Journey across the breathtaking lands of the Crescent Empire from the courts of Iskandar to the dunes of the 8th Sea!

7th Sea
the Crescent Empire

In an ancient land of sand and sun
Those who burn brightest cast the longest shadows.

When the rightful empress returned home to reclaim her throne, the empire rejoiced. As the empire awakens to a new dawn, Anatoli merchants to Sarmion nobles work towards a new life, holding close the ideals which make the empire strong—family, honor and kindness.

However, progress is not made without pebbles in the sand. The dethroned sultan plots to recover his throne and his lover, controlled by an otherworldly force, seeks to aid him. Jinn have awoken hungering for the power over mortals they had many years ago...

This book contains material for ***7th Sea: Second Edition*** including new mechanics for Poetry Duels, Backgrounds, Advantages, Stories and Sorceries. It also includes five new Nations:

- **Anatol Ayh**, the seat of power and shining star of the Crescent Empire
- **Ashur**, an independent city state run by both Assassins and pacifists
- **Persis**, ruled by a cruel shah whose vendetta against the empress may tear his country apart
- **Sarmion**, a proud Nation rebuilding after the most recent Numanari attack
- **The 8th Sea**, a vast desert filled with proud tribes and ancient beasts

Will the empire fall under these threats? Join the fight for the empire's bright new destiny!

John Wick PRESENTS

ISBN 978-1-987916-80-5
90000
9 781987 916805

7TH SEA

the Crescent Empire

JOHN WICK PRESENTS A SOURCEBOOK FOR 7TH SEA: SECOND EDITION "THE CRESCENT EMPIRE"

LEAD DEVELOPER ELIZABETH CHAIPRADITKUL CREATIVE DIRECTOR LEONARD BALSERA SYSTEM LEAD MICHAEL CURRY

ADDITIONAL DESIGN BY JEREMY ELDER DAN WASZKIEWICZ NICOLE WINCHESTER BRETT ZEILER TARA ZUBER

WRITING BY DALE ANDRADE ADRIAN ARROYO ELIZABETH CHAIPRADITKUL FLOOR COERT ROBERT DEBROECK JAMES MENDEZ HODES BETSY ISAACSON SHOSHANA KESSOCK FELIPE REAL ANNE TOOLE

SENIOR ART DIRECTION BY MARISSA KELLY ART BY GIORGIO BARONI ZULKARNAEN HASAN BASRI CHARLIE CREBER SHEN FEI MATT FORSYTH EMILY MARSH JAMES MOSINGO DIEGO RODRIGUEZ MEAGAN TROTT

GEOGRAPHY DESIGN AND MAP BY MARK RICHARDSON GRAPHIC DESIGN AND LAYOUT BY THOMAS DEENY

EDITED BY MONTE LIN PROOFING BY SHELLEY HARLAN LANGUAGE SUPPORT BY MATTHUE ROTH

CREATIVE CONSULTATION BY NANCY KHALEK STAFF SUPPORT BY J. DERRICK KAPCHINSKY MARK DIAZ TRUMAN

7TH SEA: SECOND EDITION DEVELOPED BY MICHAEL CURRY ROB JUSTICE MARK DIAZ TRUMAN JOHN WICK

BASED ON 7TH SEA: FIRST EDITION BY JOHN WICK JENNIFER MAHR

A note from John...

I was at Gen Con in 2016 when two men approached me to sign their copy of the **7th Sea Core Rulebook**. They asked me to sign on page 155. Then they said, "Thank you for saying we can be heroes in your world." That meant a lot to me, and it meant a lot to everyone else working on **7th Sea** at the time. And it made me think a lot about this book you're holding right now.

For that particular endeavor, we called on the efforts of a diverse cast including Elizabeth Chaipraditkul as the lead, our outstanding regulars Shoshana Kessock and James Mendez Hodes, but also a great list of people who know what they're talking about when telling stories about this part of the world. Me, I'm pretty much stuck with *Lawrence of Arabia* and *The 13th Warrior*, so it was nice to have a little expertise instead of my limited experience.

This is a powerful book. And I'm proud of the work that went into it. And if you see yourself in these pages, let it be clear what the message is. "Yes, you can be a hero in our world."

—John Wick

Special thanks

First off, I want to say a huge thank you to John and this team at JWP for allowing me to develop another book for them. I actually don't have the words to describe how utterly wonderful this experience has been and how thankful I am for it. I also need to say a huge thank you to the team who worked with me on this book. You're amazing. Thank you!

When I was asked which books I'd be interested in developing for **7th Sea**, I lept at the chance to develop the Crescent Empire. This book is set in a region close to my heart. Having grown up in Southeast Asia, Western Asia has always been a subject of interest to me. It's a place far from home, but somehow familiar. The yearning to understand this region and the connection I had with it as a person of asian descent led me to visit it many times, to learn its stories, its history, and its magic.

It's heartbreaking the turmoil Western Asia is experiencing today and when I jumped at the chance to delve into its past, in my excitement, I'd almost forgotten its present reality. When developing this book we therefore decided to go with a message for hope for the Crescent Empire—the empress has returned, things are getting better despite hardship, the empire will survive.

Thank you so much for supporting our book! Enjoy!

—Elizabeth Chaipraditkul

7th Sea and all related marks are © and ™ 2017 John Wick Presents. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be duplicated without express permission from the Author. This is a work of fiction. All characters and places are creations of imagination.

Table of Contents

The Palace Insects 4
I. Introduction . . . 4
II. The Firefly . . . 5
III. The Cricket . . . 5
IV. The Moth . . . 6
V. The Fly . . . 6
VI. The Bee . . . 7
VII. The Serpent Attacks . . . 7

Introduction 8
Nations . . . 9
Geography . . . 10
Before We Go Further... . . . 10
Lexicon . . . 11

Chapter 1: The State of the Empire 13
A Matter of Family . . . 14
History . . . 17
Society . . . 23
Education . . . 25
Commerce . . . 26
Healthcare . . . 26
Painting . . . 28
Pottery . . . 28
Weaving . . . 29
Architecture . . . 29
Faith . . . 30
1000 Silken Cords: Government, Military and Law . . . 44
The Three Branches of the Imperial Government . . . 47
Legal System . . . 49
Civility and Honor . . . 50
Creatures of the Sands . . . 54
- Of Beasts and Fire . . . 54
- The Hierarchy of Spirits . . . 54
- Notable Creatures . . . 59

Chapter 2: Anatol Ayh 63
History . . . 65
The Royal Court . . . 66
The Reforms of Safiye . . . 68
Religion . . . 69
Culture and Customs . . . 70
Anatoli Names . . . 72
The Kurtanoğlu . . . 72
Sights of Anatol Ayh . . . 73
Current Relations . . . 75
Important People . . . 76

Chapter 3: Ashur 81
History . . . 83
Government . . . 84
Religion . . . 85
Ashurite Classes . . . 85
Culture and Customs . . . 88
Ashurite Names . . . 89
Places in Ashur . . . 90
Current Relations . . . 93
Important People . . . 94

Chapter 4: Persis 99
History . . . 102
Culture and Customs . . . 104
Persic Names . . . 106
Military . . . 106
Politics: The Persic Insurrection . . . 108
Places in Persis . . . 109
Current Relations . . . 111
Important People . . . 112

Chapter 5: Sarmion 117
History . . . 119
Government and Military . . . 121
Religion . . . 122
Culture and Customs . . . 123
Sarmion Names . . . 124
The Tribes of Sarmion . . . 125
Places in Sarmion . . . 126
Current Relations . . . 129
Important People . . . 130

Chapter 6: Tribes of the 8th Sea 135
Current Events . . . 137
History . . . 138
Government . . . 139
Religion . . . 140
Cultures and Customs . . . 141
Tribal Names . . . 142
Places in the 8th Sea . . . 145
Current Relations . . . 147
Important People . . . 148

Chapter 7: Adventuring in the Empire 153
Making a Crescent Empire Hero . . . 154
Secret Societies . . . 162
Sorcery . . . 166
- Art of the Second Prophet . . . 166
- Chozeh . . . 171
- Khahesh-ahura . . . 175
- Mithaq Alqadim . . . 180
- Nawaru . . . 183

Games Amdist the Moon and Stars . . . 186
- A New Empire . . . 186
- Family . . . 187
- Mysticism . . . 188
- To Be at Odds . . . 189

Mass Combat . . . 191
- How It Works . . . 191
- To Battle! . . . 192
- Other Heroes . . . 193
- Morale . . . 194
- The Underdog Bonus . . . 194
- Edges . . . 194

Kavita . . . 198
Kavita Styles . . . 201
Dueling in the Crescent Empire . . . 203
Dueling Styles . . . 204

Appendix 206

The Palace Insects

1. INTRODUCTION

In the name of al-Musawwir, graceful and
merciful, who set the world in motion, planned
the tides' rhythm and the moon's arc, and wrote rules
for the endless game making sages from fools:
A great sultan ruled an emirate of old.
His palace rose high above the sands, with gold
towers, silver accoutrements, marble walls,
and Persic rugs. Poems echoed through the halls
and music wafted from windows shaped like drawn swords.
Discreet servants waited on his every word
and wise advisors guided his every act.
His home was perfect, save for one vexing fact:
he had a pest problem. Little crawling beasts
marauding through his stately home never ceased
to anger him. He, though blessed with far more than
you or me, was unused to imperfection.
One day, the Grand Vizier devised a power-
ful sorcerous ritual which would scour
every insect from the palace. This news filled
all creatures on six legs, from the park's anthills
to the dragonflies circling the minarets,
with fear. When the insect community met
to discuss the problem, panic reigned. Where would
their families find shelter and food? How could
they abandon the only home they had known?
They had never doubted their place by the throne
before now. But as they argued and fretted,
one beetle flew above and coruscated
with royal farr. The firefly, whose light shines most
brightly in the deepest dark, addressed the host:

II. THE FIREFLY

"Take heart. Weak and small as we may be alone,
a brighter destiny awaits those who've sown
friendship's seeds. Look at me: I fly slowly, my
jaws fangless, my arms unclawed. Yet here, I
can be your lantern, drawing you together,
lighting our way forward toward forever.

In the Janissary Corps, there was a man
prone to injury. Sprains, fractured bones, colds and
headaches were his constant companions. Other
janissaries, wondering at their brother's
deployment at their side, asked their Çorbasi,
"Why place him in our section, when we can see
his ailments warrant a gentler position,
perhaps, that won't aggravate his condition."
The Çorbasi harrumphed. "He's not here for me,
nor for himself. No, he's here for you. You see
him march shoulder-to-shoulder with you and face
similar challenges, though he can't keep pace
with healthier troops, and recall the strength, health,
and privilege you take for granted yourself.
If he can be here, surely you can excel
and give the Crescent Empire's enemies hell."

One by one, each species' representative
stepped forth, wracked with doubt as to what help
they'd give
this effort. One by one, the firefly addressed
their worries. Many of them nevertheless
fled, fear breaking their resolve. In the end, five
tribes of insects stayed, hoping to stay alive
by joining forces with the firefly. But they
were not yet certain. Let's see how they were swayed.

III. THE CRICKET

The insects raptly, eagerly awaited
the cricket. Large and strong, he stridulated
to announce his arrival. "I believe in
this cause," said he, "but look, if we want to win,
we'll need to do better than this sorry lot.
Look at me: I'm a veteran who has fought
a hundred Cathayan crickets, and prevailed.
None leaps higher. None but I has never failed
at any endeavor. How shall—" The firefly
interrupted the cricket then: "What we try
to do now is harder than anything we've
attempted before. Cricket, can you conceive
of how it might feel to fail? If you stumble
now, will you fight on? Will your resolve crumble
in mortal adversity's face? We need friends
on whom, even in weakness, we can depend."

A summoner sought a new lamp in which to
imprison jinn. All the bazaar's merchants knew
she was rich. They displayed their best wares, offered
bargains, poured her tea. Yet none of them got her
attention. In the end, she bought the rusted
lamp a beggar caught coins in. Why? She trusted
that foes, if they invaded her sanctum,
would overlook it, and therefore its phantoms.
Who are we to say God will not do the same
when He joins the best souls with his holy name?

The cricket was silent, which never happens.
Then he doffed his fine coat and his vain pretense
of flawlessness. "Perhaps there's something I could
learn here: 'perfect' is the enemy of 'good.'"

IV. THE MOTH

The moth, with antennae like leaves in winter
and wings like feathery shadows that flicker,
spoke with a voice like silk. "While I am flattered
you have such faith in me, I am yet fettered
to my place beside the flame. I love the lamp
too deeply to leave its side and join your camp."
The firefly responded, "Did you, moth, suppose
that of all the lights that burn, the one that glows
over us here is the only one you'll love?
Did you forget the campfire, the stars above
scattered in the black, the half-moon's silver blade?
I carry a torch within me—if you strayed
from your pyre for just a moment, you might find
a thousand thousand loves await, even mine."

A certain girl stood graceful and statuesque
as cypress, with black hair tumbling down like musk,
and eyes that shone moonlight-silver through
her tears,
dark like shadows beneath skirts when she
was cheered.
Whenever a lovestruck youth came to woo her,
her father installed himself where the suitor
could see him, conspicuously cleaning his
musket or sharpening his big sagaris—
then panicked when she brought home an Immortal.
"My friend's just here to prove my point," she chortled.
"Bind love with a chain to control who takes it,
and I'll only bring home someone to break it."

The moth listened quietly, then sadly turned
away from the lantern, weeping as it burned.
And though the firefly took her foreleg with care,
a hundred insects whispered, "Not yet, not there."

V. THE FLY

The fly flew from the camel's side, banking and
spiraling in the air, and all clapped their hands
to watch her aerobatics. "I thought I'd say
goodbye before I left. I'm making my way
out into the desert, with the caravan.
I'll be okay on my own," she said, and fanned
her wings and halteres. Before she could depart,
the firefly said, "Will you be happy apart
from us? Although we don't always get along,
if you live and we do not, who then will throng
to greet you when you return from the desert,
to buy your wares, share jokes, swap poems we've heard?
This palace becomes one fewer oasis,
drained of water and familiar faces."

A Khemetic war charioteer purchased
the world's fastest horse. Despite her whip's urges,
though, she could never make him gallop as fast
as he'd gone when at his seller's paddock last.
Whether she treated him gently or roughly,
nothing could make him move quickly enough. She
nearly gave up on him—but then the Pharaoh
called her into the field. She took him there, though
not until they fought was his practice applied:
he ran only fast as the horse yoked beside.
She said, "Your speed made me forget the second-
fastest. You never showed me what you reckoned,
no matter how often I took you to task."
The horse stared at her and said, "You never asked."

The fly scoffed; but she stayed when the caravan
left, rubbing forelegs together. "What's the plan?"

VI. THE BEE

Laden with pollen, the bee buzzed her greeting.
She danced her introduction with four wings beating.
"All hail the Queen Bee—long may she reign," she said.
"I can help you fight the vizier, but the head
of my hive commands me above all others.
I would lay down my life for my dear mother."
The firefly sighed. "I'm not sure what to tell you.
Your loyalty is commendable, but do
you realize that just as you sacrifice for
your hive, your hive must sacrifice for all our
continued survival? Could you save our lives
with that dedication you give to your hive?"

For a long time, a wise sage lived in a hut
in Anatol Ayh, on a town's outskirts. What
riveted the crowds who came to hear this man
speak were his claims that trust in the divine plan
to provide, free of earthly cares and baggage,
positions one to thrive. Every day, the sage
rose, foraged for sustenance, spoke, and rested.
One week, though, he found none, hard as he quested.
Parched, starved, he cried, "God's providence ... is it
dead?"
He then saw a girl approach with food. She said,
"Each day I leave you food to find, but alack,
this week I had a business trip. But I'm back!"

The bee bowed her head. "Your proposal does seem
logical. For the duration of this scheme,
my sisters and I will follow your command."
Though, stingers ready, they joined the firefly's band,
he saw in their eyes that honey and the comb
would divert them after the end of this poem.

VII. THE SERPENT ATTACKS

The discussion lasted long into the night.
The Grand Vizier would cast her spell at first light,
but a viper's arrival in the sulṭān's
quarters preempted all of the insects' plans.
The moth saw him in the hanging lantern's glow,
as she flew to say goodbye to her once-beau.
"If we don't deserve to die like this, does he?"
said the firefly to the doubting assembly.
When the fly's buzz woke the sultan from his rest,
the vermin there struck disgust into his breast
until he saw what had started while he slept.

The viper struck in vain as the cricket leapt,
too nimble to catch. The other insects hurled
themselves against his scales until he uncurled
enough that the bee and her sisters could find
gaps between them to pierce with venomous spines.
In the aftermath, hundreds of insects lay
dead, sacrificed for a man who'd thought that they
didn't deserve life. The bees expired without
stingers. The moth's wings were scraps. The light was
out
in the firefly's abdomen. Cricket and fly
had lost legs to the snake's thrashing as it died.
As the Grand Vizier spoke her spell's final lines,
the Sulṭān burst into her sanctum. "My mind
is changed. Had you cast your dread spell earlier,
I would lie dead now—thank God it was deferred!"

Thenceforth, none upon the sulṭān's palace grounds
could do harm to any insect which they found.
No god, empire, or monarch can become great
without the help of a thousand smaller fates.

Introduction

Between Théah and Cathay lies a land of myth and might—the Crescent Empire. Enduring for centuries, it dates back to the time of the Vodacce invasion, to the conquering of Numa and Castille and finally to this day. Now, the empire is led by Safiye, the Returned Shadow of al-Musawwir on Terra, Empress of the Crescent Empire, Mani Sultan of Anatol Ayh.

Fragile relationships built upon familial ties inextricably bind the empire together. Internally, relationships are tense, cultures clash and each Nation seeks independence from the yoke of the empire's rule. Outwardly, the empire appears united, strong and indivisible. No matter the conflict within, each Nation stands for another if threatened from without. This makes the Crescent Empire strong. This makes the Crescent Empire unique.

For many Théans, it is a land of mystery. Beset by the whims of the powerful jinn, spirits who once freely roamed over Crescent lands, and bound by codes of honor so convoluted even a Gentle Knight would have trouble navigating them, the empire can seem a strange place to live. However, its citizens easily navigate the ebb and flow of civility. Honor, care, peace and family are all one in the same—something to be cherished, something to fight for.

Respect breeds respect. Life is poetry. Such is the way in the Crescent Empire.

Nations

In 1668 AV, four great Nations make up the Crescent Empire—Anatol Ayh, Persis, Sarmion and the 8th Sea. Within the empire's borders, there is also an independent city-state, Ashur.

Anatol Ayh (an-na-TOL AH) is the seat of power in the empire and has been since the Anatoli (person from Anatol Ayh) warrior princess Aaliyah of House Chaghri founded the Alwarith Dynasty. Now led by Empress Safiye (sa-FEE-ah), also the Anatoli Sultana, the Nation represents the height of Crescent society and a pinnacle of human achievement. At the forefront of artistic expression and based in the bedrock of military ingenuity, Anatol Ayh is the eye of the crescent, the heart of the moon.

Persis is Anatol Ayh's long standing rival within the empire. The largest Nation outside the 8th Sea, Persis tears itself apart by conflict. Led by Shah Jalil, and bound by the chains of an enshrined class system, the Persic people chafed under the previous Emperor Istani's rule. When Safiye took power, it turned the country on its head. Rebel groups splintered into disparate factions and war raged within the country's borders. Persis, the home of Crescent art and poetry, now threatens to break into pieces.

Sarmion (SAR-me-on) is a Nation of healers, scholars and warriors. After the most recent Numanari attack and the overnight disappearance of nine tribes within its borders, Sarmion struggles to rebuild. To make matters worse, King Josiah's death has left a power vacuum in the land, which the rightful Princess Batya refuses to fill. Within a coastal land of breathtaking vistas and rocky mountains, the Sarmion people endures and seeks to shape the empire so they might thrive.

The **Tribes of the 8th Sea** live in a desert all others deem uninhabitable. A land so dry, so vast, so impossibly hostile no person can live there longer than a week. The Tribes make their home here, as they have done for thousands of years dating back to the great Katab, the first people of the empire. Life here is harsh, but vibrant. Based in family ties and honor, no member of the 8th Sea is ever alone within the desert. The three main tribes of the 8th Sea—the al-Jamal, al-Hisan and al-Thi'b—pledge their loyalty to the empire, as long as the empire stays loyal to them of course.

Ashur stands alone. This city-state based around the Green Mountain houses the largest population of Orthodox Vaticines in the world. The independence this pacifist Nation enjoys seems strange if not for the presence of the Guardian of the First Garden, known to Théans as the Old Man on the Mountain. With his elite army of Assassins, he keeps his Nation safe from all threats without and within. Sharing much history with the empire, Ashur is not blind to international politics. However, there are many ways to wage war and the Ashurites know this better than most.

Geography

In the times of the ancient Katab people, the 8th Sea, a desert as vast and deadly as any sea on Terra, was a fertile land. The Katabic people lived in these beautiful lush lands with their tribes. They built colonies and settled cities. When the first great drought struck, many tribes left the land traveling north, east and west in search of water. So were the great nations of the Crescent Empire founded.

The 8th Sea eventually dried out and only a handful of tribes stayed in this desolate place. When maps were made of the region, explorers found that it formed a crescent shape, thus giving the region, and eventually the empire, its name. Today, the people who live in this region use the term *crescent* in a more poetic sense.

Anatol Ayh, the Nation farthest north, the seat of power of the empire, is the Eye of the Crescent. A land of lush countryside, rocky mountains and flowing rivers providing water which brings vitality to the lands. Nestled in the mountains to the southeast of Anatol Ayh is Ashur, the Crescent's Shadow. This tiny city-state is based around the Green Mountain, a lush, arable oasis surrounded by desolate mountains.

South of Anatol Ayh is the Western Star—Sarmion. A bright light of education and ceremony in the empire, many of the Sarmion people live near the coast or in the rocky mountainside covering this ancient land. Directly east of Sarmion, across the 8th Sea, is the Eastern Star—Persis. A hot, dry land, Persis can also see frigid winters. From mountains, to plains, to forested areas, this expansive Nation is the easternmost point of the empire.

Finally, there is the 8th Sea—the Crescent Moon. A vast dry desert, nary an oasis to be seen. Even at the highest mountain ranges within the Sea, the sands are searingly hot and the air so warm, the tribes who live in the desert call it Ifrit's Breath.

Before We Go Further...

The Crescent Empire obviously takes its inspiration from many of the varied cultures and nations from Central Asia and the Middle East, especially Turkey, Syria, Persia, and Arabia. Our aim here is to enrich the world of Terra by drawing on non-Western sources, and to include themes and imagery from these parts of the world into the broader discourse of fantasy roleplaying games.

That said, we're aware that capturing all the complexity and nuance of these places is impossible to do in a work of fiction, that we're drawing from sources that are potentially fraught with complexity and have a great deal of meaning to people in the present day. Yachidism and al-Dīn, for example, are based on Judaism and Islam respectively, in the same way that the Vaticine religion is based on Western Catholicism.

It is not our intention to present this book as a scholastic treatise on these real-world regions, their politics, their beliefs, and their tensions, nor does any of the commentary within reflect on any of the actual places. Where we have used real-world terminology in a fictional context, it's been with the goal of grounding that fictional content in a foundation of verisimilitude. We have tried to carry that out with utmost respect for the cultures and faiths involved, and under consultation from trusted sources.

Our hope is that this work comes across as a celebration of this part of the world and the richness it contains for the kind of mythic, heroic storytelling that we consider part and parcel to 7th Sea. This is the Crescent Empire as it sees itself, with a minimal presence of Thean influence, and we hope that opens up a whole new perspective for you to tell stories in this growing world.

The empress has returned and is in need of Heroes. It is up to you to see this great empire into a new dawn.

PRONUNCIATION AND SPELLING

Throughout this book you may notice words that are spelled and pronounced differently than they would be in Théah. Many Théan words, which originally came from the Crescent Empire, have been simplified by Théans to make them easier to pronounce. The people of the empire do not have this problem and therefore the words are kept in their original form in this book. Throughout the text, there are various guides in parentheses to help with the pronunciation of these words.

Lexicon

Language is important, especially within the empire. How a person chooses her words shows her relation to another and also her education. It would be hard to find a citizen of the empire who did not speak at least two languages—Katabic and her mother tongue. Below is a list of words that will help you to feel most like a citizen of the empire and that will be used frequently through this book.

Ahura: A Yasnavan word for angel. Considered jinn by many outside the Ahurayasna religion.
Ahurayasna: An ancient religion worshiping nature and the teachings of ahuras. Followers of this faith are known as Yasnavan.
Al-Dīn: The religion of the Second Prophet and his teachings. Followers of this faith are known as Dīnists.
Al-Musawwir: Theus, the Creator. Also known as Elohah.
Alwarithlı: The term a Crescent citizen uses to refer to himself, derived from the name of the Alwarith Dynasty that still rules the empire today. *The Alwarithlı are a strong and intelligent folk.*
Anasheed: A sect of Dīnists not recognized by the main religion.
Anatoli: The word for people from Anatol Ayh.
Ashurite: The word for people from Ashur.
Bey: A governor or mayor in the empire.
Chavra: Elite Sarmion warriors.
Daeva: A Yasnavan word for a devil or a demon. Considered jinn by many outside the Ahurayasna religion.
Dibre: The native language of Sarmion.
Elohah: The Orthodox and Yachidi name for Theus.
Iskandar: A man often considered the grandfather of the Empire. Also the name of the Anatoli capital.
Janissary: Elite warriors who protect the empire.
Jinn: Ancient spirits of unknown power who live in the Empire. Worshiped by some, feared by many.
Kaffee: A popular warm caffeinated drink.
Katab: The ancient civilization that pre-dated any Nation within the empire.
Katabic: The secondary language most learn in the empire.
Kavita: A poetry duel.
Khalil ibn Mustafa al-Thaji: Name of the Second Prophet.
Lyra: Currency of the Crescent Empire.
Metropolitan: A governor or mayor in Ashur.
Mosque: A Dīnist temple.
Mufti: The local religious advisor to a qadi.
Orthodox: The name for the Orthodox Vaticine religion, which believes that Yesu was the only Prophet.
Persic: The native language of Persis, can also refer to the people of Persis. *The Persic people speak Persic.*
Pleroma: Ashurite government officials.
Quabilat: The Katabic word for tribe.
Qadi: A local judge
Rebbe: Yachidi teacher of religion, much like a priest.
Shah: The ruler of Persis.
Souq: A Crescent market.
Sultan(a): The ruler of Anatol Ayh.
Walī: A tribal leader in the 8th Sea.
Yachidi: An ancient religion worshiping Theus, the Creator. People of this faith are also known as Yachidi.
Yesu: Name of the First Prophet.

Chapter 1

The State of the Empire

THE STATE OF THE EMPIRE

A Matter of Family

The palace was ablaze.

Istani's troops had set the harem on fire in hopes of distracting Safiye, but the plan backfired. Safiye would be the only person to take him down, so as her elite squad of Sarmion warriors, the Chavra, rushed to quell the inferno at the harem, she tracked down her brother. She had all but claimed her rightful place on the throne. The only thing left to deal with was Istani.

