concept of station—that each person has one chosen place in the universe, which is decreed by Fate—is extremely strong on this island. A caste system reigns. A person may never rise above his or her original station, regardless of action. In Afyal, even the most successful adventurer from a beggarly background is expected to defer to a less talented or less worthy individual of a higher station. Marriage outside one's station is strongly (and often violently) discouraged.

Major Products: Trade, wood, gold, precious metals, jewelry, elephants. The elephants of Afyal are particularly intelligent and docile, able to learn and perform tasks willingly and with ease. By decree of the island's first padishah, Alon, no one may kill an elephant of Afyal without sacrificing his or her own life in turn.

Armed Forces: 2,000 city guard; 500 cavalry; 500 elephant calvary; 4 mamluk units, totaling 1,200 men, all of whom represent the Wondrous and serve as the palace guard.

Major Mosques: Selan. (While other faiths are tolerated, in keeping with the Enlightened Way, the only major mosque on the island is to the goddess of the Beautiful Moon.)

Rumors and Lore: Afyal suffers little save for its mad ruler, and his madness seems less dangerous the farther one is distant from him. The daily ritual of life goes on, for everyone has his or her place in society, and the merchant houses continue to bring in new wonders from across the seas.

The island does have one mystery, however. Ruined images of an elephant-headed idol still turn up in great numbers, ranging from small charms and statuettes to large monoliths that are discovered as the jungle is cleared. They are all that remain of the Lost One, a

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forgotten god who ruled Afyal before its days of enlightenment. The Lost One, it is said, was driven off the isle completely, and now lives among the wild islands of the Crowded Sea.

Rog'osto, City of Spires

From the mouth of the Nogaro River, a 300-mile trip north along the shores of the Crowded Sea leads travelers to Rog'osto, the City of Spires. The reason for its name is immediately evident: the city's unique metal towers soar toward the sky, gleaming in the sun. Some visitors have likened the towers to exotic mushrooms, giving Rog'osto a secondary title: City of Fungus. The bizarre towers are found nowhere else in the Land of Fate. They are the legacy of whatever inhabitants ruled the city long ago, in a forgotten time.

The Ruler: The elven khedive Samia al-Sa'id (efW/sh/15) has ruled for the past 100 years in an enlightened, progressive manner that has endeared her to both the common people of the city and to those who dwell in the towers. A powerful wizard in her own right, Khedive Samia has gained wisdom over the years and acquired mighty magical items. The khedive helps settle the squabbling between the tower-lords (*amir al-burj*). She also helps fend off the acquisitive tendencies of both the Pantheon and Afyal.

The Court: The khedive of Rog'osto is aided in all things by Sherif Akyar al-Awasif, a female noble djinni. The khedive herself freed Akyar from imprisonment, and the djinni serves by choice. Akyar is fanatically loyal to Samia. If the djinni perceives a threat, she will stop at nothing to aid her liege. The sherif (pronounced "share EEF") is on good terms with the other genies who live in Rog'osto's towers. Though (as might be expected) her relationships with dao and efreet are somewhat strained, Akyar speaks for all the genie peoples in court.

The court is large and varied. Each "power group" delegates one representative: sha'irs; sorcerers; elemental mages of flame, sea, wind, and sand; clergy; craftsmen; traders; and foreigners. There are many other groups and subgroups represented in the court, as well as ambassadors from other cities. Major influences include Sherif Akyar al-Awasif, representing the genie peoples; Bojo al-Ami (hmT/mr/10), representing the craftsmen; and Bahija of Selan (hfP/p/14), representing all clergy. Here are other characters of note:

- Fayiz al-Wazir (hmW/so/19) represents the sorcerers. He is the most powerful human member of the court. He is prone to the effects of his venerable age, however. Fayiz tires easily, and while his mind is as quick as ever, he cannot converse for extended periods without becoming exhausted. He spends most of his time sequestered within his private tower, communicating with the court through messages carried by invisible stalkers.
- Kharj al-Talqa (hmW/fm/13) represents the flame mages, and he has openly declared himself a member of the Brotherhood of the True Flame. Kharj claims that the foul reputation of the group can be attributed to a minority of overzealous members as well as dark lies that are spread by other elemental mages. Considering his background, Kharj is a polite, almost whimsical mage.
- Revered Mother Farida bint Thuriya (hfP/m/10), humble servant of the Pantheon, is the Pantheist League's ambassador to Rog'osto. She is also a firebrand and a holy crusader. Farida does not trust the city's dilettante mages and soft-sided priests, and she does not believe the inherent power of the city should rest in their hands. This moralist priest has been known to pay adventurers for whatever treasures they recover from the hinterlands, after which she has arranged for the treasures to be smuggled out of the city.
- Othmar bin Kaloth (hmW/sh/12) represents the sha'irs of Rog'osto. He is aided by his bound efreeti, Xamus. As the khedive's leading opponent, Othmar believes she is too open and easygoing to be placed in charge of such magical power. He and Kharj, the representative of the flame mages, are old adventuring companions. Xamus, the efreeti, despises Sherif Akyar, and she, in turn, loathes this genie who might dare to threaten her khedive.
- Olla al-Funun (hfW/so/17) is the ambassador from Afyal. She is an open, cheery woman who actively seeks to serve the khedive by reconciling various factions. With her facile mind and exceptional tact, Olla is often both a negotiator and an advisor to several sides of the same discussion. With each passing year, the khedive relies upon Olla more and more. Olla

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is one of the few individuals in court who have more than a passing interest in whatever race created the towers of Rog'osto. If a pristine tower is found in the hinterlands, she will reward the finders for its contents and the story.

Population: 80,000.

Features of the City: Rog'osto is actually two cities, one built ages ago by unknown, seemingly inhuman hands, the other having grown up around its base during the modern, enlightened age. The Old City comprises metal spires that tower over the area. The towers are constructed from a unique steel alloy. About 50 of these towers are in evidence, though fully half of them are shattered or toppled. The surviving towers stand almost 100 feet tall. The tops and bottoms of the towers are slightly flared, with a long stem in between. The interior of each is an open stairway, spiraling up the inside without a rail, to a great single floor perched at the tower's summit.

Three of the intact towers, arranged like the points in a triangle, have been claimed by the khedive for a palace. All three towers have recently been connected by a fortified wall, which adjoins and links their fluted bases.

In the name of the Grand Caliph, the khedive provides grants for the use of the remaining intact towers. Wizards and priests inhabit them, using the towers as research laboratories or sanctuaries. A number of wizards have blocked or removed the interior stairs and provided their own methods of egress. There are only 22 towers (not counting the palace), and they always full, though turnover is regular.

Rog'osto is considered by many to be the most magical city in the Land of Fate. The city's strange towers attract sha'irs, sorcerers, and elemental mages, as well as pragmatists, kahins, mystics, scholars, and researchers seeking the advantages of both privacy and city living. The khedive has set down rules governing the behavior within the spires (e.g., no inter-spire warfare, no experiments that affect the towers or the city), and violating those rules may be cause for expulsion. Rog'osto has lost three towers to such activities.

The New City of Rog'osto is clustered at the base of the towers, a collection of white-washed, mud-brick houses, much like those found elsewhere in Zakhara. This the home of the poor and of the middle class, consisting of traders and artisans. Rog'osto has a thriving business of craft and art, catering to the wizards, who often require the finest materials for their research.

The New City also produces excellent weapons and armor, using metal from the city's fallen towers. As noted, this metal is an unusual alloy of steel. It tarnishes instead of rusts, melts at a lower temperature, and may be drawn thin to make durable metal cords. Otherwise, it is just as strong and light as steel, and can be used in the same fashion. (Weapons produced with this steel function as normal weapons of their type.) The metalsmiths of the city pay 2 gp a pound for this material. A single fallen tower produces several tons. The existing stock has already been claimed by the city's metalsmithing houses, however.

Major Products: Information, sages, art, crystal, fine metal craftsmanship.

Armed Forces: 1,000 city guards. Each tower holder may have a personal guard of 200 sentient beings. The khedive's palace (with three towers) has a personal guard of 400 2nd-level fighters, plus 200 jann who answer to Sherif Akyar al-Awasif. The armed forces are weak, even by Zakharan standards, but no one has seriously considered fighting an entire city of wizards.

Major Mosques: Kor, Selan, Zann.

Rumors and Lore: Rog'osto's great mystery is its towers. It is assumed that they were created by some magical, possibly divine race from the heavens. A few surviving inscriptions from this race are in an archaic tongue seen nowhere else in the Land of Fate. They speak of a war, say the sages, between the city dwellers and "those above." The natives evidently lost and abandoned their city. The nature of these original inhabitants is unknown, except that they were humanoid. All humanoid races have been suggested, but common thinking leans toward the burned elves (drow).

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Appendix A: Legends and Tales of Zakhara

1. The Maiden of Beauty

This is the story of why the world is as it is, the story of Fate and the gods and the genies. It was in this fashion that the tale was told to me, so it is in the same fashion that I shall tell it to you now.

In the time before the Land of Fate became known as the Land of Fate, the world was young and very different. The great beings whom we call the gods sailed their mighty ships over the endless sea as freely as our corsairs and merchants do today. The great tribes of geniekind made their tents in the endless desert even more widely than the nomads do now. The world belonged to the gods and the genies, but they knew not how to share it. They were as fire and water, battling without end.

Mortals—and by mortals I mean men and women, children and elders, humans and other intelligent races—were caught in this violent clashing of powers. They did not hold sway in the land as they do today. Rather, the mortals were pathetic creatures trapped between the warring gods and genies, confined to a narrow sliver of coast between the desert and the ocean. The ocean storms of the furious gods shattered the mortals' boats, while the desert winds of the wrathful genies scattered and destroyed their herds. The mortals were miserable, but they knew no other life, and who were they to question their fortune?

Then one day among the mortal tribes there was born a girl of exceeding beauty. Her first smile was like the moon breaking free of clouds, and her first laugh was more melodious than the call of a songbird. All who saw this girl loved her deeply. When she grew older and became a maiden of marriageable age, so widespread was the word of her beauty that at last fell it upon the ears of the gods.

At first, not even such news could capture the interest of the quarrelsome deities. But soon three great gods (who were perhaps wiser than the rest) spied this maiden from afar. Those gods were Old Kor and Brave Hajama and Adventurous Najm. Each was immediately mesmerized by the maiden's beauty, and each immediately decided that she must devote herself to him alone—to become a follower or an acolyte, a companion or a consort, to become as much a prisoner to him as he had become a prisoner to her beauty. And so the three gods sailed their great boats to the docks of the city where the maiden dwelled. There, each in turn demanded of the mortals that she be brought forth and given over to him as a bride is given to a husband.

Old Kor said, "One of such beauty must be taught wisdom to use her traits. As the eldest and therefore wisest god, I am the most suitable match for the maiden. Give her to me, else your people will become old and blow away on the ocean breeze."

Brave Hajama said, "One of such beauty must be protected from other jealous suitors. I am the most valiant of my brethren, and therefore the most suitable match for the maiden. Give her to me, else your people will be conquered by others, and scattered throughout the burning world."

Adventurous Najm said, "One of such beauty must be cloaked in rich attire and laden with great treasures. As the most industrious of my brothers, I am best able to meet her needs and therefore the most suitable match for the maiden. Give her to me, else your people will become craven, and never amount to anything."

And so the gods began to quarrel among themselves very loudly, such that the sky became dark and bolts of lightning crashed against the ground. Their quarrel captured the attention of the genie tribes of the desert.

Now, it is true that the cold elemental gods of the genies care nothing for mortal beauty, but the genies themselves know the pleasures of the senses and of the flesh, and they appreciate them as much as mortals do. They came to learn the cause of the gods' argument. Upon seeing the maiden, they too were smitten by her beauty.

"Such radiance!" cried the Great Caliph of the Djinn. "We must bring her great treasures to rival those of the gods! Then she will choose me as her consort."

"Such sweetness!" cried the Grand Khan of the Dao, "We must steal her away from these others! Then she will choose me as her consort!"

"Such light!" cried the Most Respected Sultan of the Efreet. "We must gather the other genies in an army, and drive the gods away. Then she will choose me as her consort!"

"Such magnificence!" cried the Imperial Padishah of the Marids. "We must threaten these humans with all manner of plagues and disasters, so that they turn her over to us. Then she will choose me as her consort!"

And with that the genies began to quarrel among themselves, like the gods. Then the skies fully opened and let fall the rain, and the ground erupted with great gouts of fire. The people of the city feared for their lives, but they were too frightened to give the maiden to any one god or any one genie, lest they offend all the others.

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The maiden herself, afraid for her people, fled from the city into the jungles of the south. She hoped that she would starve there, but such was her beauty that animals brought her food. She hoped that some great beast would devour her, but such was her beauty that no creature would harm her. She hoped that she could find a cliff high enough from which to throw herself, but such was her beauty that the ground smoothed and softened itself beneath her. And so at last she fell to the ground and despaired.

Now Fate, that heavenly force who was like a goddess, yet not a goddess, was also in the jungle. She kept herself apart from the gods and the genies, and she knew nothing of their petty arguments. Fate came upon the melancholy maiden, and like her powerful brethren, Fate was smitten with the maiden's beauty. She too desired the maiden's devotion, and wished to capture the maiden's heart and win her companionship. But unlike her brethren, Fate did not want to possess the maiden as a trophy, nor did Fate entertain even a glimmer of lascivious thought.

And Fate said to herself, "It is the willing hand which best crafts, and the willing heart which is most easily led. Perhaps if I discern her problem and aid her, she will find me worthy of her devotion."

And so it was that Fate asked the maiden about the cause of her sorrows. The maiden told Fate her troubles in the same manner as I have described them. Fate became angry, for the gods and genies had behaved horridly. Fate wished to teach them a lesson. She hatched a plan and told it to the maiden, and the maiden smiled a smile like the moon breaking through the clouds, and agreed.

They set to work changing the maiden's features through skill and craft. Fate wove the maiden's hair with hanging moss, making it appear gray and stringy, and then she gave her a long beard of the same material. Fate rubbed mud across the maiden's face. The mud cracked upon drying, making her appear haggard and old. Then Fate cloaked the maiden's womanly form in voluminous robes, which were constructed to make her appear mannish and hunched.