Safiye found him in her father's quarters, a place she remembered fondly from her youth. Frantically, her brother pressed various tiles around the bedpost, hoping to find one of the secret entrances rumored to have been built by their great grandfather into the palace. Her thoughts wandered back to their childhood. Many years ago the two were utterly close, inseparable. Istani was an inquisitive, sharp boy who hungered for knowledge, to explore all the mysteries the world had to offer. She cared for him as if he were her own child.

How did such a strong bond break? Drawn back to the palace by rumors of failings in the empire and an attempt on her life by one of Istani's agents, Safiye could not help but think—was this somehow her fault?

A resounding click of the trap door echoing through the chamber drew Safiye out of her memories and to the task at hand. "Istani!" Safiye roared pointing her sword at the man she raised.

Istani turned, his eyes dark, blood staining his robes. Safiye had so much she wished to say to her brother and so little time—for what he did to their people, Istani had to be brought to justice.

He would stand trial for what he had done to the empire and his abuse of the Second Prophet's legacy. Swallowing the rage in her throat, Safiye centered herself for what she must say next.

"I challenge you..."

The words hung in the air between the brother and sister, not spoken by Safiye, but Istani himself. The words uttered from his mouth cut deeper than any sword. So was the truth now between them, the ashes of the love they held once for one another had solidified into death.

"...to a race," Istani said, a smile stretching across his face. The vise on Safiye's heart eased slightly, dread replaced with confusion. He had invoked an obscure, little known law of the empire—if you could beat your executioner to the gates of the palace, your life would be spared. The Crescent way was everything Safiye fought for. The idea that no one was above the law. While her brother's request was ridiculous, it was his to make, and hers to respect.

As the two siblings walked to the courtyard, both demanded their guards stay at arm's length. This would be an equal race, brother against sister; no one was to interfere. Rounding the corner to the main courtyard, Safiye's heart sunk deeper into her stomach. People ran panicked to the main gates, fire spread from building to building and a sliver of doubt crept into her mind.

Turning to face Istani, she swallowed that feeling and prepared for the race. Princess Batya of Sarmion, her most trusted friend and warrior, officiated the race. A group of witnesses from either side formed and at Batya's mark, the siblings ran.

As a boy, Istani had always been quicker than Safiye. Small and nimble, his curious mind got him into all sorts of trouble before she could catch up to stop him. But things had changed. The small, nimble boy was now a lanky handsome man, and she had many years of training under her belt.

Vaulting over a fountain and tumbling gracefully to the ground, Safiye closed the distance between her and her brother. Focused on her task at hand, she reached out to grab him, but as she did her legs faltered. Istani turned to reveal a small servant boy in his arms, someone he had grabbed while she navigated the fountain. A small, keen dagger against the young boy's throat glinted in the light of the burning palace.

"Why do you stop, sister?" Istani spat. "Secession demands blood. You will not have to defeat only me, but all our siblings if you truly want to secure your place on the throne. Why scare for one small boy?"

"I will not see him harmed. I refuse to follow in your bloody footsteps. Our family deserves better. The empire deserves better. Let go of the boy and we will finish our race." Istani stared at his sister and then burst into laughter, the young boy still clutched to his chest, tears streaming down his face.

Her brother's laughter lit a fire in Safiye's belly. A young boy's life hung in the balance and he had the gall to laugh? Safiye drew her sword. "Face me Istani! Make the honorable choice, let us finish this."

Istani laughed. "Hypocrite! You speak of honor. I am your brother yet you draw your sword to murder me, just as I tried to murder you. We are cut from the same cloth. Prove you are just like me." The sultan kneeled behind the young boy, stretching his arms out east to west. "Run us both through and you may have your throne."

The words Istani hissed at her hung in the air. All around the siblings, chaos reigned, but between the two was a near impenetrable wall of silence and anger. Safiye's sword fell to the ground.

"No Istani, we are not the same. The boy is innocent and I will not see him harmed."

Istani's eyes went wide and his face twisted, his eyes darkened. Screaming in rage, he flung the servant at Safiye. The momentum of the young boy hitting her forced Safiye to take a few steps back. Embracing the child, she allowed herself the briefest moment of relief, one soul saved from Istani's mania.

Istani slipped through the palace gates.

The Empire had a new Empress.

Old and New

The Empress Safiye's Chavra troops chased Istani and his loyal followers out of Iskandar, through Anatol Ayh, and into the 8th Sea—a desert so vast it had to be named after its watery brothers. The empress' troops were relentless and Istani's forces were skilled. A week into the chase within the 8th Sea, Safiye's troops had no food or water. Upon leaving the Eye of the Crescent, Istani and his followers were in worse shape than the empress' troops—there was no way Istani could survive in the 8th Sea.

Nothing survives the 8th Sea.

So, the empress' troops returned to Iskandar and Safiye's coronation took place. The people rejoiced as the true voice of al-Musawwir (Theus) took the throne.

Numanari Attack

However, not all was right in the empire. The Nation of Sarmion supported Safiye's coup. They had sent their best Chavra warriors, led by Princess Batya, to find Safiye after the Numanari pillaged their land. The Numanari sought retribution for years of Crescent occupation, and Sarmion, known widely as a Nation of scholars and healers, seemed the best place to start. Istani did nothing to help Sarmion, leaving the land to fend for itself, its king poisoned and its holy sites pillaged.

Upon securing the palace, Safiye sent half of her newly acquired army, and all of her Chavra guard, to help Sarmion. Taking the best ships in the fleet, Safiye hoped the troops would arrive in two day's time on the Sarmion coast. Equally, she sent her fastest riders with chests of treasure to the Tribes of the 8th Sea to secure their allegiance and bid them to reinforce her troops with an attack from the east.

The winds whipped violently across the Numanari Approach, and what should have quickly taken the troops to Sarmion turned into a terrible storm. Great wings of lightning stretched across the sky as the ships rocked violently, the water so tumultuous that many feared the ships capsizing.

There was nothing the troops could do, save for the few Janissaries trained in the Art of the Second Prophet who dared climb their ship's rigging. Wielding ancient weapons of power, they reflected the lightning bolts back at the storm as if it were a great jinn. The seas frothed and boiled. As the Janissaries fought the storm back, creatures rose from the depths…

Five days later, battered, bruised, triumphant—Safiye's troops made it to the Sarmion coast.

Yet, the troops did not meet battle, but a Nation in mourning. The walls of Salemoria crumbled, burnt. A soft cry could be heard echoing from every living soul across the country. Warriors lay in the street, alive, but with terribly deformed bodies from their abuse of magic. The Quabilat al-Hisan, warriors of the 8th Sea who had helped in the battle, rode through the streets attempting to reunite family members and bring broken soldiers to medical care.

Sarmion had won the day, but at a terrible cost. The Crescent Empire once again stood secure.

Five Fingers, One Fist

In the wake of such a terrible loss, Safiye set about making sure this would never again happen in her empire. Istani had been a tyrannical ruler and forgotten what made the empire truly great—unity. And if the empire was to have unity, every person must be equal.

As her first official act, Empress Safiye set out three decrees.

Yasaklama (ya-ZAAK-la-ma). Rulers of the Crescent Empire are no longer required to murder their siblings to take the throne.

Kaldırma (cal-DUR-ma). Sorcerers are no longer expected to register with the Crescent Empire as required by her brother.

Değiştirme (dae-sh-TIR-mae). There is no class system in the Crescent Empire.

Safiye's reforms were wildly popular among the general populace, but as with all laws that serve equality rather than affluence, they angered the wealthier members of Crescent society. The largest opposition to Safiye's reforms came from Shah Jalil of Persis.

Persis and Anatol Ayh have a long bloody history with one another. Constantly vying for control of the empire, the rivalry dates back to when the great Crescent Moon was no more than a handful of tribes. To make matters worse, Jalil and Istani were lovers, and Istani's presumed death infuriated the shah.

To ease the pain of Persic transition into the new empire, the empress gave the shah a decade to see her decrees enacted. Withdrawing Imperial troops from Persic borders, Safiye caused the rebel factions in Persis to turn in on themselves. Where they once opposed the empire's rule, many now only opposed the shah. To this day Persis fights a war within its own borders.

Life within the 8th Sea went on much as it always had. Just after the empress came into power, the al-Thi'b Tribe found themselves displaced from their lands by a great serpent named Saghira. As the al-Thi'b struggle to find new lands, tensions between the tribes continue to rise. Raqmu, a neutral city for all Tribes, is rife with rumors that someone or *something* conspires to set the tribal families against one another. Many say jinn call upon the creatures of the sand, preparing to strike against humanity who has all but forgotten them. Others whisper of the machinations of Istani, who somehow might have survived the 8th Sea by way of a dark pact with the jinn.

Ashur has stood apart from much of the conflict within the Crescent Empire. A lone city-state who has claimed independence from the Crescent throne since the ninth century, it mainly claimed neutrality in the Numanari attack. While the Guardian of the First Garden would never let the Numanari breach his borders, he was complacent when Sarmion suffered invasion.

However, Ashur did send subsequent aid into Sarmion after the final battle caused the Numanari to flee. Orthodox caravans loaded with fruits and vegetables made their way into the war-torn lands providing much needed relief to the destroyed towns and cities.

When Empress Safiye sent her first envoy to the Guardian of the First Garden and the Ashur Pleroma (government) loaded with gifts of thanks, the gifts were returned with a simple message, one that all who live in Crescent lands know well, "Five fingers, one fist."

History

The Crescent Empire did not begin as a united territory or even a group of friendly Nations. Instead, it existed as a group of countries long immersed in their own internal struggles, bound by ancient histories going back before recorded time. Each country has tales of a great civilization existing long before any of their Nations, a kingdom called Katab that spanned across the waters between the countries and united all people in an advanced, powerful civilization.

In those legendary days, powerful spirits known as jinn roamed the world and the people practiced magic as they pleased, building awe-inspiring monoliths that stand as evidence of their power and majesty into the modern era. These people were known as the Katabi (singular Katab) founders of the Katabic language, one of the oldest known written and spoken languages still used today.

Scholars across the Crescent Empire have dedicated their lives to investigating the mysterious Katabic writing inscribed in the structures, statues and catacombs found everywhere from Persis to Sarmion and as far as deep into the 8th Sea. Theories abound as to what ended the glorious empire, but its downfall led to the fertile ground from which the Crescent Empire blossomed.

Before the Crescent Empire could come into existence, however, there needed to be a period of darkness. The collapse of Katab plunged the region into chaos. No records exist cataloguing this time, as each region fell into tribal isolation. Each land was savagely raided by countries from across the water in Ifri, while the great Old Empire of Numa sailed across the sea in the height of their power to pillage and plunder. And if the Numanari weren't bad enough, each kingdom's leadership struck out against its neighbors.

Nomadic horse tribes rode down from Anatol Ayh to subdue and conquer Persis, while raiders from the 8th Sea attacked the borders of the hidden gem of Ashur. In Sarmion, warring tribes dedicated to ancient spirits turned the ground red until they established peace. The years of infighting among the Nations caused not only bloodshed, but a sharing of cultures, blending Anatol Ayh with Persis, Sarmion with the 8th Sea and Ashur and back again.

The Haxāmanišiya Empire

The blending of cultures continued with the arrival of Shah Korvash the Great of Persis and the establishment of the great Haxāmanišiya (ah-KHA-ma-ni-SHI-ya) Empire. The shah was raised in poverty, hidden from his grandfather the King of Nidian who sought to kill him. A prophecy warned the old king his grandson would rise up to supplant him, and so it came to pass.

Shah Korvash brought first the kingdom of Nidian, in what is now southern Persis, under his control, slaying his own grandfather in the process, and then annexed territory around the smaller Nation. With the power of his ten thousand soldiers, known to the Numanari who feared them as Athanatoi, or "Immortals," Korvash raised the mighty Haxāmanišiya Empire whose territory spanned into Khemet in northern Ifri, north into Numa and even into Sarmatia and Ussura in Théah. Whereas once Anatol Ayh raided Persis, they quailed beside the power of the newly raised Haxāmanišiya Empire as it rose into its golden age.

The Coming of Iskander the Great

It took generations, but the Haxāmanišiya Empire finally fell to Iskander the Great of Malcedon. The tiny kingdom of Malcedon was an island Nation halfway between the Old Empire of Numa and the region that would become the Crescent Empire. A client Nation of the Old Empire, Malcedon bent a knee as a conquered people, waiting for their chance for freedom.

When King Phillypus I married Princess Olystina, a half-Numanari, half-Khemet member of Khemet's royal family, King Phillypus made himself a target of the Old Empire's ire. Assassinated in his own bed by Numanari spies, he died in the arms of his young son, Iskander. The murder proved a terrible choice, as it only galvanized the Malcedonians against the Old Empire, and they rallied behind their young prince.

Olystina proclaimed Iskander the progeny of two dynasties both blessed by the blood of the gods, and many believed it to be true, as history records him having almost uncanny instincts in battle. Trained as a warrior as well as a philosopher, Iskander, a terrifying tactician, led his troops on horseback from the front. He inspired his people to throw off the yoke

of imperial rule while the Numanari still fought the Haxāmanišiya Empire. While the empire struggled to maintain control over its various territories, Iskander united forces from his mother's Khemet and the ferocious Malcedonian riders across both Numanari and Haxāmanišiya territory, cutting a bloody swath into history.

Iskander's actions have left a lasting impact on the region. It was Iskander who broke Persic control over Anatol Ayh and freed their people from Haxāmanišiya rule. In thanks, the House of Chaghri named their capital after him, creating the beautiful city of Iskandar, which serves as the heart of the Crescent Empire to this day. Iskander even traveled into Sarmion, thinking of invading the smaller country. But when he rode into Sarmion, they greeted him as a friend instead of conqueror and guided him to the gates of Salemoria. There, the High Priest and prophet Yermeya offered a sacred white bull as a gift. Iskander accepted the bull, the ancient symbol of Malcedon, with gratitude, and so charmed was he that he declared Sarmion friend to his newly growing empire. Sarmion was spared invasion and instead prospered under Iskander's protection from their ancient enemy, the Numanari.

Iskander finally conquered the failing Haxāmanišiya Empire in the fifth century. The collapse led to the Numanari snatching up all lost territory from the now fallen Persis, and Iskander took much of the rest, creating an empire of his own that might have rivaled any seen on earth. But Iskander's ambitions outstripped his capability. He never stopped to settle any area, but only to install client governors behind him in his restless travels east.

Iskander even reached the western limits of Cathay, where he became enamored with the culture and religion there. It was there that he died, infected with a mysterious fever. He left behind no heir to inherit his throne and though his mother took control briefly, the Old Empire of Numa enacted swift vengeance. They ransacked Malcedon and carried proud Olystina off in chains to dance as their prisoner in Numa. Numanari sorcerers called down a terrible curse and drowned the island until only its highest peaks lay above water, its ruins a testament to the destruction brought by Iskander's hubris.

The First Prophet

After the fall of both Iskander's growing empire and the Haxāmanišiya Empire, Numa once more invaded the kingdoms. The war that followed spread far across the region, with the most devastation landing on Sarmion's shores. The Numanari carried many into slavery back to their empire in an attempt to shore up their crumbling infrastructure. It was there, among the slaves from Sarmion, that a young Yachidi teacher named Yesu became the legendary First Prophet.

Though stories talk about his teachings and powerful spiritual message, the mark he left on history across the world was the most pronounced in Ashur, where history records he led his followers to establish a new land. The word of the First Prophet spread across the recovering Persis, Anatol Ayh and made a small impact on Sarmion and the 8th Sea. But it wasn't until rise of the Second Prophet, Khalil ibn Mustafa around the seventh century in Anatol Ayh that the true friction between Nations in the region began.

The Second Prophet

The Second Prophet Khalil ibn Mustafa al-Thaji was a legendary wanderer, a holy man exiled from his own home in the tiny state of Thaj after he incurred the jealous wrath of the sorcerous Princess Shahnaz. Tested everywhere he went by sorcerers sent by Shahnaz, the Prophet could not be destroyed. Instead, his preachings influenced people from Ifri to Théah and all across the region. When Khalil finally returned to his home of Thaj where he was killed by the Princess Shahnaz, he had hundreds of devotees with him and thousands more across the world following his teachings of humble supplication to al-Musawwir.

The impact of the Second Prophet on the region cannot be understated. Khalil sheltered for a time in Anatol Ayh, earning a dedicated Nation of followers. The Caliphate of Anatol Ayh formed in the wake of the Second Prophet's death, and when local leaders in Persis began outlawing the practice of al-Dīn as a disruption of the natural order of their country, the caliphate invaded to protect Persic Dīnists. The subsequent occupation of Persis converted many Persic people to al-Dīn, setting the scene for a period of battle between Persis and Anatol Ayh.

Rise of the Empire

Far north in Théah, Vodacce had become the center for the growing Vaticine Church, which saw itself as the religious inheritors of the Prophets on Terra. The Prophet's influence had long since transformed the Théan landscape, with the Nations of Castille and Vodacce especially swayed under the rising religious movement. The Second Prophet had united Nations from Ifri to Théah with his practice, giving Vodacce its first look at the Nations to the south.

While they had little interest in Anatoli-occupied Ashur, as it was being ravaged by Numanari attacks, and saw little of value in the inhospitable 8th Sea, they saw the warring Nations of Persis and Anatol Ayh as ripe for the taking. The Vodacce leadership took the perfect chance to shore up their flagging economy and invaded the region. Like the Numanari before them, they saw peaceful Sarmion as a perfect jumping-off point from which to invade the neighboring countries, and attempted to capture Sarmion's ports and its capital of Salemoria. But by that time, Sarmion had survived a long history of Numanari invasions and was not so easily conquered.

Led by the powerful general Yedha with his Maccabe warriors, the Sarmions held out against the Vodacce, even as the invaders launched attacks against Persis and Anatol Ayh. Emissaries from Sarmion sent by Yedha's lover, King Ahaz, reached out to the leadership of Persis and Anatol Ayh and asked for aid from both countries. This attack on Sarmion, their mutual ally, united the warring shah of Persis and the caliph in Anatol Ayh against Vodacce. Together, the three Nations called upon Persis' allies in the 8th Sea to help repel the invaders, and relied on the aid of the Anatoli client-country Ashur to provide much needed supplies to their war effort. Led by the Caliphate of Anatol Ayh, the new allied Nations attacked Vodacce forces and drove them from their shores.

When the dust settled, the weary Nations gathered their leaders and diplomats in the beautiful city of Iskandar to discuss the future. History says on the third night of feasting that all the leaders shared a prophetic dream of a united future, bathed in the light of al-Musawwir's protection. When the leaders awakened in the early morning hours, they found the night had stretched longer than normal and the only light was given by the fingernail-thin crescent moon above. Seeing this as a blessing by the Second Prophet, the leaders declared they together would become a united Empire, dedicated to mutual protection, respect and growth. Though the new empire would be primarily Dīnist, other Nations were given freedom to practice as they wished. This freedom engendered the loyalty of the Sarmions forever, and the Yachidi in particular, who lent their elite troops, the Chavra, to the newly establishing leadership of the empire for protection.

The new empire of course needed leadership. During that darkened night, the discussion raged over who would lead. In the end, the new Caliph, Aaliyah, daughter of Ilkin of House Chaghri, leader of so many battles against the Vodacce, became inheritor of the newly created throne of the Empire of the Crescent Moon.

She took husbands (and a wife) from each of the other Nations, including Prince Johathan of Sarmion, Prince Sayed of Persis, the warrior princess Anaya from the 8th Sea Tribe of the Camel, Sibar of the Wolf tribe and Isham of the Horse. Together, the new family pledged to produce a line of leaders of the united blood of each Nation, with no one sure who truly sired Aaliyah's heir.

The line of the royal empire was born of the caliphate and the power of a single family, brought together to establish something bigger than themselves. They established their home in Iskandar, and Aaliyah bore the royal line of the first rulers of the Crescent Empire. In an effort to symbolize the unity of all the Nations into a new and powerful line, they called the ruling dynasty the Alwarith, and soon the people of the empire became known as the Alwarithlı.

The Invasion of Numa and Castille

The newly created empire was almost immediately tested by the crumbling Numanari Empire. The Numanari still held large swathes of various villages on the coasts of the 8th Sea. In their first act as a major power, the Nations of the empire rose against Numa and drove them first from the 8th Sea's shores and went on the attack. Decimating the defenses of the Numanari, the new Crescent Empire had conquered their ancient enemy.

Numa became a client of the Crescent Empire, its united city-states broken and its land stripped of ancient treasures. The retribution visited on the Numanari was vicious, vengeful for the damage done to their Nations. The empire soon found itself in need of continued resources to maintain its hold on Numa and sought to garner more land westward. It set its sights on Castille, the fertile land across the sea. Having so cowed Vodacce during its invasion, the Crescent Empire saw no trouble in taking the Castillians to task. Soon, Castillians lived under the rule of the empire.

The Empress Aaliyah presided over the invasion into her old age, though history says she showed concern over her people's dedication to warfare instead of internal growth and spiritual gain. When her son Darius, first child of the great marriage, took the throne upon her death, the emperor understood each country within the empire must be given rein to grow on its own. He halted continued expansion and attempted to rule his conquered Nations more gently.

The Third Prophet

The controversial Third Prophet rose to power in the twelfth century during a tumultuous time for the Crescent Empire. The Khazari rode down into Persis from the north in 1221 and demolished the previous leadership of the country. Led by the Iron Khan, Khitai Khan, they established a new monarchy in the land before the other Nations could respond. The powerful northern Khazari Empire stretched far into the east and the Crescent Empire, newer and less powerful, could not challenge its might in defense of Persis. The Nation of Persis would not have independence until the warrior-poet Khaṭā'ī (KUH-tah-ee) wrested his Nation away from the Khazari Empire in 1507.

NUMA AND THE CRESCENT EMPIRE

Numa and the Crescent Empire have a long, complicated history with one another. Numa has attacked and invaded Sarmion and the empire numerous times throughout the centuries. The empire often retaliated in order to protect what it had. This ultimately resulted in the Crescent Empire occupying Numa for a large part of recent history. Now, these two great powers must decide if they will forget the scars of the past or if they wish to open old wounds.

It is into this time of destabilization that the Third Prophet appeared. The ferocious nobleman from the north was a powerful reformer, unwilling to accept variations in belief or the practice of magic anywhere within the faith. He saw the practice of al-Dīn as an affront to the Vaticine Church, and their actions in holding Castille an example of both the weakness of Vodacce control of the Vaticine Church and of the wickedness of the Crescent Empire. All followers of Theus in the Crescent Empire, from the Yachidi to the Dīnists and the Orthodox saw the coming of this new leader as a troubling sign in the Vaticine Church and sought to distance themselves from the new shift in its belief.

Many called the Third Prophet no prophet at all, but a usurper of the title, citing his dedication to violent upheaval as an example of an unholy departure from the peaceful messages of the previous Prophets. Their condemnation did nothing to stop the Third Prophet, however, who led a fiery reform of the Vaticine Church and called upon the faithful to liberate Castille from the Crescent Empire.

Under the guidance of the Third Prophet, the warriors of the Vaticine Church clashed with the Crescent Empire, driving them from Théah's shores and taking the fight to the sea. Facing the real possibility of an invasion by Castillian forces and in the scramble to prepare, the empire lost even further control of Numa. At the last moment, the Tribal leaders of the 8th Sea called for a halt of hostilities. The empire, the family, had taken too many losses and would not survive. So, the Tribes pulled their support from the war effort forcing the Alwarithlı to step back in the face of guaranteed loss without some of its fiercest warriors. Consolidating its power, the

empire focused on protecting its borders, from the Numanari lands it had left to the edges of the 8th Sea.

The Crescent Empire under Emperor Nasir ceded Castille back to its rightful rulers, and watched as the Third Prophet transferred the Church from Vodacce to Castille, whose people embraced the church and fanaticism. Yet the Crescent Empire did not leave the Third Prophet alone without a final parting gift. Seeing the deadly consequences of the Third Prophet's righteous zeal, the emperor dispatched one last message to him in the form of Ashurite Assassins meant to take the Prophet's life. Whether they did or not, no one can be sure, but none of the Assassins returned alive and shortly thereafter, the Third Prophet disappeared.

Reunification

After the warrior-poet Khaṭāʾī pushed the Khazari out of Persis, the Nation declared war on Anatol Ayh only a few years later, demanding that Persis become the seat of power for the empire. The vicious infighting continued for decades until Sultana Soraya of House Chaghri of Anatol Ayh suggested a marriage between herself and Shah Farhad of Persis upon his ascension to the throne. The sultana had already proven herself blessed by the leadership of both Anatol Ayh and the supporters of a peaceful Persis. Yet, many Anatoli were still embittered by Persis' perceived "betrayal" when Khaṭāʾī took the throne. The sultana's Imperial Divan demanded the young Farhad be tested before he could wed the sultana.

Farhad, desperate for peace after such a long period of war, embraced the challenge and toured the empire to accomplish a series of one hundred tests, set down by the Divan. Secretly, the sultana, so impressed by the young prince, placed a body double on the throne and rode out to help him achieve his goals. The two became lovers and by the time they completed the trials, the couple rode back into the imperial court, prepared to lead their empire into the future together.

Division, Invasion and Modern Day

Generations after the unification of the thrones of Anatol Ayh and the empire at large, trouble once again brewed across the Crescent Empire. Emperor Shareef sat the throne in Iskandar and was long since considered a fair and wise emperor. His only failing was the loss of the empire's territories in Numa, ceded back to its people after the endeavor proved too costly to continue.

The loss haunted the emperor, who wished to hand a united and powerful Nation to his daughter and heir, Safiye. He groomed the beloved princess to be the perfect future ruler, surrounded by emissaries from each of the Nations, including a best friend in Princess Batya of Sarmion. The old emperor suggested his daughter tour the various lands of her empire, and she departed on a progress that kept her away from the palace for nearly a decade.

No one is certain if the old emperor died of natural causes or if he was murdered, but rumors say Istani was not willing to wait for the old man to succumb. Istani seized the throne in place of his sister and took his beloved Shah Jalil, leader of Persis, as his lover and consort. Shah Jalil used the power of the imperial throne to declare martial law across Persis in 1648. Only a year later, the two signed into law the Magician Registry of 1649, which pushed the natural distrust of magic users by Dīnist-controlled states to a whole new level. The law required a spell caster to divulge his identity to the state, in an attempt to root out those who worshipped evil spirits and demons. That was the surface excuse, of course. In reality, Emperor Istani sought to limit magic so he might practice his own brand of demon-binding in secret, unfettered and unopposed.

Society

Alwarithlı culture is complex and beautiful. Structured around honor, family and art, the concept of living "a good life" is not lost on the people of the Crescent Empire. A woman who can say she brought honor to her family, ate her fill, sung the songs of those who went before her and reveled in the mysteries of al-Dīn has lived a good life indeed. While each Alwarithlı Nation is unique, they share a few commonalities: celebration, education, commerce and health.

Four Weeks of Celebration

The industrious people of the Crescent Empire till their fields, tend cattle and attend souqs bustling with commerce, but four weeks every year are universally reserved for celebration and rest as decreed by the throne. Each holiday week falls in a seasonal equinox or solstice.

Spring

During the spring celebration, people decorate houses with the first branches of fresh green leaves and blossom. Families set a plate or pot filled with verdant sprouts on the dinner table as a centerpiece. On the last day of the holiday, everyone gets together with baskets chock-full of food and drinks to picnic in squares, meadows or parks under the tentative rays of the new spring sun.

An Ashurite celebrates the discovery of his verdant land as well as the burial of Yesu therein. Because the fig tree has a central role in the story about Yesu and the first settlers of Ashur, people on this holiday traditionally plant a fig as done by the settlers many years ago. Ashurites all over bake and eat round fig cakes and set out large platters of fresh and dried figs in houses as a symbolic sweet treat.

Summer

On the summer solstice, people put large tubs of water outside, splash each other and throw buckets or cups full of water at each other. This joyful water feast inevitably draws the attention of the mischievous periân. They secretly mingle amongst the revelers and make sure to throw a splash of water here and there themselves. At day's end, they bless those worthy so they suffer no drought until the summer's end.

In this same week, a Yachidi celebrates her covenant with Theus. She studies the rituals and practices given to her by the Creator. All Yachidi know these practices by heart, but also know not to take them for granted. One way to stimulate insight is for groups to come together and pick a law from the Tariyag (the Yachidi list of 613 holy laws) to discuss. During the feast, the Yachidi traditionally eat no meat and use an abundance of dairy to prepare food like rice pudding or cheese filled pastries.

Autumn

After hard work comes the reward of a new harvest stocking the larders of the Crescent Empire. The autumn holiday is all about sharing these riches. People give each other baskets of food, and a wealthy person gives food and also his old summer clothes to the poor.

Over time it has become an Anatoli and Persic tradition to leave on pilgrimage on the last day of the autumn holiday. Families prepare for a pilgrimage the year before so they can weave the special pilgrim's robes. The robes have a unique and colorful geometrical theme for each family that repeats differently for each family member. The pilgrim receives gifts of food from family and friends to take along the journey. A crowd follows him to the edge of the town or village singing songs and waving paper flags, seeing him off.

Winter

Winter finds families together at the table close to the light of fires and oil lamps, enjoying opulent meals together. On the night of the winter solstice, people come together to watch the magnificent bonfire lit for the Yasnavan fire ceremony. Smaller fires are lit for one courageous enough to jump over them to be purified or to show off her steely nerves to friends.

Although the Tribes of the 8th Sea observe the same Yasnavan rites, their own Feast of Sacrifice has become interwoven with them. Each Tribe raises a special herd, called the Glorious Herd, sacrificed to Gōčihr on the morning after the winter solstice. After the fire goes out, the goats are placed in the ashes of the bonfire, and a person remains to witness the acceptance of the sacrifice. This person may never speak of what she saw but can only tell the Tribes "yay" or "nay" so they know if the sacrifice was accepted.

Kaffee: Special Pots for a Special Drink

From the kitchens of the Imperial palace to the campsites of the 8th Sea, there is one household item found in every home, the cherished kaffee pot. In Persis and the 8th Sea, the pot looks like an hourglass with an elegant crescent shaped beak, but in Anatol Ayh, Sarmion and Ashur, these pots resemble small pans with long delicate handles. Its beautiful design and high quality betray the importance of this simple object; cheaply made kaffee pots simply do not exist in the Crescent Empire.

The pot is important because of the content. People drink kaffee at almost every social gathering: weddings, funerals, births, birthdays and holidays. Joyous occasions require a very sweet kaffee but for somber events the bitter unsweetened version is preferred. Offering the drink to a guest implies that the hostess trusts and welcomes the person, and it is bad form to refuse a cup of kaffee. Not offering kaffee to visitors sends a clear message about future interactions when the rules of hospitality no longer apply.

Grounds for Caution

Kaffee has one much debated quality. According to some, the grounds left in a cup can reveal a glimpse of the drinker's future. To read kaffee grounds, the cup has to be flipped upside down on a saucer after drinking so the grounds run down the sides, creating a pattern. A topic must be decided on before drinking the cup and can be strengthened by placing a symbolic object on top of the cup as the grounds settle.

Only a skilled kaffee reader can discern the meaning from the residue. The ability is not rare and most people have at least one friend or family member who claims he can read kaffee grounds. Skeptics often claim these perdictions are merely self-fulfilling prophesies, but there have been some famous readings contradicting this. Coincidence? Maybe, but most Crescents have some deference for the predictions; better to be safe than sorry.

Every Day Kaffee

For her every-day kaffee needs, a Persic drinker or someone from the Tribes usually does not add sugar so the bitterness complements her honeyed pastries. She does often add aromatic spices like cardamom or saffron that lend the beverage a unique piquancy.

An Anatoli, Sarmion or Ashurite sweetens his kaffee and brews multiple pots with varying sugariness so guests can choose. He often serves the kaffee with soft, sickle-shaped candies made out of a starch and sugar gel called *hilal* (crescents).

The Kaffee House

Kaffee is also enjoyed in the many kaffee houses found in cities big and small throughout the empire, although no city has as many as the city-state Ashur. These cozy places usually have a terrace where the locals can be found gossiping or arguing politics. Although discussion can get heated, it is a general rule to keep things civil. The kaffee houses function as a common ground where a person is welcome no matter her nationality or religion.

Education

Anyone who knows the Crescent Empire will tell you that its inhabitants are blessed in many forms, but none is as astonishing as their education. In simple terms, a citizen of the empire has an education her Théan counterpart can only dream of—perhaps the best in the whole world!

The Dīnist faith drives the Crescent's superb educational system. The teachings of the Second Prophet state that al-Musawwir is also "the Educator of all the Worlds." As such, all Dīnists have the responsibility and duty to educate a person born under the reign of the empire.

Education is not limited to faith, as the Alwarithlı consider a real education covers all aspects of life including art, law, customs, literature, martial training, knowledge in various sciences and other useful skills. Almost all in the empire (about 99%) are literate; reading, writing and the art of the spoken word are a Creator-given right to all people. Alwarithlı hold in great esteem those with a keen wisdom and intelligence, turning scholars of every kind into revered members of the society.

Schooling

Education in the Crescent Empire begins around the age of four at home. After that a child is expected to attend school until she becomes of age. Adulthood in the empire is not exclusively determined by chronological age but instead considers whether the prospective adult can discern what is good and right—and what is not. Most adults who can afford it attend university. Whereas Théans see the universities in Castille as an innovation, their counterparts in the empire have thousands of students and possess an academic tradition going back centuries.

In many ways the university is the zenith of the Crescent Empire's deeply held views on the importance education for the human soul. The University of al-Qarawiyyin serves as a perfect example. Its columns and arches are plain white in contrast with the intricate arabesque floors. Lined with reed mats instead of luxurious carpets, the floors provide places to sit, think and chat on—something real, tangible. Thus, it provides a sense of intimacy, of a home where one can live and study these immense subjects comfortably, from one's particular perspective.

Scientific Advances

The whole scientific approach to experimentation, so revered nowadays in Théah, was in fact pioneered and thoroughly described by al-Baṣrī almost 600 years ago. Crescent intellectuals developed the number zero and the current numbering system. Resisted at first, this system has been widely adopted in Théah, replacing the Old Empire's letter system for numbering.

The most significant scientific advance in the empire, however, has to be their development of abstract mathematics, also known as *al-jabr*. Commonly referred to as "algebra" in Théah, this highly abstract, theoretical approach to mathematics is essential for any scientific study, engineering endeavor, medical practice and economic enterprise, just to name a few.

Finally, the studies in natural philosophy rank, unsurprisingly, among the most advanced in the world. A relatively recent theory is that of the "struggle for existence," which considers that animals constantly compete with one another, predicting that certain species become extinct while others remain—or even thrive. A recent offshoot of that theory states that humankind's existence derives from that of advanced animals. One natural philosopher, Al-Ḥaḍramī, has gone as far as to say that "the animal kingdom was developed, its species multiplied, and in the gradual process of Creation, it ended in humans arising from the world of the monkeys."

Libraries

Whereas the miracle of common paper was still unknown to Théans centuries ago—whose best library at the time had 36 volumes—some of the largest libraries in the Crescent Empire during that same period had over 400,000 volumes *each*. In fact, it was their idea to transform the Old Empire's single-sheet papyrus rolls into multi-page, searchable codices—what we now call books.

The greatest library in the Crescent Empire, the Royal Library in the Anatoli capital of Iskandar, once started as a modest palace library and has grown to such an amazing size, most in the capital call it "the Labyrinth." The Royal Library opened to the public in 1002 AV and continues to grow at an alarming speed. Wings built upon wings, ancient tombs of books sealed for centuries, and an impossible maze of staircases all await the scholar hungry for knowledge.

Commerce

The official currency of the Crescent Empire is the *lyra*. Everyone across the empire accepts these golden coins, although the newly minted coins bearing Empress Safiye's likeness may be frowned upon in places where people oppose her rule.

Unlike the unfavorable Vatacine perspective on commerce, the Crescent Empire holds the trading of goods in high esteem and puts no restriction on foreigners developing businesses in its lands. In fact, people consider the *tujar* (merchants, singular *tajir*) a cornerstone of society, especially in the urban settlements of the empire. Their importance is such that numerous lawmakers and jurists have written extensive treatises about how to conduct business in an appropriate—civil and honorable—manner, which can be summarized thusly: a merchant should put emphasis on the quality and quantity of her commodities and offer them at a just price.

The way people conduct business is a imporatnt part of the Crescent tradition. The practice of haggling, common in all Crescent Empire markets, and the endless, loudly spoken debates about the worthiness—or not—of goods can be heard everywhere. All together they form a base of sound which is the vibrant undercurrent of any trip through the empire.

Healthcare

If there is one aspect of a Crescent citizen's everyday life that can clearly be envied by her Théan counterpart—apart from the educational system—it has to be healthcare.

A citizen of the Crescent Empire has free access to public hospitals that function 24 hours a day and are staffed with certified doctors. These medical institutions are administered by a three-person board, including a non-medical manager, a dean of medicine and a pharmacist in charge of the public dispensary. And all of this is totally free of charge for every citizen.

This is possible thanks to the *waqf*, the donations' fund administered by the government. Although some of these donations are voluntary, most funds come from trial judgments and are considered an appropriate form of punishment. A portion of the piracy tax also contributes to the Crescent health fund, making many successful pirates very popular among the common folk of the empire.

Physical Culture

The Crescent Empire's unity has allowed physical culture to spread across national lines. Sporting events are so important that even wars within the empire are not enough to stop the most significant sporting competitions from happening.

The Anatoli term *zurkhāneh* refers to a gymnasium where martial arts and dance are taught and practiced. These practices often take on a spiritual dimension: Dīnists practice dance or athletics as *takrar* (religious repetition), while Yasnavans who belong to the cult of Miça, Angel of Contracts, founded many famous zurkhāneh. At these facilities, an athlete trains his muscles with enormous clubs, far too large and heavy for practical use—though stories say that Rostam, the great Persic legendary Hero, was so big and strong he wielded one as his primary weapon.

Dance

Court dance shares many characteristics with northern dances from Agnivarsa such as *kathak*, leading scholars to suspect that nomads spread it from Agnivarsa to the Crescent Empire. This is a performative dance, not a social one, intended to entertain onlookers. Flowing garments and elegant figures characterize court dance, as well as ritualized motions, which mime everyday activities (hunting, bathing, grooming) or scenes from myths and stories.

Line or chain dances, such as Sarmion's *dabke* and *horah*, are common at weddings and parties everywhere in the Crescent. A series of dancers joins hands for a dance involving a great deal of rhythmic leaping and stomping to show off leg strength and flexibility. The limits on mobility that come from holding hands with the (possibly mediocre) dancers to your left and right offer an attractive challenge to many young Alwarithlı. Sometimes the dancers link up into a ring; if not, the best, most egotistical or perhaps drunkest dancer positions himself on either end of the line, waving a colorful handkerchief in his free hand and taking advantage of his position to showboat.

The most famous of Crescent dancers, the whirling dervish, spins while chanting or singing hymns while musicians accompany her on tambourine, flute and bells. Her spinning dance pulls her into a state of heightened, ecstatic awareness of al-Musawwir.

Martial Arts

Wrestling

Wrestling is the most popular sport in the Crescent Empire. Almost every nominally distinct region has its own name and set of rules for wrestling, although certain forms have gained international traction. Anatol Ayh's national sport of oil wrestling is particularly popular. In this form, two wrestlers compete while wearing very little clothing and a great deal of olive oil, which they ritually apply to one another before the match as a sign of respect.

The annual oil wrestling championship takes place in Iskandar and has never been canceled in its centuries of existence, including once during an earthquake. Anatol Ayh usually takes home the championship, but Numa, Vestenmennavenjar, Ussura and Persis frequently make strong showings.

Chess

The Alwarithlı consider the game of chess, which has its roots in Cathayan culture, a martial art because of its relevance to strategy, often played on the grounds of a zurkhāneh. The words "chess" and "check" are actually corruptions of the Persic "shah," which is what you say in the Crescent when threatening your opponent's king piece, naturally. A visiting Théan should also be advised that the elephant is what she would call a bishop, and the chariot is what she would call a rook. A serious athlete sometimes has two chess sessions a day, one before her exercise when her mind is fresh, and then once after as a cooldown and to challenge herself with critical thinking while tired.

Equestrian Sports

Any sport you can do on the back of a horse or camel is probably of some import in the Crescent Empire One of the most popular spectator sports in the Crescent Empire, the Persic sport of *chogān*, began as a cavalry training exercise during the Haxāmanišiya Empire. Two teams of four riders each use mallets to knock a ball into a goal at their opponents' end of the field. Chogān requires significant resources to learn and play, so while the sport draws huge crowds when prominent teams play one another, it is not exactly popular with the common folk except in Khazari territories such as Gallenia in Ussura.

Poetry

You might say that compared to Théah, the roles of poetry and prose are swapped in the Crescent Empire. Any writing that you want someone to remember, whether a recipe, a set of directions or an exhaustive epic detailing the works and lives of every great Hero ever to live in your Nation needs to be a poem if you really want it to take.

Mathnawī

The *mathnawī* originated in Persis literature, but now abounds in greater Katabic and Anatoli work as well. A mathnawī consists of rhyming couplets, each line of which has eleven syllables (or, very occasionally, ten). Traditional topics for mathnawī include romance, heroism and religion. A common format for long or epic mathnawī is to have a frame narrative, which tells the main story, interspersed with parables or anecdotes with didactic relevance to the main point. These parables and anecdotes may be told by a character in the frame narrative, or may be interspersed without particular context.

Last Gasp

Give me one instant more, dear, before we part,
ten seconds with my hand pressed over your heart.
Let me forget the space between my palm and
your skin. Let me forget I once lacked your hand
in my hair, guiding my mouth to speak prayers
into your neck. Fingers spiraling your hair
between them, trading freedom for sensation,
sensation for holy annihilation,
light for darkness, darkness for life, sharing sighs,
gasps, glances crackling like lightning between eyes.
Bite down. Taste my blood and bone between your teeth.
Draw me in with your tongue, so you know beneath
my wayward shell, that every fragment craves you.
In you, I am the holocaust thrown into
the flame which must not know any drop of blood,
the tree which fell on the cobra's guarding hood,
the chant spoken once and never repeated.
One more breath, dear—yes, this was all I needed.

Piyyut

Most *piyyutim* (singular *piyyut*) are in Dibre or Katabic, and express religious sentiments often set to music. Piyyutim are frequently acrostics, the first letter of each line spelling out a religiously significant name or word (or just the author's name). The meters and rhyme schemes permitted are multifarious and complex, with certain patterns popular in Katabic adaptations such as the *ruba'i* (a four line poem).

The Rock Climbers

You brave climbers, who fear no height,
Exalt Honeycomb, sun-bleached white.
Should God chance to gaze from high Heaven
Upon us, He'll see you first, right?

Qaṣīda

This form originates from Katab. The Tribes of the 8th Sea originated *qaṣā'id* (CAW-sa-id) (singular *qaṣīda*) as panegyrics, odes praising tribes, chiefs, elders, angels or petitions to a patron for some boon. Since then, they have become popular in other languages as well. A particularly popular form of qaṣīda is the *ghazal*, a love poem (romantic, divine or both) with a rhyme preceding a repeated refrain.

Time Passed in Darkness

The city is dark. All that I am you hold here in your hand.
Every lamp's and hearth's fire dies, and you feel my fear in your hand.

No camel's or horse's hooves fall, no ox pulls the laden cart,
no beast stirs save me, burdened with care, whom you steer with your hand.

In the distance, muskets crack, cannons pound castle walls, bombs burst.
When flame comes at last, I'll burn like sacrifice, searing your hand.

Will clamor or silence cloud my mind? What last illusion waits?
Or might I dream of you sheltering my heart, dear, in your hands?

You're so far away, but while I wait, right now, you're all I feel.
The city is dark. All that I am you hold here in your hand.

Painting

Of all the styles of artwork in the Crescent Empire, paintings have remained an underdeveloped, unique form of art compared to their Théan counterparts. What began as a way to convey information developed with each Nation into a specialty now sought for its artistic brilliance. The Crescent Empire has taken painting from the miniatures of mosaic tiles to the grand rock-faces of 8th Sea canyons and to the soaring Sarmion ceilings.

One form equally spread across all the countries is the painting of beautifully illuminated contracts, ceremonial documents decorated with beautiful miniatures and scrollwork around the borders. Often used for a wedding contract, called a *kitab* among most Nations or a *ketubah* in Sarmion, they have become centerpieces for all new homes.

Sarmions have a history of painting inside the walls of their religious institutions and palaces, creating beautiful ceilings depicting the skies, especially heavenly scenes full of stars and constellations. Sarmions also use walls as canvases to paint poetry, declarations and prayers or magical words for spellwork. Graffiti is well known for making political statements, and the intricacies of such public acts of vandalism border on a new form of artistic expression.

Pottery

Pottery serves as a necessary production in the Crescent Empire as much as an artistic practice. Potters create the majority of the flatware used by people during meals, as well as drinkware and religious objects. Moreover, due to the need to seal away foodstuffs from often harsh and sandy environments, pottery produced across the Crescent Empire must be sturdy as well as beautiful.

The Orthodoxy of Ashur has limited its production of pottery with artistic representations of religious figures like the First and Second Prophets. In fact, Ashurite pottery instead focuses on natural vistas or else abstract art depicting events. Baked into those depictions, however, are secret messages, a way to transmit information across long distances between people, especially favored among Assassins.

Weaving

The history of weaving in the Crescent Empire encompasses a number of different traditions, including the weaving of complex fabrics for clothing as well as the creation of tapestries and carpets. The creation of fabric for clothing has become a battle over the years between form and fashion, comfort and the needs of often brutal temperatures. Clothing carried tribal affiliations as well as family lineages with patterns, crests or intricate designs, and rich tapestries depicting family lines became a major centerpiece in households from Sarmion to Persis. These days the fabrics and textiles of the Crescent Empire are a high priced trade item across Théah and Ifri for use in fashion and courtly collections.

Persis is perhaps the greatest producer of carpets in all the world. The intricately designed geometric patterns and weaving techniques have made Persic carpets both beautiful and functional, prized for their use in every home, caravan and palace across the empire. The most basic of Persis' carpets incorporates much of the nature and geometric pattern work one sees in their pottery. The more advanced showcase lavish patternwork in lush colors that can capture the eye and the imagination for hours. History speaks of a time before the crackdown on magic when carpets in Persis were capable of flight, ferrying their masters across the great deserts where no animals cross. Those days, however, are long gone, and flying carpets are considered a thing of the legendary past.

Architecture

Sacred

In similar fashion to Théah, the greatest architectural marvels of the Crescent Empire can be found in those structures built around people's faith. Perhaps the most famous and well-regarded of them are the mosques of the Dīnists. Modeled after the home of the Second Prophet, these magnificent structures have a number of common architectural features such as domes, minarets and halls destined for prayers.

Since al-Dīn is the largest faith in the empire, mosques have become synonymous with established urban settlements. Moreover, these structures function as centers of their respective communities, as well as information hubs and places of education and justice.

The architecture style of the Crescent Empire can be appropriately described as a skyline of mosque domes and minarets. Instead of the straight beams that dominate in Théah, the Crescent architects decided to use the pointed arch to build the mosque. Not only does it support the weight of the mighty minarets and domes better, but it creates taller buildings with more space inside of them. This innovation traces back to the classic Katab architecture style allowing Crescent Empire's architects to produce wonders that can hardly be rivaled by any construction on Théah.

Although less numerous than those of al-Dīn faith, the Yachidi have their own architectural marvels, the *kehillah*, a word derived from the Sarmion expression for community, also known as synagogues. These edifices' features vary as much as the mosques, but they also have in common a number of characteristics, such as a sanctuary (the main and largest hall of the construction), areas dedicated to study and others to social interaction.

Secular

Two main secular constructions exist in the Crescent Empire. The first are the palaces of the nobility, mighty structures that while beautifully adorned, differ little from other domestic buildings. As such, they never reach the magnificence of mosques or synagogues. Following many old Numanari building techniques, they are based around the agricultural necessities and have little architectural luxuries beyond baths, audience halls and other amenities.

In spite of that, the palaces of the Crescent Empire possess a clear organization, with public areas such as the armory, stables, archives, kitchens and more located in the outermost areas of the construction. Beyond that, the innermost and best-guarded rooms are destined for the sleeping and living quarters, the library, treasury, an observatory and menagerie.

The other notable secular construction is the military building. In the past, conflict was part of daily Crescent life, the imperial architects forced to repair and improve the work of their ancestors. Katab ruins lie plastered in impenetrable brick walls, and isolated wall enclosures hide secret passageways.

Faith

One cannot speak of the Crescent Empire without speaking of faith. Dīnists, Yachidi, Yasnavan and Orthodox Vaticines all call the empire home. Blood binds the empire together and faith diversifies it. An Alwarithlı citizen loves to do nothing more than speak to someone with differing views from hers, especially an educated view.

A core belief in all Crescent faiths is peace. While putting the Creator's ideal of peace and kindness to work is more difficult than theorizing about it, this concept of unity ties the Nations to one another. Through the years, people with power have abused the name of various faiths in order to seize power, and each time they have been cut down. Faith in something *more* is the great equalizer within the empire.

This belief in peace is also the reason most Crescent religions do not accept the Third Prophet as a prophet at all. His bloody conquest of Vatacine lands and violent rejection of the Second Prophet's peaceful teachings shows him as a man far from the voice of the Creator. While Yasnavan, Yachidi, Dīnist, and Orthodox followers may disagree on the shape faith should take, they are all in agreement over the Third Prophet.

Most Alwarithlı citizens claim allegiance to one faith or another. The Anatoli tend toward more secular practices than others, embracing a modern view of al-Dīn, one that supports individual freedoms and acceptance of diversity. Equally, worship in the 8th Sea is devout, but driven by necessity and realistic views on religious practices in a scorching desert. Persis and Sarmion are both religious Nations, but incomparable to Ashur, which many Crescents jokingly refer to as "fanatic country."

Vaticines are few and far between in the empire. While citizens welcome a Vaticine within the empire's borders, most Alwarithlı have a bias against him because of his embrace of the Third Prophet—a madman who waged bloody war in Theus' name. Possessing the religious fervor of an Orthodox Ashurite, but none of the egalitarian pacifism, Inquisitors are widely loathed within the empire. The empire permits an Inquisition member within Crescent borders, but monitors her heavily, often by a Janissary...or two.

Al-Dīn

Built on the First and Second Prophets' teachings, al-Dīn, Katabic for "the faith," is Terra's most populous and widespread religion, with adherents throughout Théah, Ifri and Cathay. It is also the Empire of the Crescent Moon's state religion, ruled by the Caliph in Iskandar, Anatol Ayh.

Tenets

> ***"In al-Badīʿ, I am one with al-Musawwir, who is one with all things. So therefore, to realize al-Badīʿ, I must become one with all things. I fuse not only with kin and kith, fine wine and oases; but also with enemies, foul water, desert sun."***
> ***—Khalil ibn Mustafa al-Thaji***

Al-Dīn derives from Orthodox slave and mendicant Khalil ibn Mustafa al-Thaji's life and works. Khalil, better known as the Second Prophet, rarely spoke explicitly on religious topics, but his followers documented his travels meticulously. His poems about nature and fables also survive.

Khalil referred to Theus as "al-Musawwir," the divine artist. Creation is His masterpiece's blueprint, which He must constantly improve through humans. At a sublime point called "al-Badīʿ," misleadingly translated as "Heaven" or "Judgment Day," al-Musawwir will perfect His creation when Creator and creation unite. Since art is by definition imperfect, this apotheosis cannot ever occur.

To this end, Dīnists attempt to eliminate the metaphysical distinction between the self and the other—an individual and everything else in creation. Dīnists often find this process too paradoxical for an entirely serious and traditional mindset. So, influential Dīnist scholars often view al-Dīn through the lens of play, as a game spanning all lives, both joyful and challenging in equal measure but always educational.

This joy of play, freedom of ideas, elucidates why a Dīnist often marries outside his own creed. Religion is of the world, so all are free to research other trails humanity has blazed to guide the world to al-Badīʿ.

Al-Dīn's community has built traditions over centuries that help a Dīnist breach the boundary of self and other. These "Three Duties" are the nearest thing to strict commandments Dīnists have.

The Three Duties

Itef | Kindness

The most important duty obliges Dīnists to offer help to those in need. Improving others' lives approaches al-Badīʿ most directly. Communities without formal academies or universities rely on Dīnists practicing *itef* (IT-fer) to teach children in primary or secondary education, going back to the example of adults sharing the burden of teaching children among the Prophet Khalil's followers.

Ḏikr | Remembrance

A *ḏikr* (dae-ker; plural *aḏkār*) is a meditative chant a Dīnist composes for her prayers as a personal oath of faith and purpose. She usually chooses a sentence from scripture as an adolescent, then modifies and adds to it as she ages. Most aḏkār are verbal, though sung or danced forms are popular among certain artistic devotional orders.

Muthabera | Perseverance

Undue hardship characterized the Prophet Khalil's life. Born into slavery, he spent most of his life pursuing a pointless quest designed to kill him, which rendered him homeless and endangered him repeatedly. Suffering, challenge and hardship should inform every Dīnist's personal journey towards al-Musawwir. Accordingly, a Dīnist usually chooses one month every year to take on some hardship he normally does not experience. Many Dīnist communities engage in *muthabera* (MU-th-er-ber-a) together. Fasting during daylight hours is a common form of shared muthabera, as is undertaking community service or public works projects like building hospitals or aqueducts. Many *suyuh* (teachers) absolve physically or mentally disabled Dīnists from muthabera.

Discouraged Practices

No laws are set in stone. A Dīnist is responsible for his own practices. Al-Dīn does not absolve you of blame if actions you take cause others to suffer. Still, though, some taboos, while not by any means universal or immutable, are common to most Dīnists, if not as important as the Three Duties.

Revealing the Face

Many Crescent Dīnists cover their heads and sometimes faces in public. Spiritually, covering the head represents the insignificance of the self in general and one's physical features, such as hair, in particular. Most Dīnists wear some form of head covering, although going uncovered is growing in popularity. Taking this one step further, North Ifrian Amazigh and 8th Sea Tribes originated the tradition of additionally wearing a veil or mask. This shows their devotion to the divine, but it is also a practical way not to get a mouthful of sand when the wind picks up.