Thus the maiden, now disguised as an old man, returned to the city. Fate lingered behind her, several steps away, becoming one with the shadows. The gods and genies were still arguing in the central court. The buildings quaked. The ground shook. And the heavens roared.

The people of the city were sorely afraid. Some had even fled by this time, traveling as far as they could. It was from these craven people that the barbarians of the north and east arose (for this is the heart of the world). The brave people who stayed—trusting in Fate who is all-knowing—became our native peoples. But that is another story.

The old man who was neither old nor a man strode up to the combatants in the city square. The stooped and ugly figure then tapped a stout staff against the shoulder of the largest god, Hajama. "Why are you arguing so?" rasped the old man.

"Ah, respected elder" replied the god, who was amazed by the old man's audacity and assumed him to be wise and powerful. "I have the right to take the beautiful maiden as my own, which these others deny me. That is why we argue."

"No," said the Great Caliph of the Djinn, "I have the right to take the beautiful maiden as my own, which others deny *me*. That is why we argue."

And so they began to squabble again, until the old man who was really a maiden struck the ground thrice with his staff. Fate, of course, was with the maiden, and the force of the blow knocked all the gods and genies from their feet.

"I am old and wise," said the old man. "I have no need for young maidens. Show this girl to me and I will decide who among you is the best match."

And the gods and genies agreed, though each of them made great threats as to what would happen to the mortals if he alone was not chosen. Then the gods and genies set out to look for the maiden as the old man had asked, and found she was gone from the city.

"How can I decide who is to have her, when she is not to be had?" said the old man.

And the gods and genies ran about the city, looking into every apartment, every court, and every quarter, seeking some trace of the maiden. They found nothing, for Fate was with the maiden, and none could penetrate her disguise. Then the gods and genies ran three times around the world, scouring the mountain highlands and the ocean depths to discover the object of their desires. But they found no trace, for Fate was with the maiden, and none could penetrate her disguise.

Finally, the gods and genies returned to the courtyard of the city, where a great lamentation went up, for they had failed to discover maiden. They cried and rent their garments, and they cast themselves upon the ground in despair. Then the old man spoke.

"I will do you a service," he said. "I will wait here until the maiden returns, for she is a shy and timid creature, and will certainly reappear soon after you leave. Then I will make a

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decision, and all will abide by it. Until that time, you must move your homes far from the city and the lands of the mortal people, so that she might be impressed with your kindness and understanding."

The gods grumbled and the genies whined, but in the end they agreed with the old man, for until the maiden appeared, there was no point in remaining among the mortals (who seemed quite ugly and tedious compared to the maiden). So they prepared to leave, the gods boarding their ships to return to the sea and the genies mounting their great camels to return to the desert.

Before the gods left, however, Kor the Wise turned to the old man and said, "We will go, but first we will choose among your people those who are worthy to act in our stead, those who can show that we are worthy of the maiden."

The old man replied, "We have no Fate but the Fate which is given us," and shrugged his shoulders.

Each god then picked ten men and ten women to be his first servants, and so it was that the first Clerics of the Faith came into being. And then the gods mounted their great ships and sailed far away from the lands of the mortals.

Before the genies left, the Great Caliph of the Djinn said, "We will go, but only far enough away to avoid offending the maiden's people. We will send our servants and warriors to aid you, to show that we are worthy of the maiden."

The old man replied, "We have no Fate but the Fate which is given us," and shrugged his shoulders.

And so the genies rode into the desert on their great white camels, but to this day they come regularly to the mortals' land as servants and warriors.

At last only the old man remained in the court. Fate stepped from the shadows and removed the false face and hair from the maiden, who said, "Surely the gods and genies will be angry once they realize they have been deceived. Will they not return to punish us with their righteous wrath?"

"You have wisdom in true proportion to your beauty," replied Fate, "Yet for them to return and attack, they must first admit that they were deceived by a maiden, and no god would wish to appear so foolish in front of the genies, and no genie would wish to appear so foolish in front of the gods. Before you is a most difficult task, for should you choose genie or mortal or god, the others will know, and they will return to make good their great threats and dire warnings. You must never make that choice."

"We have no Fate but the Fate which is given us," said the maiden, and she nodded.

Fate remained with the maiden for some time. The maiden gained much in wisdom, learning how to deal with gods and genies and how to guide mortals to the correct path, the path to which they are destined. Even after Fate left the maiden's side, Fate remained with her. With Fate's guidance, as the maiden she inspired great crafts and beautiful art and mighty spells. In the guise of the old man, she inspired careful thought and hard work and learning.

Still, her words and her acts touched only a few of the many mortals of Zakhara. Fate instructed the maiden to record the wisdom she had gained. This she did. So it was that one day, long thereafter, the boy who would be the First Caliph discovered the maiden's scrolls and spread the word of the Loregiver throughout the land, which became known as the Land of Fate.

If the gods and genies have ever found out Fate's trick, they have said nothing (and no mortal has inquired, for only a fool would broach the subject and risk their wrath). The maiden—who came to be called the Beautiful One, the Old One, and the Loregiver—has yet to make her decision. Even to this day, she remains at the side of Fate. She has been greatly tested by mortals, gods, and genies. But that is another set of tales, for another evening. . . .

11. The Boy and the Genies

This is the story of why the world is as it is, the story of the genies and how they caused the seasons to be, and why the genies serve the sha'irs. It was in this fashion that the tale was told to me, so it is in the same fashion that I shall tell it to you now.

Once, there was a boy whose parents died when he was quite young. The orphan had only one relative: an uncle whom he had never seen and who lived very far away. When word of his brother's death reached him, the uncle came to care for his nephew and to run the family business until the boy reached his majority.

Now, the family business was very productive, trading in rich velvets, fresh spices, and camels. It required very little time and energy, yet it brought great wealth. The uncle was fat and lazy. As his nephew grew older, the uncle came to loathe the idea that one day he would be forced to relinquish the business and its rewards. So the uncle schemed to have the youth slain. His own hands, the uncle knew, had to remain clean, so he devised a plan ensuring that the blame would not fall upon him.

The uncle hired a bandit who was reputedly very skilled in his craft. The bandit kidnapped the youth and took him into the desert, where the scoundrel abandoned him without food or water.

When word of the boy's disappearance reached the uncle, he feigned despair. The corpulent man cried and rent his fine garments, proclaiming, "I have lost one who is like my own son!" But in his secret heart he was glad.

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A boy from the city who is abandoned in the wastes of the desert will soon weaken and die—indeed, that was the uncle's intention. But Fortune smiled upon the youth, and Fate was with him (for we have no Fate but the Fate which is given us). The boy wandered, looking for shelter from the sun. Soon he found an outcropping of rocks. He crawled into the shade of the outcropping and saw that the shade concealed a narrow crevice, too small for a normal man, but large enough for a boy such as he to pass through. The sound of running water issued from the crevice, beckoning like a gentle song, and the boy followed it into the darkness.

The crevice soon widened. A light appeared ahead. The youth made for the light, then tripped over an obstacle in the shadows at his feet. Exploring with his hands, he touched the skeleton of an elven warrior. The ancient warrior held a great straight sword which glinted faintly, reflecting the light from ahead. The youth took the weapon and pressed on.

The crevice quickly became broader and the youth entered a cavern. The light emanated from the ceiling, which was ringed with luminous moss and mushrooms. A stream ran across the entire length of the cavern, collecting in a great pool at the center.