Addiction

While mind-altering substances, especially wine, tea and kaffee feature prominently in much Dīnist practice (especially amongst the poets), al-Dīn frowns on addiction, which locks the self in the body and prevents connection with al-Musawwir.

Sorcery

Sorcery is not an affront to al-Musawwir and al-Dīn treats sorcery similar to violence: something that should only be done in the Creator's service or to help people in need. Many sorceries in the Crescent and the nearby Sarmatian Commonwealth come from entities al-Dīn considers demonic. Even Yasnavan *ahuras* are suspect, as many Alwarithlı who do not practice Ahurayasna find them similar to jinn.

History

Khalil ibn Mustafa al-Thaji was a slave who served Rauf, the sorcerer-king of Thaj, a Katabic-speaking state on the border of Persis and Anatol Ayh. He cared for the great emir's menagerie of hunting raptors, doves, talking parrots and other avians. Emir Rauf and his court marveled at Khalil's knowledge and skill at caring for and training these animals; he seemed to speak with them in their own language.

The emir's daughter, Shahnaz, resented her father's affection for young Khalil. One day, when her father went away on state business and she ruled in his stead, Shahnaz summoned Khalil and his birds to the throne room. "Since you are so talented at your job," she said, "I decree you must capture a *simurgh* and bring it to my father's court. I will keep your family here as insurance against your failure. If you return to this land without it, I shall execute you. Begone!"

Khalil was devastated. A simurgh was a legendary creature, the monarch of all things that fly. A mere mortal could never hope to find one, if it in fact existed.

Khalil aimlessly wandered the world. For a long time, his only companions were birds. Then, he collected followers: mostly the impoverished, mendicants, gyrovagues and others with nothing to lose inspired by Khalil's cheerful approach to a fatal mission. Khalil turned to poetry, song, storytelling, dance and teachings he learned from Orthodox and Yachidi traveling companions to cope with the travel's privations.

Khalil's fame grew. Word got back to Princess Shahnaz, who was incensed that banishing Khalil had not killed him, but only served to increase his influence. Khalil decided to go to Théah. "Don't go," his companions told him. "It's full of wicked sorcerers. They'll destroy you." But he went anyway. Sure enough, in Curonia, he met a diabolist who tried to immolate him. Somehow—using only his staff as protection—he was unaffected by the fire. When the smoke and flames cleared, the diabolist fell to her knees begging Khalil for forgiveness. He invited her to join his strange caravan, and she accepted. .

Years later, with a wife and children and a following thousands strong, Khalil returned to Thaj, in full knowledge that he still had no simurgh and would be executed. By then, he and his followers had created an expansive canon of artwork, stories and religious ideas that became al-Dīn's foundation after his death. He did not care that he would die. His journeys taught him that there was no real difference between himself and al-Musawwir's creation—he was nothing, and therefore he was everything.

Sure enough, Princess Shahnaz attacked him on sight. She blasted him with her sorcerous power; Khalil set down his staff and allowed the magical energies to destroy him. As his body burned, a simurgh appeared in the fire and flew away.

Organization

Al-Dīn is sometimes described as the world's most disorganized organized religion. Auto-iconoclastic and self-contradictory on purpose, it draws from many different religious sources. If most religions are maps, telling you exactly where to end up and giving you various choices as to how to get there, then al-Dīn serves as a compass. It tells you which way to go, but not what happens when (or if) you get there.

The Mudarris

A *mudarris al-Dīn* (MU-dar-is), often shortened to mudaris, is a teacher of al-Dīn, specifically one who leads another in his own practice. She is the only authority figure present in some form in all Dīnist sects—in many places the only Dīnist authority figure, period. The term, roughly analogous to the Yachidi rebbe, is generally thought to have originated from that older term.

A mudarris can also operate a mosque, a Dīnist community center and house of worship. Mosques schedule prayer and scripture study sessions at certain times of day, called out from a tower called a minaret. A mudarris carries a decorated stave to signify his office, explicitly identify as priests and often practice the Art of the Second Prophet.

The Dervish

A dervish is a Dīnist monk who takes a vow of poverty and practice *takrar* (TEK-er-ar). Originally, takrar referred to the repetition of a ḏikr for meditative purposes. Nowadays, takrar encompasses any faith-focused devotional art performed in repetition such as dance, song, calligraphy, self-mortification or martial arts. Takrar can also be adopted by non-dervish al-Dīn practitioners. Most dervish orders practice some art or craft as takrar, both as a matter of devotion and as a way to offer service to communities they pass through, on whom they rely for material support as itef.

Academic Orders

Al-Dīn inherited Yachidism's academic tradition and respect for literacy and learning, to the point where *rebbeim* and mudarris often found academic institutions together. At first the stereotype went that the Yachidi taught natural philosophy and mathematics, the Dīnists taught humanities and history, and they got together to argue about philosophy; but that division is ancient history now. Nevertheless, a Dīnist scholar—especially one who identifies her scholarship as takrar—sometimes treats the hierarchy of student, adjunct professor, tenured professor, administrator and so on as a surrogate religious hierarchy.

The Caliphate

Al-Dīn's most controversial authority figure is none other than the caliph, currently Empress Safiye. The caliphate originally formed in response to Khalil's death, to replace him as spiritual leader and to protect his many followers from violent persecution. The caliph worries about things other Dīnists would rather not bother with—hierarchical administration, violent self-defense, et cetera—as itef to the entire community.

Dīnist thinkers outside the empire have pointed out that Khalil's approach to life and religion, not to mention most of the published commentary on al-Dīn, heavily imply that something like a caliph is anathema to the religion, but the caliphate is almost as old as the religion itself. Many Dīnists reason that while they study nonviolence and charity, if a sovereign must rule them by fire and steel, that sovereign may as well believe in al-Dīn.

THE ANASHEED

The Anasheed are a heretical branch of al-Dīn, not recognized by the religion proper. Al-Dīn does not recognize any prophet after Khalil, but the Anasheed state that there is a Third Prophet, Irshad bint Jamila, the Second Prophet's daughter. The Dīnists reject this for a few reasons: the first and most obvious being no proof exists that Irshad was truly Khalil's daughter. Secondly, she supported many violent measures to free Ashur from the empire. Finally, many of Irshad's laws are known only by the Guardian of the First Garden (see the chapter on **Ashur**) who seems to quote them at opportune times when his Assassins need justification for their actions. In modern times, the Anasheed are peaceful, bordering on pacifist, but are proud of their religious heritage despite its violence. Outside of the one main difference between the Anasheed and mainstream Dīnists, their practices and organization are very similar.

Ahurayasna

Persis and the 8th Sea's ancestral religion arose from the Crescent's lawless and jinn-haunted prehistory. This is a church inextricably tied to the workings of state and sadly, despite its importance, is a religion persecuted in Persis today.

Tenets

The Ahurayasna religion articulates a fundamental cosmic struggle between good and evil. In the conceptual realm beyond the mortal world's borders of time and space, the forces of Good and Evil gave rise to their personifications Zenea and Namirha, sometimes identified to outsiders as "God" and "the Devil." Zenea and Namirha each begat a host of beings who straddle the line between the conceptual and mortal realms, called *ahuras* and *daevas*—also known as angels and devils, or even jinn (although a Yasnavan, a practitioner of Ahurayasna, finds this last term disrespectful when applied to an angel).

The mortal world is the battleground where Good and Evil fight a proxy war through living creatures. Good and Evil live within each human, who ultimately falls on one side or another. A good person, a follower of Right, love and civilization, is called an *aṣavan* (AH-shuh-vun). A bad person, who has fallen under the influence of demons or his own worst nature, is called a *dragvant*—literally "deceiver," though the term denotes a sinner of all stripes. No middle ground exists where absolute Good and Evil are concerned.

There are twelve primary ahura (not including Zenea): Arsalan, Dawna, Farzaneh, Nazanin, Omideh, Parshand, Salar, Shamisa, Shayesteh, Utabar, Vafa and Zharfa. Some people speak of a 13th ahura Hediyeh who was cast out by her divine family, but many dismiss this a pure rumor. The mightiest angels sang to the prophet Zohreh a set of holy precepts describing an aṣavan's proper behavior.

Zenea's Law: Meditate on the Divine

Imbue us, O Zenea, with Thine own nature,
now as Thou didst when the first Sun rose over the young world.
As the herder guards the flock, let us guard the sacred mind against Namirha's depredations, the serpents at our heels.

Zenea, the Divine Parent and Supreme Being, is the ahuras' parent and the personification of consciousness. Purifying one's consciousness of evil defends Zenea from Namirha. Some Yasnavans consider al-Dīn's al-Musawwir and Zenea the same being viewed from different perspectives, though the discord between al-Dīn and Ahurayasna has soured this viewpoint in Persis.

Shamisa's Law: Do Not Lie

O Shamisa, light the flame of honesty,
on which we build the sacrament of civilization.
Let us speak plainly to one another,
for lies are the purest of all evils.

Shamisa (SHA-me-sa), the Angel of Light and Truth, personifies the sun, fire and understanding. "Shamisa" refers both to righteousness and to truth and to the principle of goodness in Ahurayasna. Shamisa taught humans to divide aṣavans from dragvants.

Lying to another Yasnavan is unacceptable, although declining to talk about something is fine. Lying to non-Yasnavans remains a matter of some debate: some believe they exist outside the social contract that demands honesty, whereas others advise picking and choosing who deserves honesty hypocritical. The prohibition against theft—a form of lying about property—falls under this heading as well.

Arsalan's Law: Respect All Living Creatures

How shall the herd follow an unrighteous drover?
How shall the human survive without Nature's aid?
We reject the one who sacrifices your gifts in vain,
disparaging you, Arsalan.

Arsalan (AR-sa-lan), Angel of Animals and Judgment, rules all beasts. Animals' instincts are fundamentally good, even if they lack humans' higher intelligence. Through lessons and parables from the animal world, Arsalan teaches a follower to make prudent and virtuous choices.

Early Yasnavan pastoralists had to be on constant guard against livestock theft. They banded together against daeva-worshippers, whose religious rituals prominently featured fire and sacrifice. A Yasnavan rejects animal cruelty. He avoids over-hunting and never eats cows, dogs or carrion birds. Various 8th Sea tribes add other animals, their tutelary angels' favored species, to this list.

Vafa's Law: Take Refuge in Faith

The arguments of the unjust and the deceivers
melt away in the face of your reason, O Vafa.
Let the congregants surround the hearth
and the undertakers maintain the lime-pit.

Vafa (VA-fa), Angel of Earth and Piety, represents the earth under our feet and the faith that should underlie our thoughts. Vafa shaped humanity's views of self and relation to architecture and creation: the magi's position as spiritual leaders as well as the architecture of the Temple of Hymn and the *daxdana* (see "Holy Sites" on page 37).

Salar's Law: Obey Righteous Kings, Cast Down Tyrants

Grant us, Salar, the eye of judgment
that sees the divine farr on the righteous
monarch's face.
May the royal laws deliver us from tyrants
who serve unrighteous spirits, devils and foul Namirha.

The divine right of kings and the rule of law come directly from Salar (SA-lar), Angel of Metal and Rulership. The master of all things metal brings the crown and the mace. Salar taught humans to obey a rightfully chosen leader. Salar and Shamisa imbue true kings and queens with *farr*, the luminescence that shines from a worthy ruler's face.

This law cements the authority of the elders of the 8th Sea as well as the shah of Persis. A Yasnavan has a duty to support and obey a rightfully appointed ruler—and, in the case of an unjust ruler, to raise Hell.

Namirha's Lies

"Namirha" is not his true name. Except in spells to repel or bind him, Yasnavans never speak or write his real name. It means "Destructive Mind," for just as Zenea represents good consciousness, Namirha represents consciousness twisted and perverted towards evil.

Namirha's deadliest gambit was also his undoing. He manifested in the mind of Aždahâ, the Devil-King of Serpents who established the throne of Persis. But Ziba the Beloved's coalition of the first Yasnavans overcame them, binding Aždahâ in a trap beneath a mountain. Namirha remains trapped in Aždahâ's mind and lineage, although his curse upon the Persic throne imbued every shah with a splinter of Namirha's nature.

History

The prehistoric Crescent was savage and dangerous. Wild animals, rival tribes, scarcity and disease constantly threatened the earliest tribes. A mighty ruler sought the advice of powerful spirits, who promised her success and power if the ruler only heeded their precepts and venerated them.

The first Yasnavan prophet was Zohreh, a cowherd from the borderlands of modern Persis and the 8th Sea. While lost in the wilderness, she received a vision from holy beings with vultures' wings, laying down the laws of civilization. Zohreh's hymns to and from these angels spread throughout Persis and the 8th Sea, until nearly every tribe venerated the ahuras in addition to their local spirits.

After Zohreh, Ziba and Aždahâ (see "History" page 102), Ahurayasna solidified into two major strains: the 8th Sea traditionalists, and Persis' centralized and nationalized clerical theocracy, identified with the Persic throne for dynasty after dynasty. Ziba taught her children and the magi to summon and bind demons. Ziba's and Aždahâ's descendants have fought ever since to control the throne.

The ideological tension between Ahurayasna and al-Dīn is central to the cultural and political struggle between the Persic shahs and the Anatoli caliphs. Yasnavans consider al-Dīn impractical, undisciplined and confusing, devoid of the absolute truths and straightforward rules that structure not only their religion, but also their society. Shall a fortress stand on a foundation of shifting sand?

In turn, Dīnists find Ahurayasna naïve, unforgiving and oversimplified, too quick to judge complex individuals as black-and-white good or evil, offering those in between (that is, almost everyone) no self-improvement means or opportunities. Both religions exalt kindness to others, but Yasnavans express it through participation in the state and obedience to governors, whereas Dīnists mistrust hierarchy and emphasize the mudarris-student relationship. The old saying goes that Ahurayasna is all about ends with no means, but al-Dīn is all about means without ends.

Nevertheless, this relationship does not always end in conflict. Dīnists who quest to end the division between self and other in al-Badīʿ respect the Ahurayasna funerary tradition which literally returns the human form to nature. Yasnavans revere the Prophet Khalil's rapport with birds. Mixed Yasnavan-Dīnist families abound, as neither religion discourages intermarriage with other monotheists (or borderline monotheists). Persic poetry in particular has cross-pollinated the religions' ideas and imagery. Poor Dīnist dervishes who punish the haughty and reward the generous, mighty Yasnavan sorcerer-kings and the mythical simurgh appear as stock characters in both religions' poetic canons.

Organization

The Divine Right of Kings

Yasnavans hold a monarch to a higher standard of good and evil than other humans, since her actions evince whether she rules by divine right or diabolical tyranny. In the 8th Sea, the eldest of each tribe claims this divine right. In Persis, the shah claims it, symbolizing that claim with the ox-headed mace, a holy weapon representing Zenea's blessing as well as the herds and people the monarch protects. A truly righteous ruler, both strong and good, glows with farr, a divine radiance visible in her facial features' beauty. Shah Jalil is the first Persic ruler, after Khaṭāʾī, to reject Ahurayasna as a religion, while he paradoxically still claims divine right to rule Persis.

The Archmaga

Second to the monarch is the highest religious authority, the archmaga. In the 8th Sea, an archmaga is an elder *maga* rather than an established authority. In Persis, the shah appoints a senior member of his court as archmaga. This individual administers the entire Persic Ahurayasna clerical organization. Below the archmaga, a priest called *maga* (plural *magi*) maintains the Temple of Hymn and daxdanas, tends to his flock's spiritual needs and cares for the herds of animals which constitute much of the Magistry's treasury.

The current archmaga of Persis is named Şivan. In light of Shah Jalil's outright oppression of the Yasnavan people in Persis, all duties related to running the faith have fallen on his elderly shoulders. Şivan maintains the Palace of Hymn east of Siphon, a spectacular structure with a towering daxdana on its roof and ever burning flame. Şivan is old and has Dīnist family. He is a master at cooperating with Shah Jalil and the Dīnist government. In fact, he is so good at it, no one suspects he works with the rebels in secret.

Regional Variations

Ahurayasna in the 8th Sea hews closer to the religion's earliest roots: organized on a tribal level, different groups venerate choirs of angels who may not always match the five ahuras who set down holy law. These idiosyncratic local groups add between one and three tutelary spirits, usually associated with some important natural feature such as a species of animal or a river. These spirits may also impart some duty or law in addition to those above, such as "preserve trees in this valley" or "do not kill rock hyraxes which are sacred to me." A Yasnavan of the 8th Sea does not expect a Yasnavan from Persis or the other tribes to follow all her own laws unless he is a guest in her territory; but she also does not recognize the Persic archmaga's or the shah's authority.

Holy Sites

Temples of Hymn

A Temple of Hymn is a Yasnavan place of worship. Its focal point is its hearth, where Shamisa's maga-tended flame, the symbol of civilization, burns eternal. A Yasnavan so reveres fire that even when cooking, he never lets fire touch a creature's dead flesh directly. Cremation is especially anathema.

At dawn and dusk each day, magi lead the congregation in a series of hymns: odes to angels, fables and new religious compositions by magi or congregants. The faithful decorate a Temple of Hymn's walls with calligraphed poems and illustrations of sovereigns, Heroes and angels. Most major oases in the 8th Sea have a Temple of Hymn any visitor may use.

The Daxdana

Since it is taboo to taint the purity of holy fire with the bodies of the dead, as the sacrificers do, a Yasnavan sky-buries her dead atop daxdanas. These circular towers, usually on hills or mountains near rivers, expose cadavers to feed carrion birds. A daxdana has a raised outer wall and a flat roof with two concentric rings, outer for adults and inner for children. After excarnation, skeletons roll into the daxdana's central lime pit, disintegrate and ride rainwater through coal and sand filters to wind up in a nearby waterway. Only specially trained pallbearers, magi trained to manipulate the bones without compromising his ritual purity, may enter daxdanas to perform maintenance.

Orthodoxy

Orthodox Doctrine

The basic doctrine of the Orthodox religion is as follows:

Heaven is Elohah (Theus) and Elohah is Heaven. Elohah-who-is-Heaven can best be described as a city, a forest, a land come to life and also every person in that city-forest-land as a collective of infinite complexity, a Cathedral built for and of the human spirit. In the beginning, all the world was Elohah and all the world was Heaven and then there came a Sundering.

Some say the Sundering came from a great evil; some say the result came from Heaven contemplating the existence of worlds outside itself. Either way, pieces of Heaven broke from the rest. Now, all those shards of Heaven wish to rejoin the body of Elohah, and this is right and good. Every shard of Heaven that rejoins its former self adds something strange, complex and beautiful to Heaven, making Elohah even yet greater than before.

The goal of a member of the Orthodox Church (called a Disciple) is to rejoin Elohah. To rejoin Elohah, one must love and honor the world and everything in it as one loves and honors oneself. Every person is divine and glorious, broken and bizarre, utterly unique. Perfection is not possible. Everyone on Terra exists as a shard destined to rejoin Elohah.

The First Prophet Yesu, in his teachings, compared people to gardens: infinitely complicated, intricate, beautiful, wild, frightening, flawed and all built on different bones. Every person, Yesu said, was created and beloved by Elohah. No one, not even the most incomprehensible and frightening, deserved to be discarded.

Selflessness

Evil, said Yesu, was only that which separated the self from Elohah. Evil was jealousy, the desire to deny joy to others or not recognizing nor caring for the complexity of others. Evil included selfishness—material selfishness, but also the selfishness of believing oneself inherently more worthy, more important or better than the rest of the vast and terrifying universe. To Elohah, humans are beautiful, intricate, infinite but also small; to rejoin Heaven, they have to learn to understand the utter frightening vastness of the universe.

Heaven Here Below

For the world to once again become part of Heaven, it must become a "Heaven here below"—a place where no intricacy is culled away, a place where all souls love the world and everything in it as they love themselves. When a Disciple refers to "the End of the World," she refers to the world rejoining Heaven, and she considers this good, a goal that should be worked toward.

How Disciples should, or can, work toward the end of the world is a matter of some controversy amongst the faithful. In life, Yesu abhorred attempts to build a hierarchy amongst his Disciples. Even after his death, his Disciples respected his wishes and did not attempt to build a hierarchy amongst themselves. Instead, in the years after Yesu died, the Disciples remained friends but parted ways, each determined to start his own Church and bring Yesu's message to a different part of the world. Thus, they created many different sects, all of which claim Yesu as their teacher, all of which preach Yesu's basic doctrine, but other than that, differ.

That said, most Orthodox sects also share some similarities that, while doctrinally based, are not themselves part of doctrine. These include:

- A commitment to pacifism.
- Some amount of anti-materialism.
- A disdain for hierarchy, and a corresponding bent towards collectivism.
- A reverence for nature as a whole, and a reverence for trees in particular.
- A focus on universal love as opposed to romantic love or filial piety.

Most controversially, Orthodoxists believe that Yesu was the incarnation of Elohah on Terra—not simply a "Prophet." This puts them at odds with successor traditions (al-Dīn and the Vaticine) which revere Yesu, but believe him only the first of Elohah's earthly messengers.

History

The First Prophet was a bastard, born with no father to a slave mother named Maryam ben Yakob. Maryam was Yachidi, a native to Sarmion, who tended an orchard on a plantation owned by a Numanari not far from Salemoria.

Yesu was born, both woman and man (while others argue Yesu was neither male nor female), but by Numanari law, his mother had to register him as one sex, so she picked male. When she wrote her Gospel, she said she did so to spare him being pressed to bear children. He never took issue with her choice and thus, to this day, the First Prophet is referred to as "he."

Yesu grew up a grave child, learning to tend the trees with his mother. Every Sabbath a traveling rebbe came to lead services for the slaves and every Sabbath, after the service, Yesu approached the rebbe and begged to learn more about Elohah.

One day, the rebbe asked, "Why are you so eager to learn about our Lord?"

Yesu blasphemously answered, "I think I am them."

The rebbe, of course, was horrified: her first reflex was to strike the boy, but she held herself back, and instead told him to sit with her in the shade of a fig tree. There they spoke for seven hours, and though none know what they said, the sun set on Yesu's first Disciple.

The stories told of Yesu after that are many: how he recruited four fishers, a shepherd and a tax-collector, how he endured bloody beatings before converting the family that owned the plantation, how he performed miracles and how he refused to cut down trees or even strike another person, although he died by violence.

He was a peacemaker, a blasphemer, a troublemaker; by the end of his life those who did not forswear him escaped into the mountains, still holding his ravaged body. There they wandered for five days, with water dripping from the corpse's mouth, following the sun, until they found (and founded) the green and fruitful land of Ashur.

After they found Ashur, the Disciples split, each determined to spread Yesu's message throughout the world. The evangelical among them created their own churches, and all wrote accounts of Yesu's life as they knew it. These accounts were bound up with the others to create *the Book of Yesu*, the holy text of the Orthodoxy.

Since the death of the Second Prophet, the Orthodox have been losing faithful. In the current-day Crescent, only Ashur remains majority Orthodox, a patchwork of Cathedrals thrown together as a country retaining independence with the help of Anasheed Dīnists. In Théah, the Orthodox faithful remain the majority only in Ussura, though many Ashurite Orthodox consider the supposedly Yesu-focused "Ussuran Orthodox Church" to be uncomfortably similar to the Vaticine.

Orthodox Organization

Before the rise of the Vaticine and Al-Dīn, the Orthodox Church was simply called "the Church of the Prophet." Successor churches presented a challenge to nomenclature. Currently one who follows Yesu exclusively calls herself a member of the Orthodox Church of the Prophet (Orthodox for short) but historically speaking, that development is relatively new.

Amongst all Orthodox, the formal title for a priest is Reverend. Elohim and Abnegants use this term sparingly as most decisions regarding religious doctrine are made by consensus of a Council. Enclavests have as many types of rule as they do Enclaves, and those govern themselves individually.

After Yesu's death, nine of his Disciples founded their own Churches, each spreading their own particular interpretations of Yesu's teachings. Not all of those Churches survived to the present day, and none survived unchanged: the list of sects below presents the Churches as they exist currently, not as they once might have been.

Elohim Orthodox

Elohim believe the best thing a Disciple can do is live his life in strict imitation of Yesu. Thus Elohim Disciples live in tribes averaging 50 people (supposedly mimicking the 50 in the group that founded Ashur) and practice government via consensus therein. He is a pacifist, vegetarian, does not own property and refuses to chop down trees or handle money.

Abnegant Orthodox

Taking the philosophy of the Elohim even further, an Abnegant believes imitation of Yesu involves cherishing the world even in slavery. Thus, she binds herself as "a slave to a city," a service worker who can be pressed into service by any of the city's residents, for no price but food and a place to sleep at night.

Enclavest Orthodox

An Enclavest believes in creating a "Heaven Here Below," a glorious place for the children of Elohah to live and thrive. Like the Elohim, she stays suspicious of large-scale hierarchies of power: she believes that trying to impose a better world institutionally is clumsy at best and can be downright inhumane at worst. Instead, an Enclavest practitioner concentrates on building "Enclaves"—little personal paradises for her tribe. She believes that once every person has his own Enclave, Earth and Heaven will once again become one.

Ussuran Orthodox

The largest of the Orthodox Churches, the Ussuran Orthodox Tradition started by Yesu's Disciple Arseniy, took opposite position to the Enclavests: in the pursuit of a perfect world, even permanent hierarchy and aggressive violence could be justified. Of all the branches of Orthodoxy, it is the most controversial. A document co-written by four of the Disciples of Yesu called it "barely Orthodoxy" and accused Arseniy of designing the religion for affluent Numanari. Be that as it may, it is credited with spreading Yesu's particular Gnosticism across Théah.

Rituals

If the ritual life of an Orthodox worshipper seems familiar to a Vaticine, that is no accident. The Third Prophet deliberately patterned the Vaticine sacraments after those of the first Orthodox churches. However, the specifics differ: Orthodox Baptism, for instance, requires no examination, merely a profession of faith, and Orthodox Ordainment requires examination but no three-year deferment upon failure. Orthodox marriage oaths are simpler than those of the Vaticine, while Orthodox funeral services are traditionally far more elaborate, and last rites are themselves considered Orthodox sacraments.

Orthodox Mass, despite sharing a name with its Vaticine counterpart, is a very different affair. The Orthodox Church uses no sermons or homilies in collective worship. Instead, calendrical liturgy determines the content of the Mass. *The Book of Yesu* has 365 chapters and each day, Disciples read a different chapter, sing different hymns and say different prayers.

These services, pre-determined as they are, need not be led by clergy. Indeed, *the Book of Yesu* specifically encourages laypeople to alternate amongst themselves leading services, so that all might in time learn the Gospel. In theory, all Orthodox communities gather for Mass every day, but in practice, many merely gather on Sundays and abridge the liturgy of the previous week.

Sacred Symbols

In Orthodoxy, plants are sacred, land is sacred, growth is sacred. Scholars have noted that the two Nations with majority-Orthodox populations are also the two Nations where citizens have preternatural connections to their land. The Gospels say Yesu converted his first Disciple under a fig tree and was crucified on a cherry, thus the Orthodox hold those plants as particularly sacred. The fig, associated with new life, rebirth and wisdom, features prominently in coming-of-age ceremonies. Disciples identify the cherry with blood, beauty and mourning, and the stylized outline of a cherry bough is associated near-universally with Orthodoxy. The Orthodox traditionally give cherry boughs (live or paper) as funeral gifts.