On the far side of the pool slumbered a great ghul. She had her true form, which was hideous. Her head was resting on an enormous ruby, larger in girth than the boy's own body.

The youth was sorely afraid. Yet his thirst was stronger than his fear, so he decided to drink quietly from the pool before taking his leave. As he knelt beside the water, the ghul awakened. Leaping over the pool, she seized the startled youth with her clawed hands. The boy dangled in the ghul's grasp. He fixed his gaze upon a deep scar that marked her cheek, just beneath a milky right eye.

"Another robber," hissed the ghul with her foul breath. "One came this way before. He sought to steal the great ruby of Yalsur, which I have hidden from the genie lords. He found he could not leave with it. I found he could not leave at all. Now you, too, will die, and I will feast on your marrow!" With that, the ghul carried the boy back to her side of the pool, where, in addition to the great gem, there lay a cauldron, a chopping block, and a great cleaver.

The youth still held the dead warrior's sword, and Fate was with him. As the ghul loosened her grasp, he swung the blade and cut her squarely in the left eye. The great ghul screamed and dropped her quarry, who at once scrambled over to the great gem and seized it in both arms. Then he leapt across the pool and charged with all his might for the crevice from whence he had come.

The ghul screamed and followed. The boy soon found why the elven warrior could not escape. Just beyond the cavern, the crevice became too narrow for the gem.

"Half a loaf is better than starving," said the youth to himself. He swung his shining sword at the ruby. It broke into two perfectly cut stones, each half as large as the gem had been before. One part he rolled toward the blinded ghul. The other, he gathered in his arms, and he fled. The ghul found the broken gem and began to scream, and she screams to this day. When deep underground, one can hear her screams issuing forth like a keening wind in the darkness.

The youth reached the outcropping of rocks at the surface just as the sun was setting over the desert. Feeling chill, and fearing that the ghul might somehow follow him to the surface, he set out into the desert once more, traveling by the thin light of the waning moon.

After he had traveled a few miles, the youth saw in the distance a new light. It was bright, and at first he thought it a city, yet it moved closer to him as he watched. The youth came to realize that he was witnessing a procession of the geniekind. Jann held aloft brass torches to light the way. Djinn and efreet outriders protected the flanks of the procession, while marids led the way and dao guarded the rear.

The youth then saw that this was no mere collection of genies; it was the procession of the great genie lords, who had returned to this land to see if the most beautiful maiden of the mortals had decided who among them would be her suitor. The Great Caliph of the Djinn was mounted on a camel of shining white, dripping with gems. The Most Respected Sultan of the Efreet rode in a great iron wain, pulled by a hundred of his lesser servants. The Grand Khan of the Dao rode a clattering elephant of darkest ebony. The Imperial Padishah of the Marids walked on foot—his people spread orange blossoms before him and gathered them up after he passed, not missing a single petal.

The youth thought to avoid the procession, but there was no avoiding it, no place to hide. And so it was that he flung himself prostrate and face down on the ground, arms outstretched, the great gem on one side, the miraculous sword on the other.

The procession came to him and stopped. As the jann prepared an encampment, the youth was brought to the genie lords.

"Who are you, lad, wandering in the desert at this late hour?" asked the Great Caliph and the Djinn.

"How is it you are blocking our path?" added the Most Respected Sultan of the Efreet.

"Where did you find that intriguing sword, which shines in the moonlight like a living thing?" added the Imperial Padishah of the Marids.

"And where did you find that wondrous gem, so much like one we ourselves once had?" finished the Grand Khan of the Dao.

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The youth related his story to the genie lords, telling them of his kidnapping, how he had wandered across the parched desert in searing heat, how he found the crevice and the sparkling pool, and how he fought the great ghul. He did not, however, mention that he had split the gem to escape, because the Khan of the Dao had expressed such an interest in it, and he had claimed it was once a thing of the genies.

When the boy finished his story, the Great Caliph of the Djinn said, "Fate walks with you in your life."

"Fate is most kind," added the Most Respected Sultan of the Efreet.

"You have no Fate but the Fate which you are given," added the Imperial Padishah of the Marids.

"Yet this gem you have looks much like one we ourselves once had," finished the Grand Khan of the Dao, and with that he summoned the Rawun of the Jann to recount the tale of the gem of Yalsur.

The storyteller came forward and told his tale, and the youth learned (as all learn) that the genie lords were a quarrelsome group when they were young, and they fought over most things. Most of all they fought over a great gem, larger than the boy himself, which was the ruby of Yalsur. While the genie lords argued, a bandit stole into their tents and made off with the great gem. The genies despaired of the loss, but they soon realized they had no Fate but the Fate they were given, and were soon content again, though they always hoped that one day the gem would be returned.

After the rawun's tale was complete, the Grand Khan of the Dao once more addressed the boy. "The ruby that was taken from us resembled the great jewel you now keep at your side."

"And if it is that same ruby, we ask for its return," said the Most Respected Sultan of the Efreet.

"With sweetness and goodness in your heart," said the Great Caliph of the Djinn.

The Imperial Padishah of the Marids looked at the gem, his forehead furrowed, but he said nothing.

"With sweetness and goodness," said the youth, and offered the gem to the genie lords. "I believe it is your gem, and theft from a thief is no virtue unless it aids Fate. Let me offer it to you, in exchange for returning to my home."

Now the Imperial Padishah of the Marids did speak. "I may be wrong, but was not the blood-red gem of Yalsur once larger than it now appears?"

The other genie lords thought for a moment and nodded. Yes, it was larger, they said.

The youth replied, "Ah, like most things of our world, surely it has been reduced by being apart from the true majesty of yourselves and your peoples."

The jann in the camp scoffed silently at the idea. And the ordinary dao and djinn had to stiffen their faces to keep from laughing. But the genie lords nodded sagely at the suggestion, each not wishing to appear to the others as if the boy's statement was not true, each not wishing to offend his fellow lords.

"Your gift is appreciated," said the Great Caliph of the Djinn, "but before it is accepted, we must decide who will hold the gem. Otherwise, we will fall to arguing, and another thief may take the ruby. I venture to say that I would keep it best, behind a wall of wind."

"*I* would keep it cloaked in fire," replied the efreeti sultan.

"*I* would keep it deep beneath the sea," said the marid padishah.

"*I* would keep it secure in the bosom of the earth," added the dao khan.

It seemed that the genie lords would once more begin to argue. The jann retreated, and the humble dao and djinn and efreet and marids in the procession were afraid.

Then the youth said wisely, "Could not each of you keep the ruby for three great moons apiece, and give it to another thereafter?"

The genie lords looked at the youth and looked at each other. Not wishing to appear foolish, each nodded in agreement.

"The marid padishah should take it for the next three great moons," declared the djinni caliph.

"And the djinn caliph the following three," replied the efreeti sultan.

"And the efreeti sultan the three following that," said the dao khan.

"And the dao khan the final three," finished the marid padishah.

And so they agreed. This is why the winter months are now the wettest, why the spring months bear the sweetest breezes, why the summer months bring the hottest days, and why the autumn months are the best time to reap the earth's bounty. Such things were neither here nor there for the youth, however, who desired nothing more than to return home and to be away from the powerful but capricious lords of the genies.

The lords hailed the youth's wisdom and set forth a great feast, offering him riches and treasure in exchange for the ruby and his sagacious advice. But the youth politely and humbly refused all, hoping not to offend his hosts, for he had heard tales of genie-made gold that faded in the sun. The genie lords became more insistent, suggesting that the youth take something of theirs in trade, but each suggestion brought another polite refusal. As the night waned, the genie lords began to see their offers as a kind of game. They

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consumed great amounts of wine and were at last quite drunk.

Finally the youth made his wishes clear: "All I desire is to return to my home, to find who is responsible for my kidnapping, and to be as happy as Fate allows a man to be in the fullness of time."

The genie lords rejoiced. Each in turn pledged his fealty to help the boy, to his descendants, and to his followers, to whom he would teach great things. And the genie lords then showed him how to call upon the jann, summon the djinn, and bind the dao to his will. They taught him how to visit the tents of the genies and not be harmed. And so the youth became the first of the sha'irs—the summoners of genies—and his followers remain to this day. If the genies regretted their promise, they have made no sign, for they have lived by their words from that day to this.

As a sign of their great favor, the genie lords appointed four female genies to forever aid the boy—a djinni, a marid, a dao, and an efreeti. They were of exceptional beauty and power. The boy (who was now barely a young man) wished to make them his wives, and as the genies respected his wisdom and wished truly to serve him, this was done. Then the rest of the genies packed up the camp, and left into the west, disappearing below the horizon just as the first rays of dawn appeared in the east.

"Do you have a command?" asked the djinni of her husband, her flesh as pale as bone.

"I wish to return home," said the youth.

"Hearing and obeying, with sweetness and goodness," the djinni replied, and she summoned a whirlwind, which carried the youth and his four wives unerringly back to his city, landing him in the courtyard of his own home. The servants in the court saw the youth and were glad, but they also saw the unearthly beauty of his genies and were afraid. But none was so afraid as the uncle, who saw the youth from his counting house and made to escape, packing as much treasure as one man could carry.

"Do you have a command?" asked the dao, her flesh as gray and dusky as polished granite.

"I wish to find the man who kidnapped me and left me in the desert to die," said the youth.

"Hearing and obeying, with sweetness and goodness," the dao replied. She went into the city and returned with the thief, who struggled in her powerful arms.

When the bandit saw the boy, he threw himself upon the ground, begging for mercy and kindness. He confessed fully to his crime and agreed to place himself in the hands of the city guards. Greed, he explained, had driven him, for he had been offered much gold in exchange for abandoning the boy in the desert. The bandit declared that he would surrender all his riches to the poor if only the boy would spare his life.

The youth demanded to know who had paid for such an awful deed, for he could not imagine any enemies. The bandit replied truthfully. The youth, who had loved his uncle, did not at first believe what he had heard. But when he called for his uncle, the boy discovered that the culprit had fled, using part of his ill-gotten treasure to hire a boat and sail from the city. So the uncle had implicated himself in his crime. Saddened, the youth instructed the bandit to begin leading life in an honorable manner. And the bandit did so, abandoning his former life and eventually becoming a virtuous mystic who would go on to lead others by his example.

"Do you have a command?" asked the marid, her turquoise flesh as shining as the sea.

"I wish my uncle to be brought to me," said the youth.

"Hearing and obeying, with sweetness and goodness," the marid responded, and she sought out the ship, altering its course and returning it to the city against the wishes of its captain. When the uncle saw what was happening, he jumped overboard. The marid grabbed him by his robes and dragged him, soaking wet, to his nephew.

The youth asked his uncle to explain himself. The uncle, black-hearted wretch that he was, cursed the boy and admitted proudly to everything, for he saw his life was forfeit for his obvious crimes. The uncle also ridiculed the youth for his new-found power among the genies.

"I say to you," said the uncle, that the power you wield will turn against you as surely as your wealth turned against me. I was so afraid of losing what I had gained from you that I shut myself up in my counting house, fearful of losing a drachma. So too you will be walled up, afraid to give others your powers. The genie lords have made a fool of you!" And he spat at the youth's feet.

"Do you have a command?" asked the efreeti, her skin as dark as coal.

"Punish this man according to his crimes," said the youth. "Then send out word to the cities that those who wish to learn the craft of genie-work may come to me."

"Hearing and obeying, with sweetness and goodness," the efreeti responded. She drew a great black blade and cut the uncle's head from his shoulders, then his arms and legs from his body, and she blew the pieces into the desert, where no one has ever found them. She and her three cousins sent word throughout the city that those who wished to learn the craft of genie-work should come to the house of the youth, where he would teach those who were able to understand.

So it has remained from that day to this, that the seasons pass in their richness, each with their own nature, and the

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sha'irs can summon the genies and work magic through them. If the genie lords ever noted that the ruby of Yalsur had been sliced in twain (and they might have, for they are not fools), they have said nothing. Its mated half has never been found.

Of the youth, it is said that he attained his maturity and became an honored vizier of his ruler. With his four elemental wives, he came to aid the genie lords on another occasion. But that is another tale for another evening. . . .

III. The City of Peace

This is the story of why the world is as it is, the story of the Haunted Lands and the dangers of getting what one desires. It was in this fashion that the tale was told to me, so it is in the same fashion that I shall tell it to you now.

This story comes from long ago—not in the memory of an elven grandfather, but perhaps in the memory of an elven grandfather's grandfather—when the area now called the Haunted Lands was a rich and verdant plain, crossed by rivers which swelled with the rains in winter and with the mountains' melting snow in the spring, and which were otherwise fed by small streams and springs. Trading cities and animal-herding tribes arose in these lands, and as they grew more powerful, they grew prouder, and soon they began to war against each other unceasingly. One city would contest another. One tribe would battle its own kin. Tribe and city would fight, and clans within each tribe and city would fight, and so it proceeded until even between brothers there was great contention.

Now, the sultan of one of the cities could see that discord was strong in his land, and he wished for nothing more than peace, because peace helped keep the stalls full and the fields rich and the flocks healthy. The sultan consulted his most ancient vizier for advice. The vizier was very wise. He had once been a simple barber in the market, but his wisdom had brought him great wealth and power. The sultan asked the vizier how peace might be found.

The vizier said to him, "Such a question is not a simple one. I must consider it well, and confer with others who are wise."

After a time, the vizier returned with an answer. "I have talked to my comrades, both magical and mundane," he said to the sultan. "And I have come to understand that among the riders of the gray grass there exists a mystic who is capable of bringing what you seek. The mystic can show you the way to the City of Peace. I have heard that others do not seek it, for they do not wish to pay the price. I know not the price, and in any event I am old. Seek out the riders of the gray grass, and they may tell you what you need to know."

The sultan set out from his city with a dozen camels that were loaded with goods and riches. He sought out the oasis of the gray grass where the riders were said to encamp. The sultan's own scouts rode ahead to announce his coming, and to seek out the proper directions.

When the sultan arrived at the oasis, he found that his enemies from the other cities, who did not desire peace, had arrived first. The tents were burned, the livestock scattered, and the waters of the pool were fouled and useless. Bodies of many riders lay scattered on the ground. The sultan was sick at heart, and he swore upon Fate and the gods that those responsible would die by his hand ere he himself lay down to die. He offered solace and treasure to the survivors, though they were more interested in the food and common goods the camels had also brought.