Yachidi

No one knows how long the Yachidi have existed. Their ancient texts speak of a time before the recordings of the Katab people, when the tribes wandered the deserts of Sarmion and battled with their neighbors in the names of ancient spirits, worshiped as gods. United under Elohah's blessing, the originators forged a religion *b'yachad*, "together."

Main Tenets

Yachidi beliefs are deeply rooted in years of tradition. One of Terra's oldest religions, it is steeped in years of history and learning. While Yachidi religious tenets may have changed and modernized over the years, there are a few basic practices, which have remained a constant.

Adon Hu—"Master Is He"

The first rule of the Yachidi might seem simple, but underlies a fundamental difference between the Yachidi and others. All Yachidi believe Elohah is the one true Creator and master of the world, creating all other spirits and beings who have been worshipped as gods the world over. Though other Nations may worship other beings as deities, it is *assur*, "religiously forbidden," to recognize any other deity above Elohah.

Lishmor V'Lehagen—"Preserve and Protect"

The first generation of the Yachidi may have heard the voice of Elohah through the forefather Abram and his wife Saraya, but it was not until the establishment of the Covenant of the Longest Night and their rededicating themselves wholly to Elohah that they received his full message. There, at the foot of Mount Moriah, they learned their primary goal was *lishmor v'lehagen haolam b'yachad*: "Preserve and protect the world, together." This guiding tenet charges the Yachidi as caretakers of the world forevermore, tasked to help seek peace and better the world on both the smallest and largest scales. From the word b'yachad, together, they chose the term Yachidi to denote the religion and the people as a whole.

Koach B'Ruach V'Neshek—"Strength of Spirit and Arms"

Teachings say Elohah initially reached out to the Yachidi to help bring peace and protection to the world. And while ideally that peace could be found through diplomacy, communication and compassion, a Yachidi is not a pacifist. He understands life must often be protected through *koach v'neshek*, "strength of arms," as well as strength of spirit. The rules of engagement for the Yachidi state one may act in violence only in defense of one's own life or the lives of others. The Yachidi only make *milchamat tzadik*, "righteous war," and do not take the use of violence lightly. That said, once engaged, a Yachidi is a ferocious *chayal*, "soldier," (plural *chayalim*) for her Nation and for what is right.

Kol Haolam HaKodesh—"The Whole World Is Sacred"

Since Elohah created the world, the Yachidi believe everything within it is sacred and connected. The Yachidi recognize all people possess two major parts: a material body, called a *guph*, and a spiritual being known as the *nephesh*. This spiritual understanding allows the Yachidi to see unseen, supernatural forces as just an extension of the spiritual world and therefore a natural part of Elohah's creation. This tenet recognizes and encompasses a few important beliefs.

Kesem, Lo Tishkach—"Do Not Forget Magic"

This tenet both reminds a Yachidi of magic and its place in the natural order as well as its inherent danger if misused. Since he considers spiritual power just as sacred and natural as any other force in the world, he embraces sorcery as normal. He believes the fear and hatred of magic has caused more damage in the world and seeks instead to understand it fully. Yet with that understanding comes a warning not to fall into using magic too much, or for selfish or harmful purposes.

The Yachidi are forbidden from creating life with magic or animating inanimate objects or the dead, as the power over life and death is much too powerful a burden for a human and belongs to Elohah alone.

Atta V'Ani, B'Yachad—"You and I, Together"
The Yachidi believe every religion and group has a place as part of Elohah's design. The Yachidi therefore respect all religious practices and faiths. It is assur to prosthelytize in an effort to gain more Yachidi. One who wishes to convert must come to the faith herself, and religious teachers must attempt to dissuade her three times, teaching her about the immense responsibility of living to serve the world in Elohah's name. Once a person converts however, the Yachidi celebrate her as a new member of the family.

Tariyag—"The Six Hundred and Thirteen"
Should a person choose to become part of the Yachidi, he learns the 613 laws, rules that regulate everything from how a Yachidi dresses to what he eats and when he prays. These laws keep a Yachidi in balance between spirit and flesh and in constant, joyous remembrance of Elohah's role in his life.

The laws that are assur are the most severe, and Moesh ben Amram codified them after he led the Yachidi enslaved by the Numanari during the First Invasion back to Sarmion. These Stone Commandments, written on heavy tablets, established the most serious dos and don'ts of their faith. They include recognizing only Elohah as god, worshipping no other false gods and keeping the last day of the week as a Sabbath to reconnect with one's community and family, as well as with Elohah.

Should a person breach the laws, he must undergo a period of atonement called *teshuva*. One atoning must not only seek to fix the damage he has done, but must also travel to the High Temple in Salemoria and offer up an animal sacrifice before the new year celebration. The animal's death symbolically atones for the sin, while the meat feeds both the priests and then the poor in the city.

History

The history of the Yachidi inextricably ties back to the history of their homeland, Sarmion. The origins of the religion date back to hundreds of years before the coming of the First Prophet, during a time when bloody religious conflict raged between warring tribes and the powerful local spirits they called gods. These battles might have wiped out everyone in the region had one pair of leaders not stepped forward.

Abram and Saraya
Abram and his wife Saraya, a wealthy couple of the tribe of Tahor, worshipped the goddess Naana-Astarte. They had seen decades of fighting under the bloody goddess and yearned for their land to see peace. So, when they both began to dream of a voice, calling them out to the southern desert of Gilead, they left their tribe with their servants, spouses and children and sought a new path.

In the desert Abram and Saraya are said to have heard the voice of Elohah, the Creator of all. Elohah said if they and their descendants dedicated themselves to serving the world as protectors and guardians of peace, they would become the parents of a Nation who would impact the world. Abram and Saraya walked out of the desert and taught the message of Elohah to their household. Soon others flocked to hear their message and their ranks swelled as a new religion was born.

The Covenant of the Longest Night
The Covenant was as much a religious battle as it was a war for control over a country. The old gods of the land who resented the new ideas of Elohah's worshippers drove their followers to attack the Yachidi en masse when Abram was one hundred and twenty years old. Abram's eldest son by Saraya named Isaak, and Ishamal, son of Abram and his second wife Hagar, led their people to defeat the tribes and bind the gods until a covenant could be established.

Ishamal and Isaak parted in the dawn after establishing the Covenant of the Longest Night not as enemies, but brothers, a bond that ties the tribes of the Yachidi and the worshippers of the old gods together forevermore. As a result, the followers of the old gods, led by Ishamal, continued their practices in peace. They named themselves the Ishamali in reverence for the brother who led them to a new life.

Salemoria, the Birthright and the High Temple
In the generations that followed, the Yachidi followed Isaak and his prophetic visions to prosperity as they grew into a new religion and Nation. It was Isaak's son Yakob who led his people to settle the abandoned city of Salemoria, high on the summit of Mount Moriah in the center of the country. The Yachidi not only began building a government for

their developing Nation but set down to codify the religious practices that later became the 613 laws of the Yachidi. Yedhu received the kingship of Sarmion and acted as secular leader of the land, while Levis, the pious daughter who inherited her forefather's power of prophecy, became the first high priestess of the religion. Together, Levis and Yedhu promised to build a High Temple in Salemoria, a spiritual center where the Yachidi could come to bring atonement sacrifices, celebrate holy days and immerse themselves in spiritual contemplation. Those plans had to wait, however, when Numanari invaders slaughtered Yedhu.

Destruction of the Temple

In recent years, the destruction of the High Temple by the Numanari in 1665 has brought about a troubling issue. The Sanhedrin, the religious court of the land, is not allowed by law to vote on religious laws until a High Temple can oversee the cases. When Numa put the High Temple to the torch, it essentially froze the religion in time. Unable to change any laws, the Yachidi fear their laws may become static in the face of a world making such great strides towards a modern, vibrant future.

Organization

The Yachidi religious hierarchy has two main branches, the Priesthood of the Temple and the Teachers of the Land. The priest, called a *leviat,* is born of the tribe of Levis and raised from a young age to serve in the High Temple. He leads prayers in the Temple halls, lights the holy *menorah*, an eight-armed candelabra symbolizing the light of Elohah across the eight great seas of the world and uses his prophetic abilities and magic to help the people who visit seeking aid. Only members of the tribe of Levis can become leviats, and those who do not become priests instead become laypersons who take care of the priests and the temple.

The spiritual center of Yachidi practice is the High Temple. All Yachidi must make a pilgrimage once a year on the new year to make sacrifices of atonement and celebrate Elohah's blessings. Yet with Yachidi spread all across Sarmion and beyond, it became impractical to expect people to travel to the Temple constantly. And so the Yachidi established a second class of spiritual leaders, the *rebbeim (*singular *rebbe)*, Teachers.

These teachers study the laws and beliefs of the Yachidi and travel the land, settling in all communities of Yachidi to offer counsel and guidance to the people. Each rebbe followed the religious edicts set down by the priests of the temple, but received encouragement to question and explore ethical quandaries and ideas. Whole schools of thought erupted around rebbeim who challenged the laws and considered new ways to serve Elohah.

Any decisions that must be made on religious law for the entire country go before the *Sanhedrin*, a body of the greatest rebbeim in the land. Appointed for life, a rebbe must reach the ripe old age of forty before she can be considered for a seat. The Sanhedrin ponder religious questions and update laws as new technologies and discoveries become available, keeping Yachidi practice as a living, evolving body of faith. That is, until the last Sanhedrin was murdered by the Numanari and has yet to be reconvened.

The Chavra

Part militia and part religious defense order, the Chavra was initially created by Princess Ruth and her general Barak M'Shevet Raam in their attempt to overthrow the invasion of the Numanari. While Ruth's mother, Queen Elisheva, fought the Numanari from the fortress of Haritza in the Gilead desert, Ruth was liberated from slavery and smuggled back into Sarmion. There she and Barak formed the militant arm of the religion, a warrior force intent on taking on any threat to the Yachidi and, by extension, Sarmion as a whole.

Ruth and Barak became the template for the Chavra's leadership, with Ruth as the tactical mastermind and Barak the powerful warrior. They brought on a third, Dvora bat Hana M'Shevet Ben-Ephraya, a legal and religious scholar who acted as spiritual council for the organization in its infancy. These three roles became the structure of Chavra leadership going forward, always with a triumvirate of a tactical leader, a warrior general and an arbiter and spiritual guide. Together, the three make all the decisions, acting in concert to point the Chavra towards their next mission.

In the years since the Numanari invasion, the Chavra has grown from a small rebel force into the guardians of Sarmion. Elite warriors, investigators

and bodyguards, the Chavra keep an eye on any danger to the Yachidi people both within the Crescent Empire and beyond. An agent travels everywhere, often masquerading as a simple traveler, hiding his martial proficiency until forced to act. A Chavra agent therefore makes an excellent spy, though he repents often the need for subterfuge and lying. What he does, he does to protect his people.

Due to their fearsome reputation, the Chavra are often employed by the imperial royal family. The old emperor had a contingent of Chavra warriors in his employ before his death, and Emperor Istani kept those soldiers as hostages to his court, depriving Sarmion of their skill during the last Numanari invasion. The last of the Chavra, dispatched to Princess Batya's aid by her father King Josiah, helped Empress Safiye retake her throne. Their absence left the king unprotected, and his death at Numanari hands left a painful stain of shame on the organization, a shame many Chavra believe deserves atonement.

Peace and Destruction and the Diaspora

The rest of the Yachidi history is largely tied to the history of Sarmion and its constant cycle of peaceful rebuilding and devastation at the hands of their ancient enemy, the Numanari. The Numanari came and savaged the land several times, carrying off slaves and occupying the land. Yet every time, the Yachidi remain stalwart in their practice, embracing the effort to make the world a better place.

That effort to make the world better leads a Yachidi to leave Sarmion and even go beyond the borders of the Crescent Empire to explore new communities. There she settles among the population and eagerly learns and shares ideas with open hands and hearts. Those interactions have met with mixed results, ranging from open appreciation and welcome to distrust and even violence.

A Yachidi's acceptance of magic sets him directly at odds with the Vaticine Church and Dīnists, especially those fanatical in their need to control or destroy magic such as the Inquisition. The Yachidi see the destruction of any lives to quash magic as an affront to Elohah, and many have become involved in rescuing persecuted sorcerers in places like Persis and Vodacce, smuggling them to safety in Sarmion or in Yachidi communities worldwide.

1000 Silken Cords: Government, Military and Law

The Crescent Empire is a collection of mighty Nations and tribes welded together by the iron will of Empress Safiye who rules from her throne in Iskandar. While each Nation, tribe and people of the empire have their own government, laws and customs, all rally to the empress' banner in times of crisis and provide for the common defense during external invasions. Individual Nations and tribes may disagree with the empress' policies, but her word is final in all matters concerning the empire as a whole.

The ultimate goal of the imperial government is to maintain the "Circle of Equity," or sacred balance, between the imperial government and its subject peoples. The Circle has existed as long as the empire and is etched in gold on the floor of every government building throughout the realm.

The Circle consists of eight simple precepts:

The good garden lives, but with the grace of the bugs,
There can be no imperial authority
without the military.

Feeding upon the leaves,
There can be no military without taxes.

Fell from a great tree, one with the ground.
Taxes are generated by the people.

The good gardener tends his bed carefully.
The ruler protects the people by ensuring justice.

Not to trample the earth's bounty underfoot,
Justice requires a harmonious society.

Aware of the world just beyond his walls.
A harmonious society is a garden;
its walls are the state.

The good sun shines upon the garden
The state is sustained by religion.

And the good gardener basks in its glory.
Religion is supported by imperial authority.

The Throne's Power

Empress Safiye is the single most powerful individual in the empire. All imperial law flows from her will. As the supreme religious authority, she speaks with the voice of the Creator and is the commander-in-chief of the imperial military.

The empress has been busy since her ascent to the throne. She has abolished the strict caste system, dismantled her brother's registry of sorcerers, discontinued the law of fratricide, initiated civic and military reforms on a massive scale and has taken a much more public role in government than her predecessors (much to the chagrin of many traditionalists). The empress has given her subject Nations ten years to implement her decrees, and woe to those who fail to realize her vision.

Traditional empresses rule from deep within the confines of the royal palace, the Fatih Sarayı (Conqueror's Palace), surrounded by ceremony and shrouded in mystery. Empress Safiye has chosen to break with this tradition and makes herself much more accessible to her court and her people.

The Imperial Divan

The Divan is an 11-member cabinet composed of the most formidable grandees in the empire. The Grand Vizier assembles the Divan four days a week in his palace of government in Iskandar, where they discuss relevant matters of state and decide policy. Their decisions are dutifully recorded by scribes and delivered to the empress by the Grand Vizier for her final approval. The empress is by no means bound to accept the Divan's decisions, but a wise empress does not casually discard her advisors' counsel.

Of late, the empress has begun to take a more direct interest in the day-to-day affairs of state and chairs the weekly meetings of the Divan herself (much to the chagrin of the Grand Vizier).

The Imperial Harems

Few aspects of the empire epitomize its unique mixture of sensuality, exoticism and the forbidden more than the imperial harem. Many a poet has scratched out sultry descriptions of the decadence of the empress' harem and the perfumed beauties that lazily inhabit its environs. The harem's pleasures are forbidden to all but its mistress and violating its sanctity courts death at the hands of a hard-eyed eunuch.

The poets' descriptions are not entirely inaccurate, but fail to mention one important aspect—the harem is first and foremost a private place for the partners of the Sultana, their children and their servants. Like everything else in the empire the harem is built on the foundation of family and provides romantic partners for the Sultana. It serves the vital purpose of helping to perpetuate the dynasty and is also the backdrop for much political intrigue.

There are two harems, "black" for women and "white" for men (corresponding to the traditional color of their veils). While no tradition bars the empress from sampling members of each harem, the ascendant harem is always the one opposite from the present ruler's gender to emphasize the importance of maintaining the imperial line. A Harem Stewardess runs the black harem while the "White Eunuch" runs the white harem. Each bears the easily recognized fur-lined robes, bejeweled headdress and silver mace of office.

The leader of the ascendant harem becomes Chief of the Harems and sits on the Imperial Divan. The present Chief Eunuch is the White Eunuch, Bomani Chike, a native Ifrian whose massive frame conceals the patience and cunning of a lion stalking its prey. A staunch supporter of the empress, no intrigue escapes his notice, no treachery his retribution.

Perhaps more powerful than even the Chief Eunuch is the Valide Sultan or empress' mother. A master of the Art of the Second Prophet, she sits spider-like in lavishly appointed apartments at the heart of the harem and wields influence far beyond her official station. It is whispered the Valide Sultan's loyalties waver between the empress, Safiye's siblings or the shade of her son Istani. Few can predict her decision, but Terra will tremble when she makes it.

Children of the ruler sequester in different parts of the harem to prevent overly enthusiastic parents from arranging "accidents" for their children's rivals. Rumors claim that some desperate parents even resort to elaborate charms or foul necromancy to defend their child's stake. Intra-harem intrigue and secret trysts are rife on the best of days, but outright attempts at assassination have decreased dramatically with the empress' abandonment of the Law of Fratricide.

The Grand Vizier

Second in authority only to the empress herself, the Grand Vizier holds her royal seal and runs the day-to-day affairs of the empire. The vast powers of the Grand Vizier include the appointment of personnel to the military and bureaucracy, maintaining civic order in Iskandar and commanding the military in the event the empress chooses not to lead the army herself. He receives all foreign ambassadors and chairs sessions of the Divan in the empress' absence.

The position of Grand Vizier has always been perilous; the life of a Vizier is measured by the mirth (or lack thereof) of the empress. Mehmed Ali Pasha, the present Grand Vizier, hopes to reverse this trend, having survived the empress' father, brother and, Prophet willing, Empress Safiye. Mehmed has a razor wit and keen mind honed in the finest palace schools. He spends his leisure hours playing chess and admiring exotic birds in his water garden, but Mehmed's enemies whisper of an unhealthy fascination with Syrneth artifacts.

Mehmed has observed the empress closely and is increasingly disturbed by what he sees. A staunch traditionalist, he believes her reforms may ultimately destroy the empire. Loyal to his position and his people, Mehmed has been content to worriedly contemplate the empress' new liberal policies. He seeks to find the former conservative Emperor Istani in the 8th Sea, believing the young man did not perish as many assumed, but still survives, gathering power to overthrow his sister.

Foreign Ambassadors

The Grand Vizier receives foreign ambassadors to the imperial court in his opulently appointed palace of government located just west of the Fatih Sarayı. All ambassadors ultimately seek to obtain a "capitulation" or treaty with the empire granting important trade rights, reduced taxes and protection from "privateers" sailing under the imperial banner. Competition is intense, and Iskandar's foreign quarter is rife with intrigue.

All Théan Nations have representatives in Iskandar, but Ludovico Attendolo Bernoulli is easily the most prestigious. As wealthy as he is cunning, Ludovico and his young Fate Witch bride, Lucia, employ praise and poison in equal measure to maintain Vodacce's favored position with the Crescent government.

Ludovico's most enthusiastic rival is Comtesse Amandine Gautier of Montaigne. Amandine, an unrepentant libertine, possesses a feral cunning matched only by her voracious appetite for Crescent masculinity. She seeks to claim favored Nation status for Montaigne in order to launch a joint Montaigne-Crescent invasion of Castille. Amandine's most persistent gadfly beyond Ludovico is the Castillian ambassador, Esteban dela Rosa de Odiseo. A staunch Vaticine, his dogged determination, unshakable sense of honor and skill with a sword have slowly but surely begun to win him allies at court. He would give his life to save his people, and Amandine has every intention of seeing that happen.

Esteban found an ally in Sir Jack Harding, the Avalonian ambassador. One of Queen Elaine's most trusted knights, Jack has become a favored fixture in the empress' court. A man with a deep moral code and sense of duty, Sir Harding chafed against Istani's rule. When he got word from his allies in Théah that the rightful empress was returning, he knew he must act for sake of the empire. By smuggling half of Safiye's Chavra guard into the palace right before the coup, he ensured the empress won a decisive victory.

Now, Jack is again caught in the middle of political schemes. Esteban is a just man, and the people of Castille deserve liberty, but how can Jack help him without implicating Avalon?

The Three Branches of the Imperial Government

Below the empress and her Divan are the Bureaucracy, Military and Judicial branches.

The Imperial Bureaucracy

The Imperial Bureaucracy, a vast collection of scribes, accountants and administrators, maintains the day-to-day functioning of the empire. Broadly divided between the Imperial Administration and Financial Officers, no aspect of life in the empire escapes their influence.

The Imperial Administration, comprised of an army of bureaucrats, maintains the machinery of state, while Imperial Financial Officers guarantee that no activity escapes taxation. The empire can overlook many sins, but tax evasion is certainly not one of them.

The Imperial Military

The Crescent war machine is fearsome to behold and more than capable of rivaling the best Théah has to offer. Disciplined, well-equipped and devoted to their empress, the imperial military exemplifies the Crescent philosophy of "many Nations, one empire."

The Palace Guard

The elite *bostanci*, or "gardener," bodyguard division defends the empress. Lead by the *bostancibasi*, the bostanci manage the security of the imperial palace, maintenance of its grounds and defense of the empress and her family. Their reputation for ferocity is legendary, and only the suicidal challenges them lightly. The present bostancibasi, Altan Demir Pasha, is a nigh unstoppable Sarmion Chavra warrior, relentless in the defense of his charge.

The Standing Army

In addition to the palace guard, the Crescent Empire maintains a formidable standing army of cavalry and infantry. The *pala* (cavalry) arm of the imperial military composes of four divisions of lavishly over-equipped horseriders culled from the elite families of the empire. A fearsome sight to behold, the pala defends the empire with fanatic zeal. The pala regiments take great pride in their record of unquestioned loyalty to the throne and suffer no small rivalry

NUMA AND THE CRESCENT EMPIRE

Numa and the Crescent Empire have a long, complicated history with one another. Numa has attacked and invaded Sarmion, and subsequently empire, numerous times throughout the centuries. The empire often retaliated in order to protect what it had. This ultimately resulted in the Crescent Empire occupying Numa for a large part of recent history. Now, these two great powers must decide if they will forget the scars of the past or if they wish to open old wounds.

between their Janissary counterparts whose record has been less consistent.

Legendary for their deadly accuracy and discipline under fire, the Janissaries comprise the infantry might of the standing army. Recognizable by their distinctive white hats and lavish attire, the Janissaries mostly come from war orphans or from families who sell their children into indentured servitude to escape poverty. Trained in the palace schools of Iskandar, promoted by meritocracy and equipped from state arsenals, the Janissaries comprise one of the most highly disciplined military formations on Terra. They have a dedicated host of armorers, water bearers, medics and artillery, and bear rifles that have both greater range and accuracy than their Théan counterparts.

Traditional Janissary discipline, harsh to the point of brutality, strictly forbade marriage, participation in trades and all vice. Safiye has eased many of these restrictions and opened the ranks of the Janissaries to external volunteers from all walks of Crescent society. Traditionalists within the Janissaries question the empress' judgment, but only time will tell if these reforms will erode their loyalty.

In addition to her standing armies in Anatol Ayh, the empress can summon a formidable array of levy units. From the Imperial navy, to Alwarithlı pirate mercenaries, to warrior forces from any Nation under her control, the Imperial war machine is a fearsome sight to behold.

Provincial Administration

The subject Nations of the empire are divided into a patchwork of imperial provinces or *eyalets* for purposes of taxation and administration. Each province is assigned a *bey* who manages a household of administrators and functionaries to maintain accurate records and assess taxes, a host of servants and a garrison of Janissaries for security. While a bey has the authority of the empress behind him, he allows the subject Nation of the empire to administer its own affairs as long as it obeys the empress' dictates, pays its taxes on time and fills the empire's muster rolls in time of war.

The Imperial Judiciary

The imperial judiciary is composed of *qada* (judges, singular *qadi*) that administer law and jurisprudence throughout the realm. She receives a superlative education in the law schools of Iskandar and is well versed in the religious, secular and tribal laws of the empire. Bribery and corruption are not unheard of, but frequent rotations and the threat of public dishonor (or death by strangulation) keep the judiciary reasonably impartial. Qada attempt to render decisions using local law when possible, but conflicts are always resolved in favor of imperial courts over local custom. Paired with each qadi, a *mufti* (religious advisor) ensures that the qadi's decisions abide by the tenants of al-Dīn.

While this system of checks and balances works well in theory, it has also led to occasional (and sometimes legendary) confrontations between the qada and mufti like the conflict between Qadi Tadashi ibn Barris and Mufti Asil Mansoorzadeh. Tadashi, the qadi appointed to a prominent eyalet in Persis, is loyal to Empress Safiye's vision of the empire. Asil staunchly defends Persis' faith, culture and shah. Their confrontations in the courtroom have become legendary, culminating in rumors that Asil called Tadashi a "backwards devil beast birthed of an inbred goat," and it is only be a matter of time before silken words turn to blows.

While the system administers justice as swiftly as possible, appeals, failures to procure witnesses, court backlogs and the dizzying bureaucracy of the empire tie up more complex cases for months, if not years. In such cases, a plaintiff or defendant can incite the

"judgment of al-Musawwir" and challenge her opponent to trial by combat.

In addition to the imperial court system, the Crescent judicial system recognizes a series of local courts that administer law in non-Dīnist communities. Vaticine, Orthodox, Yasnavan and Yachidi courts are recognized by the empire and are allowed to render judgments within their own communities as long as they pay a *jizya* (worship tax) proportional to their ability to pay. The imperial judiciary recognizes these decisions, and appeals from these courts can be processed upward through the imperial system, which renders its verdict using the law of the individual community as it understands it.

INDENTURED SERVITUDE

Slavery is forbidden and carries a death sentence, but indentured servitude is perfectly legal. A citizen can sell herself or her children into indentured servitude, often the only option for the ultra-poor seeking a better life in the households of the wealthy or ranks of the Janissaries. All contracts for indentured servitude require formal recognition, notification and certification by a qadi with the empire taking a fifth of the price of the servant's contract. Abuse of an indentured servant carries strict penalties. An indentured servant goes free upon fulfillment of her contract or the death of her debtor.

Legal System

"Let the oppressed have appeal to law, stand before my sacred pillar and read its inscription aloud by light of day where the fire of our creator's justice will lift the veil of iniquity from his eyes."
—Inscription from the Code of Shamash-tal

The legal system of the empire is legendary for its unique admixture of equality and brutality. Forged of a complex fusion of the religious tenets of al-Dīn, the secular laws of the empire's founder and the sacred codes of the ancient king Shamash-tal, the laws of the Crescent Empire are as diverse as the people it governs.

The cornerstone of Crescent law is equality.

While the Crescent legal system has achieved a nigh-astonishing level of bureaucratization, it is designed to treat everyone equally, paying special attention to the plight of the poor and children, who receive special protection under the law.

Civil Law

The empire has an extremely elaborate body of civil law that most Théans could never navigate without a trained attorney. Contracts can be drawn up for almost anything, and breach of contract requires payment in kind for services rendered or goods lost.

Lawsuits can be brought between citizens of the empire for almost any reason, but frivolous suits can result in fines or loss of honor making them unattractive at best. Perhaps the greatest penalty under civil law is to be forced into indentured servitude for failure to pay a debt. The empire does not maintain debtors' prisons and this system allows the indenture to survive under the roof of his new master, while working in a productive fashion to pay off his obligation.