The sultan discovered that the mystic who knew of the City of Peace was slain in the raid. The sultan staggered as if stricken, but a small voice from the group spoke up.

"I know where the City of Peace is," said the voice.

The sultan looked up and saw a small child no more than seven years of age, yet in the child's eyes were the depth and understanding of a mystic. And the child said that he would lead the sultan to the city, but would not enter it, if the sultan would give away all things except a single camel and follow him.

The sultan did as the boy asked. They journeyed for two weeks and then some. At last, they came to a great dune rising from the desert floor.

"The city you seek is on the far side of the dune." said the child. "Are you sure this is what you seek?"

"I seek to end the conflict among our peoples. I seek to punish those responsible for slaying your tribesman. I am sure."

"Then I will leave you here to Fate," said the child, and he led the camel back into the desert. The boy called back to the Sultan, "Remember this: I will wait for you at the gates of your own city." And he was gone.

The sultan climbed the dune. Behind its great mass was a verdant valley, filled with sweet grass and great trees that were heavy with fruit. At the center of the valley lay a city. And at the heart of the city was a great palace which bore an uncountable number of silver domes and a great mosque with an uncountable number of silver minarets. The sultan scrambled down the face of the dune.

The sultan was met at the gate to the city by two mamluks, who barred his path. "What do you seek, wanderer?" said one.

"I seek a way to bring peace to my warring peoples, and I wish to gain vengeance against those who have hurt others."

The mamluks looked at each other, then nodded and said, "Go straight to the fountain at the palace."

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And so sultan went to the palace and found a great fountain in the central court. At the edge of the fountain sat a beautiful woman, glancing at the water. Her eyes were luminous, and her hair was black. The sultan was so enthralled that all thoughts of his homeland suddenly fled from him.

"Greetings, noble wanderer," she said, a gentle smile upon her lips. "How may I aid thee?"

"You may consent to sit with me by the fountain," he replied, "and dine and dally with me for a short time."

The woman laughed with a laugh that was like the tinkling of bells. She clapped her hands and twice-twenty servants appeared, each of them brawny and bare to the waist. Some carried sumptuous cushions and great urns of fine wine, which they laid before the pair. Others brought all manner of foods, both common and rare.

When the pair had finished their refreshment, the woman said to the sultan, "And how may I aid thee now?"

The sultan recalled his true purpose in seeking out the city. "I wish to end the wars between city and city, between tribe and tribe, and between city and tribe. I wish to find peace for my people and the peoples that they know."

The woman laughed with a laugh that was like the tinkling of bells. She clapped her hands and a scribe dressed in velvet entered the court. He carried a great scroll and waved a quill that was made from the feather of a peacock. The sultan listed for the scribe all the names of the tribes and cities that he knew, which were many in those days, and when he had finished, the names filled the entire scroll. The scribe then bowed low and departed.

The woman and the sultan returned to their leisure. Another sumptuous meal was laid before them, and when the pair was again satisfied, the woman said, "For the third and last time, how may I aid thee?"

"I seek vengeance against those who hurt my people and against those who struck the riders of the gray grass. I wish for those who are responsible to be punished until they draw not a breath more."

This time, the woman did not laugh. She rose solemnly. "It is as you wish," she said softly, and then she departed. The doors through which she left the court closed behind her of their own accord.

The sultan was stunned. He raced down the halls and through the adjacent courtyards, but could not find the woman. Nor could he find the servants, the mamluks, or any other living creature. The sultan was alone.

A wind arose. Sand and dust began to blow through the halls and courtyards, intensifying until the sultan could not see his hand before his face. Clutching his robe tightly to his face, he sought shelter from the wind, but there was none to be found.

The sultan had no idea how long he strode against the storm, but at last its intensity faded, and the sky cleared with the sunset. He found that the city was gone, and all around him was nothing but the arid wasteland.

The stars remained, and he used them to find his way west, toward his own lands. He did not know how long he had traveled, but at last he came to a ruined city, its minarets snapped and its wall crumbling in a dozen places. At first he thought it was the City of Peace, and he despaired. Then he realized that it was his own city, and his despair darkened into the deepest night.

At the gates of the city, now wrecked and hanging open, the sultan discovered an old man. The man's flesh was little more than tatters on his bones, and his eyes were deeply sunken. The old man looked at the sultan and spoke.

"I told you I would meet you here," he rasped. The sultan realized with a shock that this was the child mystic who had led him to the City of Peace—only a single day before.

The old man regarded the sultan and nodded. "You have gained the City of Peace and courted Fate," said he. "And Fate has granted your wishes. You wished to find pleasure with Fate and that occurred. You wished for the tribes and cities to stop warring, and Fate scattered them far across the world so that they not meet each other again until such a time that none could remember their strife. You wished for all those responsible for this hurt to die. And are we not all responsible for our actions, regardless of Fate? So all those who offended you and your people have perished, to the last one. You think that only a day has passed, yet you have been gone more than two hundred years. I have waited here, for Fate has been with me, and that is how I know the tale. . . ."

And with that the old man perished. The sultan sat by the dead man for a day, then two, then five, but no one else came to him, nor did anyone trouble the ruined city. Then the sultan returned to the desert, hoping to find the City of Peace. He was not seen again in the lands of the living.

So it has remained, from then until now, that the Haunted Lands remain empty, save for the ruins of great mosques and cities which once thrived there. And so it is that legend reaches your ears of other lands, far removed, where men and women who seem similar to us walk among the unenlightened, and even become mighty in their own petty empires. But that is another tale for another evening. . . .

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IV. The Voice of History

Excerpted from a sermon by Abba min Hiyal, kahin to the forces of Truth, as he addressed the people of the distant land of Halruua and told them of the Land of Fate.

I understand. I understand. I have been enlightened and I understand.

I have been asked by your spellcasters to tell of my lands, but when I begin to speak of the wonders of Fate and the magic of genies and the wars of gods, the supposedly wise men interrupt and say, "Please, noble lord, tell us the facts, not just a story." What are the facts but a story which happens to be true? Yet I will pare down all that I know, to aid you in understanding. It is like boiling the flesh off a duck for soup; eventually one reaches the bare bones, but it is not a pleasant experience for the duck.

Man has always lived in the burning world of Zakhara, most noble of lands, as far as we know. The great empires of the past litter the land with their fallen towers, their buried tombs, and their monuments to forgotten gods. Who they were we cannot say, only that they once occupied great river empires. We call those empires Nog and Kadar. They embraced their river, and then, like freshwater fish who could neither leave the water nor pass into the sea, they died. Or perhaps something else happened. We know only that they are gone.

Also long ago, there existed the Loregiver. Our rawuns and sages say that the Loregiver was a maiden who, guided by Fate, chose not to make a choice, and in doing so, she gained great wisdom. She collected that wisdom as law and spread it to the desert peoples, and she wrote it down and hid it away for the time when men and women were ready to receive enlightenment.

Or perhaps not. I cannot prove any of it, just as I cannot prove the first sha'ir was married to four genies. Yet today we see the sha'irs calling upon the genies and commanding them, we can see the ruins of Nog and Kadar, and the Law of the Loregiver influences the lives of all enlightened people.

Other old empires came and went. Small cities became large and then were abandoned. Wars were fought. People died in them, or they did not and died later. Tribes and cities disappeared, for they displeased the gods. Graven images were worshipped and abandoned. At last, the time came for enlightenment.

So a young boy of a desert tribe found the writings of the Loregiver. Guided by the hand of Fate, he found the scroll that contained the Law and spread the word. The people saw the wisdom of the youth's words and flocked to his banner. The great emirs and pashas and khans bent down on one knee to receive the boy's wisdom. Zakhara became the Land of Fate. The youth became the first of the Grand Caliphs, the First Caliph. He made Huzuz his home, for it was there he had received the vision which eventually led him to the scroll, and it was there he had first begun to spread the word, and it was there, the sages say, that the Loregiver herself had lived.

So it was that the word of the Loregiver spread from one great sea to another, from the Free Cities that look toward your own shores to distant Afyal, the Isle of the Elephant, and all those enlightened by the word came to be ruled by a single Grand Caliph. They were unified in their language, knowledge, and understanding, and so it remains today. Can any of your petty empires claim such wonders?

That is my tale. It is not as lively as some I have told, nor as romantic, nor even as interesting. It is merely, as you have requested, a statement of one fact upon another. And if this is your way of thinking in the Northern territories, I have greater pity for you than I had before.

Your thoughts are like one foot placed before another, a relentless repetition of fact upon fact. You may get where you are going, but how can you ever dance?

V. The Dragon and the Genies

This is a tale of the great, lizardlike dragons that haunt the northern climes, and why they are seldom seen in the Land of Fate. It is not the only explanation you may hear. Some claim that it is the climate that drives these creatures away, while others point to the lack of ready food, and a few may even tell you it is because the sand wears away the dragons' scales. Those who know the truth of the matter know this tale, however, and you shall know it, too. It was in this fashion that the tale was told to me, so it is in the same fashion that I shall tell it to you now.

Long ago, when Nog and Kadar were not yet in existence, the great lizard-beasts of the distant North held a conclave of their tribes. Piggish creatures, these dragons had eaten all the available cattle and destroyed all the nearby towns, and now they would go hungry unless they found new pickings. So one of their number, a great reddish creature, volunteered to scout out a new home. He flew south many days until he reached the shores of burning Zakhara. As he approached the beach, he saw a maiden frolicking in the surf. As it had been a long trip, he decided this skinny creature would sate his hunger until more meaty prey presented itself. He swooped down low to spear the maiden with his claws.

Yet when he dove down upon the maiden, she vanished without a trace, and in her stead a huge wave rose out of the surf, knocking the dragon from the sky. He crashed upon the

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beach. When he had recovered his senses, the dragon said to himself, "How is it that I could miss the maiden? And from whence came the wave like a fist? Am I so famished that I cannot trust my eyes?" And with that he headed inland.

At length, the dragon found a small herd of goats tended on a hillside. A shepherdess had planted her staff nearby. The dragon chased the goats around the field, looking for the meatiest to eat first. The shepherdess ran up to the dragon and tapped him on the foot with her staff. The dragon was accustomed to humans fleeing from his greatness, not being so brazen as this, and he turned to regard the woman with curiosity.

"Who are you to disturb my sheep?" asked the shepherdess.

"I am one of great power," said the dragon, and I do as I see fit.

"What is your great power?" demanded the shepherdess.

"I breathe fire," the dragon replied, and with that he spat out a ball of flame that engulfed the shepherdess.

The dragon expected to dine on her charred form, but when the smoke had cleared, she stood there untouched, staff in hand. "Pitiful," said the shepherdess. "Try this instead."

And with that she became a great pillar of fire whose heat was so intense that the dragon had to fall back for fear of being scorched. The fire's heat grew stronger, and the dragon took to the air to evade it. The pillar roared after him, but eventually the dragon escaped the lapping flames.

"This is a frightening land," said the dragon to himself, "where even the peasants are magical. I must find a cave and rest before I go farther."

And so the creature found a likely mountain and within that mountain found a likely cave, and he settled down for a short nap. At length, however, his sleep was disturbed by a tap on his snout. He opened his eyes to see a withered and gray-haired man scowling at him.

"This is my home," the codger snapped. "You'll have to sleep somewhere else, for you are an uninvited guest."

The dragon snarled. "I will not leave for any crippled old man. I claim this cave. Begone!" And he showed his teeth.

The old man showed his teeth as if to mock the dragon. "If you desire the earth so much," shouted the man, "you shall have it!" And he disappeared.

Immediately the mountain shook and the cavern began to collapse. The dragon escaped only with the tiniest sliver of his life.

Hungry, tired, and hurt, the dragon cursed this strange land and its strange people. At length he heard a piping. Investigating, the dragon found a small boy who was seated upon a rock, playing a flute. This time the dragon did not attack, for who could tell what powers this weak-looking creature possessed? Instead, the dragon approached in a gentle manner, and begged the child to listen to his story.

The child heard the dragon tell of the maiden, of the shepherdess, and of the old man. And the child learned how the dragon was afraid to eat and even to sleep in a land that held such powerful creatures.

At length the child said, "I know those of whom you speak, for the maiden of the shores is my cousin, the shepherdess of the valley is my aunt, and the old man of the mountain is my uncle. Do not snivel so. They have shown you great kindness, for any of them could have killed you, and they have spared your life only because you are not enlightened and know no better."

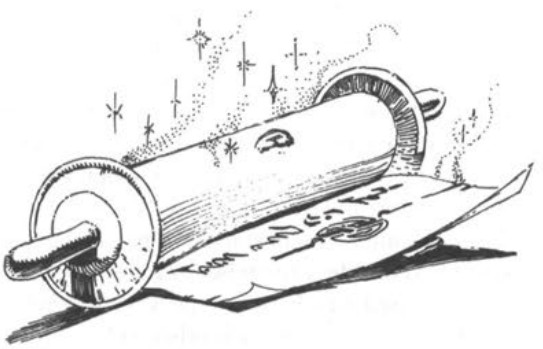
"Tell me, child," sputtered the dragon, growing more fearful by the minute. "Are all the natives of this land as powerful as your family?"

"Oh no," replied the child. "Most are much more powerful. There are men and women who tell my aunt and uncle and cousin what to do, and my aunt and uncle and cousin do whatever is asked, almost without question."

The dragon sent out a pitiable wail. "Curse me for coming to this horrid land! I wish I had never arrived! I wish that I could return to my home!"

"Hearing and obeying, with sweetness and joy," said the child, and he summoned a great wind, which blew the dragon back to the North.

Those who know our land know that the boy was really a djinni, the maiden was a marid, the old man was a dao, and the shepherdess was an efreeti. The men and women whose commands they heed are mere mortals who hold great wisdom. But the dragon did not know this. We can only assume that the dragon told his tale to other dragons, and if they were still hungry, they have made other arrangements, for to this day few dragons are spotted in the Land of Fate. From time to time, a lone dragon has appeared, seeking to test the power of the genies and the patience of the enlightened. But that is another tale for another evening. . . .



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Appendix B: Language

Visitors to the Land of Fate can hear a variety of languages being spoken. Midani, the language of all civilized and intelligent creatures, is by far the most prominent. Midani is Zakhara's "Common"—the language understood by all enlightened citizens and most unenlightened savages.