Criminal Law

Criminal law and punishment in the empire are almost uniquely harsh. Minor offenses are often handled by public humiliation. This typically involves having the offender swallow a stone tied to a string, after which an official jerks it out with no small enthusiasm. The violent vomiting this inspires is met with no small scorn from passers-by. False witnesses are seated on donkeys, drenched in bull's blood and paraded around the local market for all to see, while a dishonest merchant has his ear nailed to his market stall. An equally creative array of punishments awaits a thief, including: beating her feet until she cannot walk, cutting off a hand or even plucking out an eye.

More serious crimes like adultery, burglary, treason, rape and murder are all executable offenses.

Piracy

Piracy of an imperial vessel is punishable by death, but permission to pirate non-imperial vessels can be purchased from the government for a nominal fee in addition to a 10% tax on all goods seized during the voyage. Capitulation agreements between the empire and foreign governments can stipulate immunity from Crescent-authorized pirates, but require payment of an additional anti-piracy fee on an annual basis.

Marriage

Citizens may have up to four spouses by law, but multiple spouses tend to be limited to wealthy families, due to its expense, or to the Tribes of the 8th Sea. A licensed marriage scout or *gorucu* is often employed to haunt the bazaars, baths and significant gathering spots to locate an ideal mate for her charge prior to initiating the elaborate courtship rituals that ultimately culminate in marriage.

The state plays a relatively little role in the marriage, but does require the families to request permission from the local qadi in addition to recording the names of the couple and the amount of any dowry paid (predominantly to set the couple's tax bracket).

Imperial law permits divorce if a declaration is made and the couple abstains from sexual relations with each other for three months, after which the divorce is irrevocable. Grounds for divorce include failure to provide financially for a spouse, neglect, mutual consent or if the right to divorce was specified in the marriage contract.

Magic

While Empress Safiye has dismantled her brother's magic registration program, employing sorcery for evil is still a capital offense that requires the offender to be burned alive at dawn in addition to seeing his family name blackened for the next ten generations.

Civility and Honor

The Crescent Empire has many ways for brave souls to face death. Daring the blazing 8th Sea without seeking a guide among its Tribes. Facing down pirates off the coast of Anatol Ayh. Hunting Assassins across the rooftops in Ashur. Death is no small thing. But for the ignorant, countless roads lead to a fate worse than death: dishonor.

Kindness and Hospitality

To welcome others with kindness is a literal religious tenet for the major faiths of the Empire. Whether a Dīnist, Yachidi, Orthodox or a Yasnavan, faithful in the Crescent Empire see it as a duty to welcome guests with kindness and civility. Offering home or hostel to a visitor is to offer him rest and relief from the strains of the road. It offers him protection.

This carries with it certain obligations, from both guest and host. A guest violating these obligations gravely insults his host and immediately ends the host's duty to protect her guest. Luckily, Alwarithlı give a foreigner a little leeway due to his ignorance of local customs. Hosts commonly intervene, calming offended locals with reminders of the newcomer's ignorance, quietly explaining the faux pas to the visitor and suggesting a means to make amends.

A host violating his obligations means a grave loss of respect. A poor host may heap verbal insults on a guest, but a guest who reacts with patience rather than striking back in kind not only gains honor herself but causes her host to lose face. These ties of obligation extend into public life: the responsibility of those in authority extends to those under them, be it employers and employees or nobles and servants.

Whether a private home, or in public, hosts greet guests with a traditional blessing of peace, or *salaam*, in Katabic. "Salaam. Peace be upon you as you rest under this roof."

Among Crescents it is quite rude to intentionally exclude another Crescent by shifting the conversation to a language she does not know. Excluding non-Crescents is not nearly as impolite, in part because of the lack of familiarity most have with Katabic or any other language of the Crescent Empire. In fact, many Crescents expect a certain amount of rudeness and uncouth behavior from Théans and other outsiders.

Respect and Family

Respect and family are cornerstones of Crescent society. Everyone is owed proper respect according to the teachings of the Second Prophet, because humankind is one massive tribe. Family may quarrel among themselves, but no one else can raise a hand or voice against your family.

Those in authority receive the respect due to a parent, the first authority any Crescent knows. When seeking the advice of experts, one gives respect as though they were elder uncles and aunts, whose wisdom is to be cherished and only questioned with respect... and in private. Peers and friends receive the respect of siblings, that is to say with mutual respect and honesty. To sing the praises of your comrades and relatives shows filial piety. To sing your own praises exposes hubris.

Honesty must be balanced with respect. To declare your friend a liar in public or make a lewd comment about her sexual escapades, even in jest, calls her integrity into question among listeners. To do so in private is another matter, as the truest of friends are brothers and sisters chosen by the heart, while blood siblings are given by al-Musawwir.

Among lesser acquaintances, words must be weighed with care. Rather than say "you are lying!" or "that is false," it is safer to imply a mistake rather than dishonesty. "I must have misheard you" or "Perhaps you are confusing me with someone else?" To accuse someone openly of dishonesty, impropriety or Villainy can lead to duels of blades or worse, words.

The family forms the core of all relationships in the Crescent Empire. The nuclear family of parents and children is a closely held bond. It is no surprise that many of the Nations of the Empire have traditions to grant children a surname based on their parents' names. Omar's daughter, Yasmin, is called Yasmin bint Omar (Yasmin daughter of Omar). The extended family (uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, third cousins, basically any level of relationship by blood, marriage or even ancestral claims) is equally sacred. Family is a part of you, a part of where you come from and what you can become. Insulting a man's family insults him, for they are a part of him. Questioning a woman's modesty questions the honor of the whole family, not to mention bringing her children's relationship to her extended family into doubt.

Honor and Name

Honor is highly prized in the Crescent Empire. While the duelists and Heroes to the west certainly know of Théan honor, in the Empire of the Crescent Moon, honor is more valuable than gold and as fluid as water. Words said in haste, deeds done without care, can all tarnish a good name. Worse, it can ruin the names of loved ones.

In the courts, judges give extra weight to the testimony of someone with a good reputation. If a merchant in good standing accuses a soldier of heinous acts, the soldier may find herself forced to prove her honor *before* she can prove her innocence. In the market, a merchant offers visitors with great social standing his best wares. However, a disreputable customer may be told, "My shop holds nothing worthy of your name." A perfectly phrased insult to those who understand the art of Alwarithlı conversation.

Honor may be won and regained as surely as it can be lost. Honesty and cleverness. Courage and prudence. Generosity and moderation. These virtues when practiced in balance with one another can erase the shame of misdeeds that came before.

A dishonest man is never trusted. A man who lacks wits is never taken seriously. But if a Hero speaks with both honesty and wit? Who sees clearly enough to navigate the web of words and schemes of her enemies? That Hero's honor will certainly grow and her shame will fade like shadows before the dawn.

Likewise, an Alwarithlı sneers at a coward for not standing against adversity as much she mocks a rash fool for diving headlong into disaster ruled by his unbridled passions. She who stands in spite of fear, and who tempers passion with good sense, gains the respect of others.

A View of Decorum

The customs above are common across the Crescent Empire, and following them certainly aids a traveler in keeping out of unintended trouble. However, each Nation of the Empire has its own unique variations on the art of decorum. A wise person would do well to learn something of each land's traditions of honor.

Anatol Ayh

More so than any other Nation of the Crescent Empire, Anatol Ayh holds to the tenets of equality and egalitarianism. To accuse or imply that someone abuses her authority or position ranks among the highest of insults in Anatol Ayh. As the center of the empress' power, such accusations are dangerous, as both private duels and the mufti courts can bring down punishment for unproven slanders. That being said, exposing when an Anatoli abuses power is something of a zealous duty among the true believers in the empire's legal system.

Religion is also a deeply important part of Anatoli pride and honor, especially the Dīnist concept *al-Badīʿ*, the mtoment of divine union between Creator and creation as an artist of any art form completes his masterwork. Artistic skill inspires respect and honor, as does the appreciation and protection of art. An adventurer diving back into a burning building after evacuating the children may look to the outsider as madness, but to see him emerge from the smoke and fire cradling the beautiful carving the children's grandmother had left them causes the Anatoli heart to sing.

Ashur

Ashur is a Nation of Orthodox farmers of great skill and Assassin warriors of renown. While this may appear to be a contradiction, given the pacifism preached and practiced by the Orthodox and Anasheed, Ashurites coexist harmoniously by and large.

To seek or use violence first or without absolute need shows a disregard for the greatest, most beautiful gift Elohah has given: life. Not to mention any such threat is likely to be met with swift action by the Anasheed, or even the Assassins. To accuse an Ashurite of cowardice for not fighting displays only ignorance of the culture of Ashur and further lowers your honor in her eyes.

Showing respect to the great trees of this flowering Nation raises your standing in the eyes of an Ashurite. Trees, though strong and firm, can bend in the wind to avoid breaking. To respect and imitate these qualities is to learn something of what it means to be of Ashur and brings you the esteem of that Nation.

Persis

In part due to the strict regulations of magic and class under the shah, Persic society holds a particularly perilous set of social rules for the unwary. The old rivalry between Anatol Ayh and Persis over the leadership of the Crescent Empire is especially sharp among the ruling class. Mentioning the empress' decade time limit to do away with the rigid system of class and magic divisions likely gains you looks ranging from annoyance to rage while in genteel Persic company.

It should be noted that despite this rivalry, Persis has as great an artistic tradition as Anatol Ayh, especially in the art of calligraphy. Skill with and appreciation of this art can be a way to gain standing among the artistic souls of the country.

Sarmion

A Nation of pious scholars, Sarmion is a land apart from its Dīnist neighbors. The people here respect knowledge as it is in few places in Terra. Gambling life and limb to safeguard knowledge is a quick, though dangerous, way to gain solid friends and great honor in Sarmion.

Within Sarmion, the Yachidi prize academic and theological debate as a skill. Knowledge, after all, must be understood, not simply memorized. To consider the arguments of another and to offer your own views in respectful discourse is much like the creation of a poem with two voices and two poets. An able mind and gifted speech are much admired among these scholarly folk. The traditional support of this Nation for the leadership of Anatol Ayh also touches on honor in Sarmion. Showing disrespect to the empress would as likely land you in a group of angry young soldiers as it would lead to a duel in Anatol Ayh.

Tribes of the 8th Sea

Family is important to all the peoples of the Crescent Empire, but the Tribes of the 8th Sea are living extensions of their great ancestors. Any insults toward a Tribesperson's family, whether nuclear or extended, living or dead, are met with vehement anger to a greater extent than elsewhere in the empire.

The honor of human members of the tribes and clans is not the only sensitive topic, but so is the reputation of the herds used by the Tribes. The horses and camels of the Tribes of the 8th Sea are the lifeblood of their desert-dwelling existence. The Tribes owe their lives to their pack and riding animals.

To call the horse of Ibrahim ibn Ali al-Hisan (from the Tribe of the Horse), for example, a poorly bred beast or of low value would cause the tribesperson to rise to the animal's defense, by word, sword or a pointed contest to demonstrate the superior quality of horse and rider alike.

Creatures of the Sands

Of Beasts and Fire

The Crescent Empire is filled with a great many sights from the endless dunes of the 8th Sea to the cavernous mountains of Persis. The creatures inhabiting these great sights are no less fantastic.

The jinn, terrifying and wonderful, permeate all levels of Alwarithlı society. The Persic people refer to them as angels and demons. Sarmions call them the old gods and in the 8th Sea, the Tribes worship them as current gods. No matter what mortals call them, jinn have their own way of organizing themselves, their own culture and their own customs. What the mortals wish to call them matters not, for all the schemes and tributes they demand from those who worship them, a far more important struggle happens within their ranks.

Set among the politics of humans and spirits are the creatures of the sands. Creatures of wonder and delight, terror and dread. Adults tell their tales to terrify children and warn them: life far from civilization is dangerous. If the perils of the desert do not get you, the Gōčihr surely will. Mind where you step in the sands, lest its creatures swallow you whole.

The Hierarchy of Spirits

Long before the mortals were first created, the jinn (singular *jinni*) existed. They were the first beings, the primordial, the original inhabitants of the world, created from *samum*, the smokeless fire.

Jinn is a catchall term Alwarithlı use for spirits with otherworldly power. Scholars commonly assume many different species of jinn exist and that these creatures can become something *more*. This is also why people refer to some jinn as angels, demons or old gods. All Angels are jinn, but not all jinn can be an Angel. In the end, the jinn care nothing for mortal titles; their place in the hierarchy is all that matters.

Common Characteristics

Alwarithlı agree on a number of distinguishing characteristics all jinn possess. First, they inhabit a space in the world invisible to all humans. Their name, in fact, means "one that it is hidden and/or concealed." The jinn are immaterial beings able to move freely though any object except for those made purely of iron. This weakness also means that in their immaterial form, jinn can be injured by weapons (or items) made of pure iron. Needless to say, these objects are *very* rare and highly valued by Crescents of all Nations.

Samum, the smokeless fire, makes jinn extremely fast and they can travel distances at such a speed that they appear to teleport from one place to the other. Besides that, they have the ability to assume any shape or form they desire while in the material world, although they usually prefer that of animals (especially dogs and snakes) or that of human beings. In any case, the transformation is not perfect and a keen observer can discern small but telling details, such as unnaturally bright eyes, too slender features or movements that appear forceful.

All jinn have the Immaterial (see below), Shapeshifting, Swift and Teleporting Monstrous Qualities.

Jinn Hierarchy

There are many types of jinn, and each Nation of the Crescent Empire has their own traditions and idiosyncratic beliefs regarding them. In spite of that, it is possible to identify at least five types of jinn universally known to all Crescents.

Ginnayê

The *ginnayê* (singular *ginnaya*) are the oldest and were once the strongest of all the jinn. These jinn Originally the tutelary deities of the Tribes of the 8th Sea, these jinn still receive the worship from Yasnavan of the 8th Sea. In ancient times, they were worshipped like gods and commanded that faith by ferociously defending their people. After all, traveling through the desert with valuables for long days and nights invites robbers, yet the people of the Tribes hardly ever suffered such fate.

The answer as to the apparent good luck of these caravans lies in their deals with the ginnayê.

The Tribes of the 8th Sea once had the knowledge to forge binding contracts with the ginnayê, pacts granted their protection to a specific item or person in a group of traveling caravans. Together with their art of appeasing Gōčihr, their power in the 8th Sea reigned supreme.

One day, Diya, the most daring thief in the empire, attempted to steal Micaela Ben's caravan. Under guise of night, he and his accomplices murdered the night's watch, reaching Micaela before the rest of the warriors could wake.

Surrounded by steel and poison, Micaela simply smiled.

"Why are you smiling, old woman?" asked the famous thief. "Do you not fear death?"

"I do," Micaela replied. "Do you?"

"Of course I do," the thief remarked, "but I'm holding the blade here."

"And I'm the one holding the ginnaya," she said.

In that moment, a mighty roar rose up from the ground; the earth shook and a sudden sandstorm hit the caravan, lifting all the thieves and smashing them to the ground, leaving Micaela's caravan unharmed.

Most scholars say the rise of al-Dīn and other beliefs caused the ginnayê to lose most of their power, to leave the lands that had forgotten them and restrict themselves to the 8th Sea. The Tribe's practices strengthen as the ginnayê feed off worship and reverence.

Nowadays, the secret of how humans can employ the ginnayê's abilities is lost. Some, however, whisper that Yasnavan among the Tribes still remember how to do it—for a price, of course.

Apart from the qualities common to all jinn, the ginnayê have the Guarding (see below) Monstrous Quality. Most ginnayê are Strength 15 Monsters.

Afārīt

No one knows how they appeared, but the stories about winged, giant creatures made of fire are common all along the Crescent Empire. They are the *afārīt* (singular *ifrīt*), currently the most powerful jinn and widely feared by all Alwarithlı.

Although their powerful and impressive physiques are nothing to scoff at, the real reason people fear them is their ability to transform any creature—including human beings—into another creature of their choosing.

There was once an Anatoli princess who sought far and wide for a beautiful woman who had been kidnapped by an ifrīt. When the princess found her, they instantly fell in love, a deep passion burning within each of their souls.

The ifrīt found both women in each other's arms and, consumed by rage, lashed out to attack them. The afārīt are mighty, but the princess was swift. The jinn let loose a fiery whip, but the princess cared not for burns, such was her newfound love.

Finally, the princess overcame the ifrīt and as she was about to strike the killing blow, the creature screamed, "I see now you are no simple mortal, but a worthless frog!"

And as he said it, the princess turned into a frog, and so she is to this day...

Luckily for most people, the favored residence of the afārīt seems to be deep underground caverns and ruined structures. Some argue this as the reason to why the Alwarithlı excel at erecting resistant buildings; no one wants to unwittingly invite an ifrīt to live near him because of a poorly constructed collapsing structure which could become the dwelling place of afārīt overnight.

The knowledge of how to invoke the afārīt is a forbidden secret throughout the Crescent Empire. In a place that widely encourages knowledge and research of all things, the empire considers possessing the secret to summoning an ifrīt one of the most serious crimes anyone can commit.

Šāhzamān was a great sorcerer. He had paid a huge price for a mighty secret: that of how to summon afārīt. He was ready to commit the great crime, as both his wife and her lover were bound and gagged on the floor. Šāhzamān slit their throats while reciting the sacred words of the afārīt.

From the blood, a creature of gargantuan proportions emerged, with huge wings and made of burning flames.

Šāhzamān laughed, ready to complete his life-long dream of absolute power when Dunyazade, his sister-in-law, appeared out of the shadows and threw an unused nail into the blood pool.

With a loud cry, the afārīt was dragged back to the Hidden World where it had come from. Before disappearing, though, it took away the fool who had tried to summon it.

Apart from the qualities common to all jinn, the afārīt have the Elemental [Fire], Metamorpher (see below), Powerful and Winged Monstrous Qualities. Most afārīt range from Strength 10 to Strength 15 Monsters.

Quranā

Most types of jinn are the subjects of myths and legends but, in fact, a Crescent will never encounter one of them in her life. That is not the case with the *quranā* (singular *qarīn*).

These "constant companions" generate much talk and speculation in the Crescent Empire, especially when anyone discusses the current politics of the Persis. It is punishable under the law to gossip of Shah Jalil's *qarīn* Araska. Yet everyone knows she influences his actions even now, wandering through the halls of the palace, whispering in his ear.

How the rulers of Persis allowed themselves to be influenced by supernatural forces fuels much debate, but the truth is that they are—and they have been—for some time now. Legend says each qarīn is born from the heart of their mortal companion—how good the ruler, how evil the qarīn, and in theory, how evil the ruler, how good the qarīn. Jalil freed Araska right after Istani was disposed and she gave him the power to enact a terrible curse… Now, only time will tell if the legends are true.

All of this has been accomplished thanks to one unique ability that distinguishes the quranā: supernatural seduction. When a mortal hears the voice of a qarīn, his first instinct is to obey it, no matter the consequences.

Zumurrud was a wise shah but the plague was too much, even for her. She put all her physicians to work discovering the plague's cure and spared no resource in this enterprise.

Then one day Shirin, her most brilliant scholar, came to her. If not for the shah's weary state, perhaps she could have seen Shirin's eyes glowing with an unholy light.

"We have found the cure, my Shah," she said.

"Then why are you not happy?" asked Zumurrud.

"Because the only way to save our people is to sacrifice two of your children to the jinn."

Distressed, Zumurrud asked her to leave and pondered on the conundrum. Finally, her wisdom told her that two of her children were a huge price to pay, but that her people's survival was dearer to her.

Turning the problem over in her mind, her thoughts warped and twisted. Why not them all, then? After all, if murdering two stops the plague, to sacrifice all of them to the jinn would bring greater benefits.

Zumurrud followed the qarīn's advice and so her line, and the plague, ended.

Apart from the qualities common to all jinn, the quranā are Strength 15 to 20 Monsters and have the Compelling (see below) Monstrous Quality.

Ghilan

The jinn are usually respected and feared because of their potential to harm a mortal. In the case of the *ghilan* (singular *ghūl*), however, there is no such thing as *potential* for harm; no one that faces them survives the encounter unscathed and most never return to tell the tale.

The ghilan are the most cunning of all jinn. They may lack the sheer might of the ginnayê, the magic of the afārīt or the quranā's power of seduction, but they do have the ability to deceive and lure their victims. In this sense, the ghilan are the hunters of the jinn—and they care only for the weakest, most accessible prey.

Ghilan do not care for fighting in fair conditions; when they successfully ambush their victims, it is a bloodbath. For the death they bring, the ghilan have long been associated with cemeteries and other dangerous places.

Old Al-Kuz went to visit his husband's stone in the cemetery every day. He was a poor fisherman and fishing was not going well, so most days he just had himself to bring. On lucky days, however, he was able to bring flowers.

Today had been a lucky day. Al-Kuz had a beautiful bouquet under his arm, walking as confidently as when he was young and his husband lived. He got to the stone smiling and, without paying any attention to his surroundings, he knelt down and left the flowers. After that, he kissed the stone and opened his mouth to say some words, but then found he had no throat anymore.

The last thing he saw was a ghūl standing on top of him, eating his flesh.

In order to ambush their prey, the ghilan employ any and all jinn abilities. They often shapeshift themselves into animals like hyenas or into victims they have already eaten. Their impersonation of the living is almost flawless, and their deception is very difficult to detect for anyone not a close friend of the deceased.

Apart from the qualities common to all jinn, the ghilan have the Ambushing Monstrous Quality (see below). Most ghilan are Strength 10 Monsters.

Periân

The weakest and youngest of all the jinn, the *periân* (singular *peri*) have only recently appeared in the Crescent stories about the creatures of smokeless fire.

Those stories speak of diminutive creatures with elegant, long flowing hair and wings as big as their bodies. Although they seem to be fragile, they are, in fact, quite resilient. Periân, spotted more often than other jinn, continually quest to find a particular, emotion, heirloom or piece of junk.

The loud humming woke Duban up.

The baby rubbed his eyes and looked around. In front of him, a group of beautiful, tiny winged periân flew close to one another. They had looks of concern upon their faces and searched their surroundings frantically.

Duban reached out to touch them when a group of divs appeared. They surrounded the periân, incarcerating them one by one in tiny iron cages. Only one peri was left flying, the fiercest and most beautiful of them all. The divs swarmed her.

As they were about to put her in a cage, Duban started crying. He loved the beautiful periân and wanted to help them, but he did not know what to do except to cry. His cry echoed out like a powerful wave and the divs disappeared as quickly as they had arrived.

The peri left standing smiled, opening her tiny hands to capture the last bit of his cry and in return left the babe with the blessing of joy.

The truth beneath this endless searching lies in the origin of the periân. As the youngest of the jinn, they have no great powers. What the periân look for is a defense against the *divs*. While the items they steal may appear trivial, the periân have found a way to harness and preserve the power in them. Thanks to their thievery, the periân can face the divs and defend themselves quite effectively.

The divs are foul, tiny jinn so removed from the great ginnayê they are immune to iron, determined to lock the periân in iron cages. While in those iron cages, the periân cannot become immaterial and are, in fact, immortal prisoners. The reason for this persecution is simple: the divs are not recognized as real jinn by their peers, so by waging war on the periân they wish to eventually take their place in the hierarchy.

Maintaining the lowest rung of jinn hierarchy, periân have no special Monstrous Qualities aside the ones normally given to jinn. A single peri is a Strength 5 Monster.

New Monstrous Qualities

Below are new Monstrous Qualities for the jinn. All jinn have the Immaterial (below) quality. It is common for most species to also have the Shapeshifting, Swift and Teleporting Monstrous Qualities.

Ambushing

This creature waits hidden or in disguise for unwary or helpless people. When in its ambushing spot, this monster is truly deadly! Spend a Danger Point to double the number of Wounds dealt by the Monster on its first successful attack in a Sequence if it goes unseen.

Compelling

A compelling monster has the capacity to alter the perceptions, immediate desires and even the motivations of its target. At any time, the creature may suggest a path of action. If the Hero acquiesces, the player receives 1 Hero Point. If the Hero refuses to follow the suggested path of action, the Game Master gains 1 Danger Point. This ability does not enable the Monster to control the compelled being as if she is an automaton, but any suggestion made by the Monster is viewed in its most favorable way. Thus, a compelled creature refuses to obey a suicide suggestion, such as "you should jump off that bridge" or "you should shoot yourself in the head," but something along the lines of "this man killed your husband, now is the moment to take your revenge! You should *kill him*!" is acceptable, even if it endangers the compelled being.

Guarding

Some creatures are bound to a place, object or even to a specific person. The manner of their binding varies, but the common feature is that a Guarding Monster has to defend the object by any means necessary. Beware those that dare to endanger the object. If this Monster is a Villain, it rolls 5 additional dice in any Risk it takes while performing its Guarding duty. If this is a Monster Squad, it inflicts double Wounds while performing its Guarding duty.

Immaterial

This creature is invisible to any and all human senses, but its location may be deduced through other means, such as the use of light or the reaction of animals. This monster cannot be harmed by any material means, except under *very* specific circumstances, such as a difficult-to-obtain material (pure iron, silver, etc.), magic or other unlikely occurrences. Any Immaterial creature may acquire physical form for as long a time as it wishes to, but during that time, it is considered to be material and loses its Immaterial immunities.

Metamorpher

This monster has the powerful ability of transforming any creature into another. This ability gives all characteristics of the form of the target creature, although the transformed creature retains its mind and will—for a time, at least. Once transformed, only a powerful magic can return the target to its original form. If the creature spends too much time in its new form, it begins to lose its sense of self. A Game Master has to spend 1 Danger Point to activate this ability. A Hero targeted by a Metamorpher may spend 1 Hero Point to retain only one aspect of his original form, such as the ability to speak, for example.

Obsessed

This monster is on a mission, desperately looking for an object or specific person that represents the goal of its quest. Because of that, anyone that stands between a questing monster and its goal suffers its wrath. Any fool doing so must surely have a death wish! If this Monster is a Villain, it rolls 5 additional dice in any Risk it takes while trying to obtain the goal of its quest. If this is a Monster Squad, it inflicts double Wounds while trying to obtain the goal of its quest.

Notable Creatures

Bakhtak

Few people see a *bakhtak*, but many have felt its ill effects. The bakhtak only strikes at its victim when he sleeps and gives him bone-chilling nightmares. It crawls onto its victim's chest and breathes a noxious breath into the nose and mouth causing terrifying nightmares.

Born when someone curses another person with such malice that it gains substance, the bakhtak are only half the size of an average person. It seems even smaller because it is always slightly hunched. Its features are twisted with a big crooked nose and protruding bulbous eyes. It is covered in patchy brown fur and two large canine teeth protrude onto its fleshy lips.

Once the bakhtak has found a victim, it continues its nightly assaults until the nightmares are so violent they kill the person. When that happens, it quickly drinks in the soul escaping from the dead person's mouth, preventing him from passing on. It is possible to beat the bakhtak at its own game by sleeping with a knife under the pillow; this allows the dreamer to awaken in his dream armed to attack the creature.

Bakhtaks are Strength 5 Monsters and have the Nocturnal and Shadowy Monstrous Qualities.

Dybbuk

The *dybbuk* are the reborn spirits of people who died with unfinished business. Living side by side with an unborn baby, it nurtures and creates a bond with the child until, in the moments before the delivery, it finally enters the newborn's body and melds with her soul.

When the baby is born, she shows no signs of the dybbuk's presence. As the child grows, memories of both her own lifetime and memories from the spirit's life conflict. At first, they seem like momentary lapses or vivid daydreams but, after a while, the distinction between one set of memories and another begins to blur.

The dybbuk's past business must be resolved for it to finally rest in peace. If this happens, the dybbuk leaves its host peacefully, often imparting a gift of wisdom to its host. Any other treatment, sorcery or religious techniques used to try to expel the spirit from its host only serve to enrage it. When in a frenzied state, the

dybbuk uses the host's body to attack anyone trying to remove it.

The dybbuk has no special Monstrous Qualities, but instead has the same stats and the person it inhabits.

Karkadann

The *karkadann*, a gentle beast, looks incredibly fierce. Its body has a thick grey hide resembling leather armor with the pieces overlapping like scales. The brown beady eyes of the beast, set low in its head, give it a permanent scowl and its legs are short and incredibly strong. In the middle of its head, a long elegant horn shaped like a crescent moon curves up towards its stocky body.

Karkadann used to peacefully roam the Persis grasslands in small groups but the beast rarely appears now and when it does, it attacks people on sight. The karkadann has come to distrust and even hate people because they hunted it to near extinction to harvest its horn. The horn of the karkadann, so coveted because it has miraculous medicinal properties, can heal any illness if ground to a powder and ingested.

Able to sense innocence, the karkadann gently puts its head into the innocent's lap and cries for its lost companions. The tears of the karkadann turn into priceless jewels when held in the light of the moon, but no truly innocent person would abuse a creature's trust just to catch its tears.

A karkadann is a Strength 15 Monster and has the Powerful Monstrous Quality.

Gōčihr

Some call it the Sovereign of the Desert or the Terror of the 8th Sea, but the Tribes call it by its name—Gōčihr.

Once upon a time, a gigantic serpent lived in the sky. It yearned to eat the sun so it could warm its cold blood forever. It stretched out and opened its maw to swallow the sun, but just when Gōčihr wanted to bite down, it felt a pleasant warmth near its tail.

Gōčihr looked down to see a tribe of miniscule people who had built a bonfire as big as a mountain underneath it. Bemused by the frantic activity of such insignificant creatures, the serpent asked in a thunderous voice why these tiny specs of dust would try to interfere with the direction of a storm? The tiny people all started to tear their clothes and pull their hair and wail in anguish and they begged Gōčihr please not to eat the sun.

Like the elephant who has no pity for the ant it tramples underfoot, so was it for Gōčihr who found no pity in its heart for the tribespeople. It asked how such diminutive beings could hope to persuade one so great as itself? The people begged the snake to live in their desert so it could bask in the light of the sun by day and seek shelter in the warmth of the deepest sands during the night. They promised that every year on the longest night they would remind the serpent of the comforts of the desert with a sacrifice to sate its hunger and warm its gut.

Gōčihr agreed; it could always eat the sun later if it wanted. The serpent told the Tribes to carry with them the 'flowers of the desert' and to hang these in their tents and put it in the feed for their cattle so that it might recognize them and never harm them.

Sometimes, in the 8th Sea, a whole caravan disappears never to be seen again, yet the Tribes know what has happened, glad that it is never one of theirs. Members of the Tribes or those traveling under their protection are never attacked by Gōčihr. Every year when the nights grow long, the Tribes of the 8th Sea hold a Feast of Sacrifice to keep the serpent, Gōčihr, from rising up and eating the sun.

They say the sand serpent is so big that when it opens its maw a sinkhole forms, consuming everything near it, sand, people, tents and cattle. A whole camp or settlement can vanish from the face of the world as if it never existed. Nobody has seen the creature in its entirety, but many tales have been told. Travelers say they felt the sand move under their feet, or swear they saw snake scales shimmer far off in the desert sun. The Tribes have a saying that when a sandstorm rages over the desert, Gōčihr sneezed.

Gōčihr is a mythical creature of unspeakable power. To assign Monstrous Qualities or a word as weak as "Strength" to the creature would surely cause the great beast to stir from its resting place in anger.

The Offspring of Gōčihr

Gōčihr is the only sand serpent of its magnitude to live in the 8th Sea as far as the Tribes know, and if anyone would know, it is them. However, smaller serpents as long as 40 feet from head to tail called the Offspring of Gōčihr terrorize desert travelers. These sand colored snakes blend in dangerously well with

the environment and spring up and crush or poison any unfortunate creature they encounter.

The Tribes are the most common victims of these attacks, but many tribal warriors have built up a natural resistance to the venom over time. The snake-bite still makes them sick but they are far more likely to survive. The venom is extremely powerful and if you coat a weapon in it, you just need a scratch to kill an opponent. Harvesting the Offspring's venom is a dangerous endeavor that only few dare undertake, making it a rare and precious commodity.

It is unsure if the big snakes are really offspring of Gōčihr. If so, that suggests Gōčihr either has a mate or that it can reproduce on its own. Both possibilities are equally worrying.

Offspring of Gōčihr have the Chitinous, Fearsome, Powerful, Relentless and Venomous Monstrous Qualities. Offspring normally are Strength 20 Monsters.

Lamassu

Most people in the Crescent Empire fear Ashur because of the Assassins and the Guardian of the First Garden. People that have visited Ashur, however, fear the *lamassu* more.

The lamassu have been ever present in Ashur. The statues were said to be first found by Yesu's followers when they first settled the land. They stand at the entrance of every city worth its salt and at the gates of every village that can afford them.

During daytime, they appear as 15-feet-tall statues depicting a creature with a human head, the body of an ox (or lion) and giant bird's wings. Moreover, they have five legs instead of the usual four of oxen and lions. Anyone in the presence of these great, stone creatures remarks on the feeling of being watched, despite where the lamassu's gaze may rest.

All of this would be disturbing enough, but pales in comparison to their nightly activities.

Rumors say the lamassu protect the common people and every night they wake from dreams of stone. For a small blood offering, they listen to any man, woman or child and defend the truly suffering.

Their fifth leg, in fact, represents their ability to move between the seen and unseen world. During the night, they can travel huge distances in the blink of an eye and hunt down criminals in the other side of the world in no time if they need to. Bound to return to the place where their statue form is before the sun comes up, their sphere of influence is usually circumscribed to Ashurite cities and palaces.

If a dishonest person tries to get their favor, however, they strike him down without hesitation. That is why most Ashurites—and the Alwarithlı who do not know their ways—now fear them, and only seek their help when at their most desperate. For a person with pure intentions, on the other hand, they can be the most powerful allies one can get.

Lamassu have the Relentless, Shapeshifting, Teleporting and Winged Monstrous Qualities. A lamassu always shapeshifts into stone (or back to its original form) whether that be a statue, mountain face or a rock. Lamassu are Strength 17 Monsters.

Rukk

The weary crew navigated towards the shore, relieved they had survived the long journey at sea. Suddenly, a cry echoed across the waters and a large shadow fell over the deck easily covering the entire vessel. Minutes later, nothing was left but timber floating on the waves and a few sailors struggling to get to shore, terror in their eyes.

The rukk is a colossal bird of prey with walnut brown plumage. If it flies high enough, it might be mistaken for an eagle, but when it descends it reveals its frightening size. When it strikes at its prey, the rukk excretes a strong smelling odor from scent glands located near the base of its neck evoking a primal fear prey feels for the mighty predator. Stories tell that this scent can turn the mightiest Hero into the most terrified coward within seconds.

Rukks build nests on high cliffs near the ocean where they have the open sky to fly and hunt. Their eggs are as big as a person and a rukk chick can be a dangerous opponent even though it cannot fly. When a rukk nests near a port or populated area, it wreaks such havoc on the populace and the town that, if not dealt with, decimates the entire town in a matter of weeks. Sometimes a rukk moves if its nest gets destroyed, but finding a brave soul who dares to climb a cliff with the risk of becoming bird feed is not easy.

Rukks are Strength 15 Monsters and have the Winged Monstrous Quality.

Chapter 2
Anatol Ayh

ANATOL AYH

The Caliphate of Anatol Ayh is amidst a great change. An ancient land of rolling hills, mighty rivers and cerulean seas, the crowned seat of the empire has always held strictly to tradition. The House of Chaghri has ruled in Iskandar since they broke the Numanari on the field of battle. From the ashes of their predecessors did the House of Chaghri's greatness grow. Today, inheritor of the Alwarith Dynasty, Sultana Safiye's rule reaches from Persis to the borders of Khemet, and her word is law across the endless dunes of the 8th Sea.

In her first action as sultana, Safiye abolished the laws set in place by her predecessors. She declared magic users free citizens, abolished the class system and enacted sweeping reforms making her truly the people's Empress. Her reforms have been met with resistance, especially by the more affluent members of Anatoli society, but the Anatoli push ever forward heroically pathing the way for the rest of the empire.

In Iskandar, the heart of Anatol Ayh and the Crescent Empire, day begins when the mosque's dawn prayer rings out over the still waters of the Orfiç Boğazı River, calling the faithful to worship. In the winding byways of Grand Bazaar, hawkers cry their wares in dozens of languages, while the walls of the Fatih Sarayı (Conqueror's Palace) and the dome of the recently restored Orthodox church, the Ayaecclesia, frame the rising sun. It is a place of commerce, of faith and, above all, of power.

The Sultana

As with all periods of reform, Safiye's reign has seen the rise of oppositional forces who seek her abdication or overthrow. The traditional feudal aristocracy resents her attempts to centralize power in Iskandar. As a lord should support the sultana both through taxation and by placing a portion of his military forces at her disposal, his resistance weakens the Crescent Empire both economically and militarily.

The greatest blow came from the lord Koray ibn Mazhar who withdrew his troops stationed in the capital when Safiye attacked to regain the throne. While most lords eventually rallied behind the sultana, Koray remained loyal to Istani. Even now, he secretly campaigns to the other lords to join him. First, in finding the lost emperor, who Koray believes still lives, and secondly in gaining enough force to attack the sultana.

The sultana has responded to the nobility's intransigence by expanding the Janissary Corps, a selective force of musket-wielding infantry that competes for prestige with the traditional cavalry forces. Her invite to any member of society, despite his faith or perceived class, has won the sultana favor across the empire and especially at home. She has placed her younger brother Vedat in charge of the corps, a man so far removed from the inheritors line he had no hope of ever gaining power. Terribly abused by Istani, only left alive to be mocked in court, Vedat is fiercely loyal to Safiye. His years of subjugation make him a general who understands the men and women working underneath him, gaining the royal family much-needed loyalty.

Of a deeper concern than the unhappy nobility is the rise of bloody-minded traditionalists in the far eastern provinces of Anatol Ayh. Calling themselves Kurtanoğlu in reference to an ancient Anatoli myth, these fanatics believe that Anatol Ayh's greatness must be renewed through bloody wars of conquest not peace. The Kurtanoğlu view Sultana Safiye's attempts to preserve the fragile peace within the Crescent Empire as weakness.

EMPRESS, SULTANA, RULER

Throughout this book Safiye, liberator of the Crescent Empire, is referred to with many different titles. She is the empress of the Crescent Empire, but she is also the sultana of Anatol Ayh. Safiye is arguably the single most powerful person in the Crescent Empire and her titles denote her station and her responsibilities. When first addressing the sultana, it is customary, and very polite, to recite her full title:

Her Majesty, the victorious and successful Mani Sultana, the ruler aided by God, whose undergarment is victory, whose glory is as high as Heaven, crown of the royal head, shadow of Theus on Terra, culmination of rulership, quintessence of the book of fortune, equinoctial line of justice, perfection of the spring-tide of majesty, sea of benevolence and humility, mine of the jewels of generosity, source of the memorials of valor, manifestation of the lights of felicity, promulgator of the standards of al-Dīn, author of righteousness on the pages of time, Sultana of the two seas, ruler of east and west, protector of the holy sanctuaries, anointed successor to the Prophet of mankind, Padishah Safiye, the Lawgiver.

History

The origins of the House of Chaghri remain mysterious. Apocryphal histories trace their ancestry back to a band of nomadic horseriders who subjugated the Kingdom of Persis and the petty despotisms along the Idiglat and Buranun Rivers before turning their eyes to lands of Anatol Ayh. The Tribes of the 8th Sea claim the House of Chaghri as one of their own, a lost family of the al-Hisan whose righteousness allowed them to unite the lands of the Anatoli in preparation for the coming of the Second Prophet. The shah of Persis points to the persistence of Persic terms, customs and poetic forms to argue that the House of Chaghri is in fact a wayward child of Persis, and, in Shah Jalil's words, "it is abhorrent that the son should rule the father."

Whatever the truth may be, the House of Chaghri has blended the traditions of Persis and the 8th Sea with the learning salvaged from the wreck of the Numanari Empire, creating a vital culture more than the sum of its parts. From the fall of the Numanari to the present day, the history of Anatol Ayh belongs to the House of Chaghri, and them alone.

The Coming of Khalil ibn Mustafa, the Second Prophet

In the seventh century, during the final skirmishes between the waning Numanari Empire and the rising Anatoli Sultan Mehmet I, "the Heroic Lion," a young man in humble dress began to preach in the streets of Iskandar. While the walls of Fatih Sarayı rose to honor Mehmet's triumphs, Khalil ibn Mustafa preached humility and urged his followers to make their lives an act of ecstatic devotion to al-Musawwir.

Sultan Mehmet did not take kindly to the youth's message of submission to a power greater than himself, and commanded Khalil to attend him as the sultan brought a rebellious Persic bey to heel. The Second Prophet arrived in the aftermath of the deciding battle between the sultan and the bey, making his way to the sultan's tent through a field strewn with corpses.

Upon the Prophet's arrival, the sultan demanded to know by what right this cur urged his subjects to serve a power beyond their ruler, to which the Prophet replied, "I urge no such thing, only that your people create so that they might know the struggle of al-Musawwir, the Shaper, who molded this land and all its peoples."

The Prophet continued, gesturing to the cowering bey and the carnage of the battlefield, "but I tell you truly that wanton butchery offends the eyes of al-Musawwir, the Merciful One, and it is not his will that such acts go unpunished."

The bey, her courage fired by the Prophet's words, took up a dagger and charged at the sultan. Mehmet, far-famed for his archery, dismissed his Silahdar Agha (chief weapon bearer) with a shake of his head, letting fly an arrow that took the lunging woman in the throat. The sultan twisted to avoid her knife, but his foot slipped and he was mortally wounded in the breast.

As the sultan, peace be upon him, breathed his last, the Prophet spoke, "So al-Musawwir, whose justice is infinite, has punished them: one for the crime of rebellion, the other for the crime of barbarism."

Jalal, the son of the sultan, had watched the altercation unfold and embraced the Prophet like a brother, saying, "I take al-Musawwir, the Expediter of Fortunes, as my God, and accept you as his messenger. What you deem holy, I will guard, and what you deem sinful, I will cast out."

The Prophet counseled him: "Al-Musawwir the Creator asks only that you struggle to build as he built and that you bring forth wonders as he brought forth wonders."

Jalal swore that it would be so, and for this deed and many others he is known as "King of Kings." In honor of this pledge, the Anatoli monarchy became not only the temporal rulers, but guardians of al-Dīn, protectors of the holy places and the sword of the faith.

THE FETRET DEVRI

The Fetret Devri refers to a period of civil war after the death of Sultan Selim I, "the Cursed" in 819. During this period, two twin sisters, Aisha and Melike, fought for the throne of Anatol Ayh resulting in Aisha winning and Ashur's independence (see **Chapter: Ashur**). There were two major consequences for the Crescent Empire. First, it put into practice the principle of *Maslaha*, by which an heir could inherit the Sultanate only if all her siblings were dead. Secondly, the Fetret Devri also resulted in independence for Ashur, proclaimed by Sultana Aisha during an enigmatic toast to the "Guardian of the First Garden" after defeating her sister Melike.

The Royal Court

Anatol Ayh is the crown province of the Crescent Empire and the laws that govern its subjects are those of the Crescent Empire writ large. In Iskandar, the seat of government is the royal court. The court, in turn, is divided into two branches: the Enderûn, or "Inner Service," that sees to the functioning of Fatih Sarayı, and the Birûn, or "Outer Service," responsible for all governmental functions beyond the walls of the Palace.

The Enderûn

The Inner Service is both pedestrian and powerful. In theory, its duties verge on the mundane: attending to Sultana Safiye's personal needs, and overseeing the cooks of the Kilar-ı Hass and the concubines of the Harems. In practice, members of the Enderûn are the most alive to the ebb and flow of power and favor within the aristocracy. The departments of the Inner Service are among the oldest administrative divisions in the Crescent Empire, called "Chambers" in reference to their traditional locations within Fatih Sarayı, the Conqueror's Palace.

The Hass Oda, or "Privy Chamber," is the most powerful of the subdivisions, composed of courtiers who facilitate the daily activities of the sultana. The Silahdar Agha, or chief weapon-bearer, disseminates the sultana's will throughout the palace. In addition, the Silahdar Agha recommends talented guards for promotion to the bostanci, an elite force of guards who protect the palace and the sultana's person.

The current Silahdar Agha is Hazan bint Elif, a former member of the bostanci who refused to rally to the empress' side when she took the palace. A woman of few words, Hazan's reasoning for why she stayed loyal to the former sultan was simple—duty. When Hazan became a bostanci, she made a vow to protect the sultan on the throne and the palace no matter her personal feelings, something she would do to her last breath. Safiye admired Hazan's code of honor and rewarded her for her actions by making her Silahdar Agha.

The Hazine Oda, or "Privy Treasury," contains the personal wealth of the reigning sultan. The Khojagan, or chief treasurer, oversees the palace budget and ensures that the sultana's revels do not exceed her means.

The Seferli Oda, or "Expeditionary Chamber," claims responsibility for the logistical coordination of all military campaigns. At its head sits the Nizam al-Mulk, who approves all military budgets and supply requests, ensuring that the armed forces do not enrich themselves at the realm's expense.

The Kilar-ı (KEE-laar-rah) Hass, or "Privy Larder," is under the supervision of the Mutbakh Emini, who plans all the sultana's meals, oversees a small army of poison tasters and handles event planning for affairs of state. Every palace page, no matter how august his lineage, must serve a tour in the larder and learn that drudgery is half of service.

The Birûn

The Outer Service's remit has grown with the borders of the Crescent Empire, and these ever-increasing responsibilities have forced the Birûn to subdivide into three Royal Institutions, each overseeing an essential function of Sultana's government:

The Kalemiye, or "Scribal Institution," is responsible for the financial administration of the Crescent Empire, collecting taxes, distributing pay and confirming aristocrats in their fiefdoms. At its head sits the Grand Vizier, Mehmed Ali Pasha, who also serves as chief councilor of the Divan.

The Seyfiye, or "Military Institution," draws up and executes the military strategy of the Crescent Empire, as well as overseeing the army and navy. At its head sits Ali Hakhan ul-Barrayun wa al-Bahrain, "the Lord of Land and Sea," the chief military officer of the Crescent Empire.

The Ilmiye, or "Religious Institution," oversees religious law and education. The head of the Ilmiye, called the Sheikh al-Dīn, holds the highest religious and legal authority in the Crescent Empire after the sultana.

These three institutions are frequently at odds with one another, each trying to gain favor with the sultana or control of another institution in order to push forward their own political ideologies. The Grand Vizier, a staunch traditionalist who disapproves of Safiye's reforms, has long been courting the favor of Ali. If Mehmed gains enough influence with Ali, he will have the power to overthrow the empress, should a more suitable ruler come to light.

To strengthen his plans, Mehmed has influenced the sultana in subtle ways to undermine Ali and infuriate him. Under the Grand Vizier's influence, Safiye placed her brother Vedat in charge of the Janissary Corps without consulting Ali. While the sultana was well within her right to do so, the Lord of Land and Sea, a seasoned officer with a firm grip on the military, took insult. He still remembers the slight to this day.

However, Yonca Sheikh al-Dīn bint Damla, a sharp-witted, elderly woman appointed many years ago by Safiye's father as Sheikh al-Dīn, seeks to gain favor with Ali before the Grand Vizier can tighten his grip on the military. Under Safiye's rule, Yonca has been able to undo many of the wrongs done by Istani. She has given back the Ayaecclesia to the Orthodox to use as a church and finally finished the awe-inspiring Sulan Metehan Camii mosque. If Yonca can convince the deeply religious Ali that Safiye is truly the voice of al-Dīn in soul, not just title, the empress will have the military power she needs to maintain control of the region. Yonca's first step: quash the Montaigne ambassador's seduction of Ali, a ploy obviously orchestrated by Mehmed to pull the empire into another war with Castille.

Harem Intrigue

Set among the rivaling branches of the court is the Imperial Harems. The harems are first and foremost a home for the royal family, but also provide the current sultana with romantic partners to further the imperial line. When not lavishing their attention on the sultana, the inhabitants of the harem live a life of luxury and obligation entraining guests, caring for their children and following multiple forms of higher education. Heading the White Harem and now the Chief of the Harems is the White Eunuch Bomani Chike, an Ifrian man in full support of the empress. Opposing Bomani is the Head Stewardess of the Black Harem, a Vodacce Sorte Strega, Caterina Palazzao.

Under the former sultan, Caterina ruled the harems, enjoying every luxury the Chief of the Harems had to offer. Once a concubine for Istani's father, she never bore him a child and quickly fell out of favor. Clawing her way back up the ladder, she was finally named Head Stewardess after she used Sorte on Istani to advise him. In addition to the title, he also paid favor to the concubines Caterina put forward—causing vicious rivalries between the men and women in both the White and Black Harems respectively.

Now that Bomani is in charge of the Harems, Caterina has fallen out of favor in court once more. Under Safiye's rule, honor is once more a favored trait and something that Caterina was never known for. Most of all she loathes the Abode of Felicity, a home the sultana set up to house her siblings and their parents, which houses many of her former rivals for the sultana's deceased father's affections. If Bomani doesn't keep a close eye on Caterina, she will be happy to see the Abode of Felicity burn to the ground.

The Reforms of Safiye

Since taking the throne three years ago, Sultana Safiye has promulgated a series of reforms fundamentally changing the way the Crescent Empire operates, both within the confines of Fatih Sarayı and beyond the palace walls. These reforms, among others, have led her courtiers to dub her "Kanuni," (the Lawgiver). An empress of the people, her views developed in her years traveling Théah and the empire. Hearing the call for reform by the vast majority of her subjects when she took the throne, Safiye set about giving her empire back to its people.

Yasaklama, "the Forbidding"

Maslaha, Katabic for "the greater good," was the governing principle of Crescent Succession after the Fetret Devri. Surveying the carnage of the interregnum that preceded her reign, Sultana Aisha decided that the House of Chaghri should, in her words, "turn the dagger on itself" and absorb the costs of succession disputes internally. From that day forward, a sultan or sultana was not considered regnant until he or she had executed all of her living siblings, ideally by strangulation or poisoning as spilling royal blood was frowned upon.

Sultana Safiye believes this practice led her brother Istani to attack her and has forbidden it henceforward. She expanded the royal harems, building a sumptuous new complex called "the Abode of Felicity" where a sibling passed over in the succession, and his family, can live out their lives in comfort under the watchful eye of the Enderûn. Slowly, her siblings who fled from Istani's reign are returning to the empire, including her brother Bayram whom she met when traveling in Montaigne. When Bayram, exiled by his father and hunted by his brother, was welcomed back with open arms by the empress, it caused scandal within the courts. In Théah, rumors claim he engaged in the political sabotage of Montaigne's courts by smuggling victims of the nobility to a better life. Worse yet, it is rumored Safiye helped him.

Kaldırma, "the Abolishing"

Among the laws enacted by Sultana Safiye's brother Istani was the establishment of the Sihirbazların Kaydı, or Magician's Registry. This permitted the Imperial Government to compel the registration of all those gifted with magic within its domains.

Pointing out that Khalil ibn Mustafa, the Second Prophet, was himself the child of two gifted sorcerers, Sultana Safiye questioned the need to single out sorcerers for treatment. At a stroke, she emancipated the Crescent Empire's sorcerers, revoking the Sihirbazların Kaydı and ordering the records destroyed. Shortly thereafter, she issued an ultimatum to Persis, demanding that Shah Jalil follow her example within a decade or confess himself an apostate. The silence from Persis has been nothing short of deafening.

Değiştirme, "the Changing"

Sultana Safiye also altered a number of other statutes and customs throughout Anatol Ayh after taking power. She has further enhanced the aggressively meritocratic and cosmopolitan nature of the Birûn and Enderûn. Today a member of the Crescent Empire fluent in Persic, Dibre and Katabic can sit for an exam that, if passed, admits him to the royal school within the royal palace and may eventually lead him to a post in either service.

In addition, the remnants of the old feudal caste system were finally stricken from the books of law at the sultana's command. A person's status in Anatol Ayh and the larger empire is no longer bound to her religion, ethnicity or social class at birth. The beys of several eyalets near Iskandar are of Numanari Vaticine descent and Yachidi beys govern several of the eyalets bordering Sarmion. Persic peoples hold several positions of authority within the Crescent Empire, and as tensions grow they have shown themselves to be an important diplomatic backchannel between Iskandar and Shah Jalil's court.

Religion

The Crescent Empire is a cosmopolitan melting pot of ethnic and religious communities, and Anatol Ayh is no exception. While the population of Anatol Ayh is overwhelmingly Dīnist, there are a number of religious minorities, including Orthodox Vaticines, Théan Vaticines, Yachidi from Sarmion and Yasnavan from Persis. Because Crescent law is explicitly Dīnist in its foundation, a member of these religious minorities is subject to it only if he has committed a crime against a Dīnist. Crimes committed between two members of different religious minorities unable to agree on which community's law to apply default to Crescent law. In most cases, however, the legal system of the harmed party takes precedence.

Most recently, in a show of solidarity and religious tolerance, Yonca Sheikh al-Dīn gave the Ayaecclesia, a beautiful church in Iskandar turned into a Dīnic temple by Safiye's father, back to the Orthodox Church. Many believe Yonca's actions were politically motivated—an attempt to secure Ashur as an ally. Worse yet, lords outside of the capital suspected Yonca of conspiring with Ashur to undermine Anatoli supremacy. However, for many Dīnists, the Ayaecclesia returning to the Orthodox Church, a happy turn of events, invited the Orthodox back into the capital and ignited the spark of religious debate, keeping the faithful on their toes, feeding alliances and friendships.

For all disputes, civil, religious or criminal within a religious minority, the religious head of that community is the governing authority. Sufficiently large religions receive an exclusive quarter within Iskandar and have permission to appoint a prelate that serves as the arbiter of final appeal for that religion within the Crescent Empire. While the prelate may not be the actual head of a given faith, for the purposes of law within the empire he is the highest authority.

Sultana Safiye is a tolerant ruler, but she does not allow the Vaticine Hierophant to meddle in Crescent affairs. This starkly contrasts to Safiye lending her ear to other religious heads on a regular basis. Much like the Sheikh al-Dīn, these religious heads have the ability to appoint subordinate authorities. In practice these religious authorities tolerate a great deal of local independence, and only step in if the locality's preference for a candidate threatens the broader autonomy of the religious community at large, as in the case of an appointee that preaches rebellion or sedition.