The Land of Fate also has five regional dialects. Natives of the Free Cities and Qudra speak with a sharp, precise rhythm, clipping the end off their sentences. The people of the Pearl Cities tend to speak with a melodious lilt. Inhabitants of the Pantheist League seem to trill their consonants at random. In eastern Zakhara, the speech of enlightened mortals has a nasal quality. Finally, the people of Huzuz and Hiyal—who believe they speak "true" Midani—often sound flat and mechanical compared to the natives of other regions. In addition to these quirks in rhythm and pronunciation, each dialect is distinguished by a smattering of unique words and expressions. With a little practice, however, anyone who speaks Midani can understand these regional tongues.

The Land of Fate also has a number of languages spoken by select groups:

- *Thieves' Cant*. More a lingo than a language, this choppy vernacular is spoken only by rogues (members of other classes can't understand it). Thieves' cant differs slightly from city to city. Player characters may not consider it a "known" language.
- *Racial Languages*. Zakhara lacks the alignment tongues found in many other worlds. It does, however, have a number of racial languages. The most prominent is Jannti, language of the genies. Whether Jannti is a single tongue with a number of dialects or four closely related elemental tongues is a matter for the sages to debate. In game terms, Jannti is one language (unless the DM decides otherwise).

Other racial languages include the ancestral tongues of many demihuman and civilized humanoid races: Elvish, Orcish, Dwarvish, Gnomish, Kobold, Ogre, and the like. Giantish and its dialects are also included. Like Jannti, Giantish is considered to be one language unless the DM decides otherwise. In general, racial languages are used only between speakers who belong to the same race and know each other well.

- *Monster Tongues*. Many of Zakhara's fell creatures and unenlightened races speak a language all their own. Examples include the tongue of the brutal yak-men and that of the rare and savage dragons.
- *Dead Tongues*. Through magic, sages have mastered some of Zakhara's forgotten languages—those no longer spoken by any living culture. The Dead Tongues include Noga, Kadari (from the Ruined Kingdoms), Drow (from lands west of the Pearl Cities), Affa (ancient language of the Isle of the Elephant), and Chun (a savage tongue written upon the ruins of the Haunted Lands).
- *Outlander Languages*. Several languages heard in Zakhara are "imports"—languages acquired from foreigners who trade with Zakharan merchants. Such "outlander tongues" include Thorasta (and its dead ancestor, Thorass) from the distant North, Shang-Chou from the far-flung East, and Akotan from the western trading outposts. A number of lesser languages are spoken throughout the islands of the Crowded Sea, but these have been increasingly replaced by Midani, the language of trade.

A Zakharan Phrase Guide

The following words and phrases are commonly heard throughout Zakhara:

Aywa (EYE wah)—Yes.

La (LAH)—No.

Es salam alekum (ess sah LAMB ah LEH koom)
—May peace be upon you. A general greeting.

Wa alekum es salam (wah ah LEH koom ess sah LAMB)
—May peace be upon you also. Response to the preceding.

Maas salama (mahs sah LAMB ah)—Go with peace.

Saheeda (sah EE da)—Greetings. Hello. Also goodbye.

Min *fadlak* (min FAHD lahk)—Please.

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Shukran (SHOOK rahn)—Thank you.

Afwan (AHF wahn)—You're welcome.

Kwayis (KWAY iss)—Good.

Mish Kwayis (mish KWAY iss)—Bad. ("Mish" negates whatever adjective it precedes.)

Hatar (hah TAR)—Danger.

Samm (SAHM)—Poison.

Ma (MAH)—Water.

My liver!
Ymmah! (Oh, mama!)
Ybbah! (Oh, papa!)
—Expressions of surprise.

May Fortune smile upon you.
May Fate guide thee to glory.
She is to a man as rain is to the desert.
—Compliments and good wishes.

You are the son of camel dung.
You are the son of a dog's water.
May you sleep with a restless heart and know a thousand nights of misery.
May a porcupine live in your trousers for a thousand days and die there for a thousand and one.
—Insults and ill wishes.

I conjure you to do it!
—I beseech or command you to do it.

The gods are merciful and Fate is all-knowing and I am but a humble slave before them.
—Said by a person receiving a compliment, as a matter of humility and a defense against the evil eye.

You are the life-stuff of my liver!
—You are very dear to my heart. Said of spouse or family.

I have a pain in my liver.
—I have a pain in my heart. You have caused me pain, shame, or sorrow.

My eyes, my eyes, my soul, my soul, the heart of my heart!
—You are my life. (Lovers' talk.)

You have given me an internal wound.
—You have pained my heart deeply. (Lovers' talk.)

He makes coffee from dawn until the dead of night.
—He is truly an outstanding host.

You have baked your bread; now you must eat it.
—You must live with the consequences of your actions. You've made your bed, now lie in it.

As the mind expands, the tongue grows quiet.
—Those who are wise do not chatter idly.

Though your companion may be honey, do not eat him completely.
—Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.

We opened our home to him, and he brought in his ass.
—He overstepped the bounds of good taste; he tested the limits of our hospitality.

Guests are like fish; after three days, both stink.
—Al-Badian proverb. Refers to the three-day limit for a guest's stay, a custom observed throughout Zakhara.

When it begins to rain, he takes shelter in the fountain.
—He leaps from the frying pan into the fire.

A man's head is like the desert; the hotter it gets, the emptier it appears.
—Foolish deeds are done in anger.

After the incense has come, the guest must go.
—A reference to the custom of passing a censer filled with frankincense following a coffee ceremony, after which the guests leave (or retire for the evening).

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Appendix C: The Zakharan Calendar

Al-Toril, the planet graced by Zakhara's presence, completes its journey around the sun every 365 days. Each year on the Zakharan calendar holds 12 months. Each month holds 30 days (roughly matching the orbit of the single moon). The Zakharan calendar also includes the High Holy Days—five days belonging to no month.

Months of the Year

Taraq:	January
Masta:	February
Magarib:	March
Gammam:	April
Mihla:	May
Qawafil:	June
Safa:	July
Dar:	August
Riyah:	September
Nau:	October
Rahat:	November
Saris:	December

High Holy Days

Ahad, Atnen, Salas, Arba, and Yasad—these are the five High Holy Days. They follow Qawafil and precede Safa each year (belonging to neither month). From dawn until dusk, the High Holy Days are a time of faith, meditation, and fasting. After the sun sets, they become a time of celebration and revelry. The greatest festivals take place in Huzuz.

Yasad is also called Ascension Day. Long ago, the First Caliph is said to have ascended the throne on this date. Each Grand Caliph who succeeded him also assumed rulership on Ascension Day. When the rulership remains unchanged, Yasad is distinguished by the Grand Caliph's public appearance and worship in the Golden Mosque. Many pilgrims flock to the mosque on this day to hear him speak.

Local Celebrations

Many cities in Zakhara have their own celebrations, commemorating local battles, miracles, or great leaders of the past. Gana, the City of Riches, holds a spectacular three-day festival each year to mark the end of the pearl season. Further, most cities observe the local ruler's birthday with feasts and entertainments; such celebrations usually start in the morning and last well into the evening. Citizens of Huzuz celebrate the Grand Caliph's birthday with parades and processions throughout the city. The current Grand Caliph's birthday falls on 27 Dar.



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