Yol

Al-Dīn is essential to Anatoli culture, despite Anatol Ayh being one of the more secular Crescent nations. Central to Dīnist teaching is the distinction between outer and inner truth. Outer truth is human, flawed and impermanent, while inner truth is divine and eternal. *Yol*, an Anatoli form of al-Dīn, in turn, seeks to guide its adherents toward a state of mystic union with this divine truth.

Collectively, followers of Yol embrace a variety of paths toward that union, including breathing exercises, chanting, meditation, dance and pilgrimage. These techniques are taught by a *yol bulan kişi*, literally meaning "pathfinder," who acts as a person's teacher or guide. The purpose of all paths is nothing less than annihilation of the ego in pursuit of divine union, as pursued through ecstatic states, ritual purification and overcoming of desire.

A given worshipper is not restricted to a single path towards union; as the spiritual guides who lead each path fondly say, "there are many paths to al-Musawwir."

Ishaq ibn Qunavi is one of of Iskandar's most demanding yol bulan kişi. Tall, bearded and severe, he inculcates critical thought in his students through intense philosophical cross-examinations, where the relentless, staccato rhythms of his questions push a pupil past her fear of failure and other earthly concerns and forces her to confront the deeper limits of both her learning and her language.

Though ostensibly linguists, Ishaq's followers take as their primary concern the tension between the knower and the known. Implicitly challenging the practices of all other paths, the Ishaqin ask if human senses can ever apprehend reality as it truly exists, and, if so, whether that knowledge can be transmitted to someone who has no direct experience of it. The Ishaqin seek to discover a form of communication that obliterates the distinction between observer and observed and makes didactic process, rather than ecstatic experience, the center of worship.

Culture and Customs

The culture of Anatol Ayh exists in a state of flux, where adherents of pre-Dīnist traditions of martial excellence vie for supremacy with those who hold the Second Prophet's exhortation to "bring forth wonders" highest of all.

The Way of Anatol Ayh

After a thousand years at the center of the Crescent Empire, Anatol Ayh has developed a rich, syncretic culture incorporating influences from the 8th Sea, Ashur, Persis and Sarmion. Though it draws from many sources, Anatoli culture has a distinct identity, known as "the Way of Anatol Ayh," and demonstrated mastery of its many forms signifies a sophisticate. Indeed, this mastery is the path to the aristocracy—a boorish but wealthy merchant finds no welcome at court, but more than one person of humble origins has shaped the course of events in the Crescent Empire by mastering the Way. A Master of the Way gains no official title, but is often given the honored title Osda by her peers.

A true scion of Anatol Ayh fluently speaks in the tongues of the Crescent Empire and the traditional forms of poetry. Such a person can compose and recite verse in any of these languages, and is familiar with the traditional poetic forms, from the polemical and political qaṣā'id to the mathnawī *epics*. Other forms of artistic endeavor are encouraged, and even an undistinguished aristocrat may have talents as a ceramicist, musician, painter or weaver.

The Way of Anatol Ayh also prescribes a code of conduct: every citizen is expected to offer hospitality and respect to all without regard for class. A beggar can expect a warm welcome in the home of an aristocrat, and the poorest laborer offers food and shelter to his betters. In the face of such generosity, the recipient customarily refuses the first offer and only accepts after a second offer has proved the host's sincerity. This neighborliness keeps the melting pot of Anatol Ayh from separating into its constituent parts.

There is no class requirement to become an Osda of the Way of Anatol Ayh, nor are all its masters Anatoli. Because the Way is open to all, the crown province of the Crescent Empire boasts a cosmopolitan and sophisticated class of aristocrats that represents its many constituent parts. As a result, no Nation or religion has a monopoly on culture and this pluralistic division of power keeps the Crescent Empire stable and united.

The Ghazi Ideal

Some in Anatol Ayh consider the Way a spineless compromise that dilutes the true greatness of the Anatoli people by incorporating foreign, and therefore, inferior influences. Hearkening back to older—and in his eyes, truer—traditions, this fundamentalist believes that the conquest of the Numanari Empire was the purest expression of Anatoli greatness.

In his telling, this feat was accomplished by bands of holy warriors, known as *ghazi*, who, with faith, fire and sword subdued the debased aristocrats of the Numanari and claimed Anatol Ayh for the House of Chaghri. Seeing the multiculturalist and permissive reforms of Safiye as a contemporary analogue to the decadent Numanari, those who hold to the Ghazi Ideal seek to reignite Anatoli greatness through resistance to, and in some cases, rebellion against her rule.

Meşru Müdafa

Regardless of gender, national origin or religious conviction, a resident of Anatol Ayh is expected to defend her person and her property. And so Meşru Müdafa, or martial arts for self-defense, occupies an uneasy space in the cultural debate.

The emphasis on Meşru Müdafa exists in both the Way and the Ghazi Ideal. The Way of Anatol Ayh emphasizes the beauty of stylized practice forms, while those who embrace the Ghazi Ideal see it as a necessary first step along the path of transcendence through conflict.

The Yarişma, an annual tournament of champions held in Kadifekale, has become the focal point of skirmishes between adherents of each cultural mindset. There are separate events for each form of martial arts, and a winner declares himself in support of one view or the other; the Yarişma of 1665 saw the largest number ghazi champions yet recorded. In an attempt to keep the competition civil, grand and exciting, the bey of Kadifekale sent invitations to the best martial artists in Théah, Ifri and Cathay inviting them to the Yarişma this year.

Güreş

Sculptures and art recovered from pre-Dīnist ruins along the Idiglat and Buranun Rivers depict Güreş (wrestling) competitions. As such, the Anatoli consider this ancient and august wrestling form to be the preeminent martial art of the Crescent Empire.

According to legend, Sultan Mehmet held a great Güreş tournament to celebrate the birth of his first-born son inviting people of all faiths and cultures to compete; the champion would have the honor of deciding where to construct the Fatih Sarayı. In the final bout, a thick-necked Yachidi by the name of Samson faced Delara, a lithe Persic athlete, atop a hill crowned with fig trees. The contest lasted for hours, stretching long into the night. As the rising sun broke over the hilltop, the two were found dead, their broken and exhausted bodies still intertwined in a mockery of love's embrace.

Understanding the omen before him, the sultan ordered them buried beneath the trees and declared that his palace be built around the grove where they had chosen death over defeat. The fig trees still flourish atop Padişahın Tepesi, now the center of Fatih Sarayı. The sultana's closest bodyguards, the bostanci, or gardeners, are so named because their first duty is to look after the sacred grove at the heart of the Conqueror's Palace. Should the trees die, the tale has it that the Crescent Empire will not long survive them.

Commerce

A common Anatoli saying considers commerce as a battlefield, and bargaining a sport pursued with all the fervor of war. Anatoli consider it rude to purchase an item for the asking price, as it implies the merchant either unworthy of the customer's time and attention or such a poor businessman he requires charity.

Traditionally, merchant and customer engage in protected haggling sessions, each party making outrageous claims of either privation or comradeship in pursuit of a mutually agreeable price. If no agreement can be reached, another merchant within earshot usually takes up the gauntlet, and a new round of bargaining begins.

Art and Architecture

As with most aspects of Anatoli culture, artistic endeavor in Anatol Ayh synthesizes many traditions, some native to the province, others appropriated from other cultures and given a distinctly Anatoli twist.

Anatoli architecture draws its inspiration from the Numanari Empire. The greatest mosque in Anatol Ayh, Iskandar's Hikmet Camii, is an ancient Numanari temple converted to Dīnist use. Similarly, the Dīnist emphasis on purification led early sultans to reconstruct the Numanari baths, and today these bathhouses, called *hamam*, reflect the Crescent Empire's prosperity in their sumptuous marble, ceramic and silver furnishings.

Anatoli art is similarly varied in its forms and inspiration. Ceramicists produce beautiful tiles hand-painted in patterns reminiscent of far-off Cathay, but ornamented with the flora and fauna of Anatol Ayh. In studios known as *nakkaşane*, a painter works to bring life to the teachings of the Second Prophet through her illustrations, which are less concerned with realism and more with the Persic tradition of evoking the emotional or spiritual truth behind the tale. Finally, weavers on looms of every size create carpets that are half-gift, half-talisman, incorporating patterns from the 8th Sea alongside decorative wards against evil.

Food

To serve the empress, her retinue and the dignified guests of the Imperial palace, the Eye of the Moon employs the most celebrated cooks of the Crescent Empire. A smattering of all the empire's culinary highlights are found in these kitchens as well as influences from Théan cuisine, especially from Montaigne and Vodacce. Simplified versions of the luxurious and often innovative dishes trickle down from the Imperial kitchens to the common people of Anatol Ayh who recreate them using local ingredients. Pasta from Vodacce has recently become popular and is combined with traditional ingredients like lamb, beef, eggplant, mint, cumin, walnuts or pistachios.

Meals are often served with a side dish that combines Anatol Ayh's deliciously tangy yoghurt with refreshing mint and cucumber and some light fluffy flat bread.

Clothing

Anatol Ayh is a primarily Dīnist country, but it borders many different peoples and faiths. As such, Anatoli clothing mixes cultures, fabrics and traditions. To combat the changing temperatures of the country people often wear large, comfortable cotton *salba* (trousers) under simple, brightly colored skirts. Floor or knee length robes, dyed in sumptuous colors or woven with stripes or other patterns and layers, are topped by a *kasak* (sash) worn just below the waist.

Hats and headwear are extremely popular. Harkening back to their Dīnist routes, the Anatoli have turned headwear into an art form and the higher the better. Headwear also signifies social status and an affluent Anatoli enjoys showing off his wealth with ostentatious head garb. More liberal than their Persic neighbors, Anatoli men and women commonly show their hair, loose or braided. Men also often sport impeccably groomed beards and moustaches and anyone who knows anything about the Way keeps his appearance well maintained and polished.

Anatoli Names

The Anatoli names find their roots in Katabic. An Anatoli does not have a surname; instead she takes a second name based on the parent of the same sex. Before the person's second name, either ibn, "son of," or bint, "daughter of," is used. People who identify as neither use one or the other depending on their personal preference. For example, Ece bint Belinay is Ece, daughter of Belinay, and Umur ibn Berkay is Umur, son of Berkay.

Titles are used to further distinguish people by name, and each title is listed after a person's given name. Huban is the daughter of Sara and also a bey; her names in Anatoli are Huban Bey bint Sara. Occupational bynames can be used in the same fashion to distinguish a name, but are often used before the person's given name. Kemal the butcher who is the son of Sahil would be Itci Kemal ibn Sahil.

Female Names: Aysun, Derya, Elif, Elmas, Fidan, Fatma, Mira, Nuray, Pinar, Rabia, Seyma

Male Names: Ahmet, Aras, Efe, Hamza, Halil, Kaan, Murat, Onur, Poyraz, Taha, Yusuf, Yasin

Common Bynames: Cava (guard), Demri (smith), Hati (piligrim), Hoda (teacher), Itci (butcher), Sifti (farmer)

The Kurtanoğlu

A tale as old as the Anatoli people tells of a child birthed by a dying mother on a battlefield, for whom battle was bread, and blood was mother's milk. In time, this orphan grew to be a great chieftain of Anatol Ayh, taking a she-wolf for his bride and raising a litter of half-human, half-wolf sons. These savage pups, whose surname was Kurtanoğlu, or "Son of the Wolf," were the apocryphal forefathers of the Anatoli, seizing hold of their destiny through acts of butchery and destruction.

The contemporary Kurtanoğlu claim to be the direct descendants of these ten abominable whelps and now

have just as many women among their ranks as men. Common to all is the belief that Sultana Safiye's public-minded rule expresses weakness, and that Anatol Ayh can only regain its greatness through violence and conquest. To prove this to the Anatoli people, the Kurtanoğlu have launched attacks on outlying towns around the country's capital. Safiye has attempted to stop the group with little success. Their "packs" use guerilla warfare to thwart her military operatives. If the group is not stopped soon, their next plan is to attack the capital.

These fanatics structure themselves in independent packs, where the strongest man and woman rule the lesser members through the threat of violence. Any ambitious cur may challenge the alpha of her gender, though failure always results in death. When a pack builds up a sufficient pool of loyal recruits, they hold a bloody induction ceremony at the dark of the moon. Each litter of neophytes must hunt its own members through the night, and only those who return at dawn with the blood of a littermate on their lips are welcomed into the pack. All others are killed for their weakness and left for the vultures.

The extreme brutality of these zealots has given rise to all sorts of tales: that a Kurtanoğlu can transform into half-human, half-wolf horrors and command her lesser kin; that he seizes the faithful by the light of the full moon and baptizes them in blood; that only weapons blessed by an imam can harm her; that he can only be repelled by chanting the teachings of the Second Prophet.

Whatever the truth, reports of wolf attacks in the eastern eyalets of Anatol Ayh have risen dramatically, and military units dispatched to investigate have found nothing. Local beys are at their wits end, terrorized into supporting these firebrands and reporting that their own soldiers obey orders from the Kurtanoğlu above those of the sultana.

Even the heart of Iskandar has rumors of Kurtanoğlu activity. Wild stories circulate in the merchant stalls of the Grand Bazaar, and gossipmongers claim that people with the skin of beasts lair by day in the Numanari cisterns beneath the city, emerging with the moon to hunt the sultana's loyal citizens and feast on their flesh.

Sights of Anatol Ayh

Kadifekale

Originally settled by Don Guillermo de Terciopelo, a Vaticine fanatic from Castille, the fortress-town he built was quickly overrun by the sultan's forces who found the remote coastal location an ideal place to get away from the heat and noise of Iskandar.

Today, Kadifekale is one of the jewels of the Anatol Ayh. Sitting atop a defensible bluff overlooking a cerulean inlet of the Numanari Approach, it has become the focal point of Anatoli cultural endeavor. The very land seems to evoke poetry, with warm seas, deep forests and high mountains all accessible from the city's heart. Fertile soils eroded from the mountains and a lazy river with which to irrigate them ensure the city's economic prosperity, leaving its citizens free to pursue the finer things in life.

After the sack of de Terciopelo's fortress, the sultan's soldiers discovered the ruins of an ancient Numanari city, and laid out the contemporary city of Kadifekale in accordance with the plan of its ravaged predecessor. At the heart of the city lies the Numanari *agora*, an ancient market and administrative center that continues to fulfill that function. Several of the Numanari buildings have been restored by Anatoli architects, and architectural elements from those buildings now line the grand avenues that extend outward from the agora, lending the city an air of romantic antiquity.

The studios of the city's cultural elite are located on the outskirts of the city, scattered about the foothills of the mountains that lie to the east. Here a poet, painter, weaver or musician can practice his craft in relative solitude, while still remaining close enough to the city to critique a peer's work and attend cultural events.

The House of Learning

In quarrying the stone for his ill-fated fortress, de Terciopelo accidentally uncovered the entrance to a Numanari library containing ancient texts preserved by the cold, dry climate of the high mountains. Among the works preserved were histories of the savage Katabic kingdoms along the Idiglat and Buranun Rivers, epics of the Persic shahs and Numanari treatises on cosmology and mathematics. Sultan Hamid II ordered the construction of a

medressa (educational institution) known as the House of Learning to house the texts, most of which have been translated into Katabic. The library in the House of Learning remains one of the most complete guides to the pre-Crescent history of Anatol Ayh, and all those in search of ruins in the deep desert would be wise to consult the sages housed therein.

The Pool of Sorrow

According to Numanari legend, one of their kings was forever imprisoned in this black pool for the crime of deceiving the gods. A great rock formation resembling a recumbent woman—said to be the king's daughter—stands over the pool, a spring bubbling from the formation's head and trickling over the dark rocks to feed the lake. Folklore has it that a fool who swims in the pool's dark waters becomes trapped by the desires she cannot grasp, becoming withdrawn and eventually dying of deprivation. City authorities shrug at the legends, but every summer a few foolhardy citizens go missing after taking a dip to escape the punishing heat.

Batik Şehir

Since time immemorial, there has been war across the hills and dales of Anatol Ayh, and the halls of Batik Şehir, the Sunken City, have always welcomed refugees. The earliest accounts still extant in Anatol Ayh mention these ruined halls, and the stone of the upper levels displays scars with the exotic names and ancient accounts of those who sought refuge therein: Naram-Sin the Defeated, and Esarhaddon the Blighted.

Those who visit the site today are likely to come across a fugitive from the former sultan's justice, or a few schismatics from Ashur performing their unorthodox rites. Except in times of war, most avoid the halls of Batik Şehir, believing them cursed or at least an invitation to misfortune. None truly know how far the complex extends, and few are foolish enough to find out.

The Mağaralar

Accessible via a single entrance built into the side of a ridge, the Mağaralar of Batik Şehir are recognizably the work of humans. Though windowless, these caves possess small hearths and are well ventilated by shafts driven down from the surface. Cisterns, dug into low-lying areas of the ridge above, channel rainwater through a series of culverts carved into the floor, providing running water of a sort. Refugees quickly discovered that waste deposited into strange metal shafts running through the stone vanishes from the halls entirely, seeing to their plumbing needs.

More puzzling still are the metallic statues of fantastic beasts littered throughout the caves. Called Canavarlar, these hybrids of human and beast take many forms. There are winged oxen with human heads, horned snakes with many grasping hands and scorpions with the upper bodies of men and women. Though none have yet figured out why, these figures move about the Mağaralar seemingly at random, occasionally belting out phrases in forgotten tongues that sound suspiciously like religious invocations.

The Hapishane

On those occasions when overcrowding forces a refugee from the highest levels of Batik Şehir, he descends to the Hapishane. This unfortunate reports a strange noise always at the edge of his hearing, that disappears whenever he concentrates on it. The architecture begins to take on an alien cast, with fewer curves and more angular construction. Chambers here are unbricked and hearthless, the rock free from the marks of chisels or sledges, seemingly hollowed out at a stroke from the surrounding mountain.

A few pariahs have delved even deeper, making wild claims of tunnels connecting Batik Şehir with other settlements miles distant, of strange machinery cast from an unknown metal and strange lights flickering in deep chasms. Monstrous beasts that defy description are also reportedly imprisoned in the Hapishane. These accounts remain nothing more than hearsay, as friends and family shun those who venture so deep, believing them touched by misfortune. The last pilgrim to do so, Muharrem ibn Evhad, left the following poem with his family before jumping from the ridgetop: "T'was too deep to go; fleeing evil above, I found evil below."

Current Relations

Ashur

Since granting Ashur's independence in the aftermath of the Fetret Devri, Anatol Ayh has viewed the breakaway province with frustration and scorn. Possessed of natural wealth, and between the unruly populace and an unknown number of religiously motivated murderers, Ashur is costly to conquer and difficult to rule. Nevertheless, some within the sultana's court believe it would have been better if Aisha's decree had never been spoken.

Persis

Relations between Anatol Ayh and Persis are strained to the breaking point. Shah Jalil's love for the deposed—and presumed dead—Sultan Istani has made him an implacable enemy of Sultana Safiye. Conflict is inevitable, but the question of who will strike the first blow and where it will fall has yet to be determined.

Sarmion

Sarmion has enjoyed a great deal of influence since Sultana Safiye's coronation. With several Chavra among the bostanci, the Nation can ensure the empress hears any concerns its monarchy has directly, rather than being diluted through advisors. The result has been a tightening of relations between the two Nations, especially as the threat from Persis grows and the sultana looks for allies.

Tribes of the 8th Sea

Since Sultan Istani's disappearance among the burning dunes, Sultana Safiye has cultivated close relations with the Tribes of the 8th Sea, sending gifts and sages to the tribes. If her brother lives somewhere in that desert, she wishes to ensure he cannot build a base of support among the clans.

There was once a king, who believed he could only understand others if he traveled the world alone to see it with his own eyes. Outside the walls of the palace he despaired, as he was treated as just another man and faced the slings and ignobilities of the unkind, the corrupt and the depraved.

Blindly he wandered the desert, until burnt by the sun and parched without water, he stumbled against the tall gates of a mighty city. In the shade he saw three laborers breaking their afternoon meal. The three looked up from their food and saw the stranger, and welcomed him to their shade. They offered him bread, and salt, and had his feet washed. Only then did they ask the man what he might need to continue his journey. The king in disguise, so struck by their generosity, exclaimed, "I come to you with nothing, and you offer me the bread of your table. What else could I need except one answer. Why do you show such kindness?"

And the eldest of them explained, "It is by your staff we know we must offer you every kindness in the world. For it is written, the Second Prophet, may he ever be praised, walked with a staff in his hand through the land in search of a home. You seek your salvation while he sought to offer us ours. In the name of his gift to us, we offer these gifts to you." And so moved was the king, he returned to his city and donned once more the mantle of rulership. His wisdom grew so much from his experience, he was soon elevated to the high seat of emperor. Yet from that day forward, there were always three individuals at Iskandar's gate, ready to offer the gifts that feed the body, and the soul.

IBRAHIM IBN HAYREDDIN, CAPTAIN OF THE *TURGUT*

"My poor brother, may he rest in peace."

Ibrahim ibn Hayreddin, Captain of the *Turgut*

A dashing, thoroughly modern commander, Ibrahim believes that Crescent Empire should embrace the best of what the world has to offer. After years of study, he has mastered every Théan tongue, and makes a point to treat a captive kindly while pressing her for information about military tactics, scientific innovations and works of cultural import. Once he has satisfied his curiosity, he sets her free a few days travel from a friendly port with enough food and water to make the journey.

The crew of the *Turgut* is fiercely loyal to their captain, and he looks after their health and safety assiduously. Nowhere else on Terra do people from as many Nations strive together to accomplish a single goal. Ibrahim believes his ecumenical, cosmopolitan crew to be a microcosm of what the Crescent Empire could be if it truly dedicated itself to reform, and he hopes his military successes inspires others to follow his example.

Story Hooks

- Ibrahim has his hands full with a band of Anatoli pirates unlawfully raiding ships sent from Anatol Ayh to Sarmion. The pirates attack swiftly under cover of night and number far too many for the *Turgut* to take on its own. Even more confounding, some ships appear to also fly Numanari colors.
- Ibrahim's father, Hayreddin, was once considered the Crescent Fleet's foremost commander. Hayreddin deserted for reasons unknown, stealing the fleet's flagship and turning corsair with his whole crew. Ibrahim is driven to know why, and to avenge the slight on his family's honor. At the same time, he wonders if he can ever outmaneuver his legendary father at sea. Ibrahim has heard word of Hayreddin off the coast of the Gilead and looks for good ships to join his cause.

Safiye, Sultana of Anatol Ayh, Padishah of the Crescent Empire

As Padishah of the Crescent Empire and Sultana of Anatol Ayh, Safiye bears a tremendous burden in the name of her people. As a young woman she left the empire to explore the world. Visiting every Théan country and learning what she could from their customs, she drank in all excitement Théah had to offer and more. She was content. Upon hearing her beloved brother Istani had taken the throne, she resolved to stay away, to spare him the horror of having to kill her and allowing the kind boy she once knew to rule her empire.

Safiye's peace of mind was not to last. In her travels, she heard worrying stories of the empire's new laws—laws that went directly against peaceful Dīnist scripture. She refused to believe them until one night a band of brigands sent by her brother attempted to assassinate her. Along the way she met up with her closest friend, Batya Princess of Sarmion, and together with an elite squad of Chavra took control of the empire.

After three years on the throne, she still feels herself torn between her responsibility as a ruler, and her duties to reform the empire, being the new head of her family and the supreme eminence of the Dīnist faith. She seeks to build the Crescent Empire into a place that benefits from the richness of all faiths and peoples.

Story Hooks

- Safiye suspects the Grand Vizier, Mehmed Ali Pasha, of knowing the whereabouts of her brother Istani. Recently, Mehmed meets with a mysterious man from the 8th Sea every Wednesday at noon for chess at the Khalil's Grace Park in Iskandar. Rumors say this man knows the whereabouts of Istani.
- Titania Paganii, a Vodacce courtesan Safiye met on her travels, has requested the sultana's help in building a library in Vodacce to educate women of all walks of life. Unable to assist, as it is best for the empire to remain on good terms with the Merchant Princes, the sultana seeks help to secretly send a shipment of Crescent books to Titania.

SAFIYE, SULTANA OF ANATOL AYH, PADISHAH OF THE CRESCENT EMPIRE

"Together, among the moon and stars, we will thrive."

EZGI KIZI MEHMET, SULTANA OF SCHOLARS, PADISHAH OF POETS

"My sincerest gratitude for the invitation, I would love to attend the Sultana's ball, what wonders I will be able to discover there."

STRENGTH	INFLUENCE	RANK
7	7	14

Ezgi kizi Mehmet, Sultana of Scholars, Padishah of Poets

A middle-aged woman who can mold words as easily as al-Musawwir shaped the world, Ezgi kizi Memhet is welcome everywhere she travels. And travel she does, from the tribes of the 8th Sea to Iskandar and even to Persis, declaiming couplets on the woes of humanity and the hunger for spiritual perfection and union with the divine. As a yol bulan kişi, she embraces an ascetic lifestyle and has assembled a significant following of devotees drawn by both her poetry and her mysticism.

Beyond her gifts as a poet, scholar and mystic, Ezgi is also a talented spy for the Shah of Persis. The couplets of her *qaṣā'id* often highlight the fallibility of Anatoli rulers, and the inability of a single soul to devote itself fully to both temporal and spiritual concerns. A welcome guest in any home, she amasses significant stores of intelligence for the shah and wins the allegiance of malcontents across the Crescent Empire.

Story Hooks

- Hoping to ignite a fight in the capital, Ezgi has convinced a wealthy merchant, Feray, that the sultana's reforms were unjust—especially to the rich. Goaded onwards by Ezgi, Feray seeks allies to help her set fire to the Grand Bazaar in Iskandar, destroying many new businesses begun by people aided by the sultana's edict. Princess Batya has been charged with discovering who is behind this foul plot, but needs someone to help infiltrate Feray's noble group and find out who has turned against the sultana.
- Shah Jalil tasked Ezgi with a deadly mission: poison the waters of the White Harem, rendering the sultana's male concubines infertile, crippling her chances of producing an heir. Ezgi has already gained an invitation to perform at the sultana's court, now all she needs is the right moment to strike. Irmak, a concubine in the Harem, has found a few vials of the poison, but she needs someone to find more proof before she can bring it before the sultana.

Davud ibn Ihsan, Bölükbaşı of the 1st Company, Janissary Corps

No man better represents the Way of Anatol Ayh than Davud ibn Ihsan. The son of a prominent qadi, he learned Dīnist theology and law at his father's knee then took up the study of languages, achieving fluency in all the regional languages of the Crescent Empire, and numerous tongues from Ifri and Théah. Given consistently high marks by his tutors and commanders, he enjoyed a meteoric rise through the Janissary Corps and now holds its most prestigious field command, often tasked with resolving intractable problems in far-flung provinces.

The Crescent Empire has given Davud everything he could ask, and he countenances any means to preserve it. His courtly manners and peerless command of law, theology and custom have given him the tools to justify any course of action he chooses to take. He values the Crescent Empire's continuing strength and stability above all, and removes any threat to either without regard to procedural or ethical niceties. Davud, wholly untroubled by his conscience, has butchered thousands in the name of the former sultan.

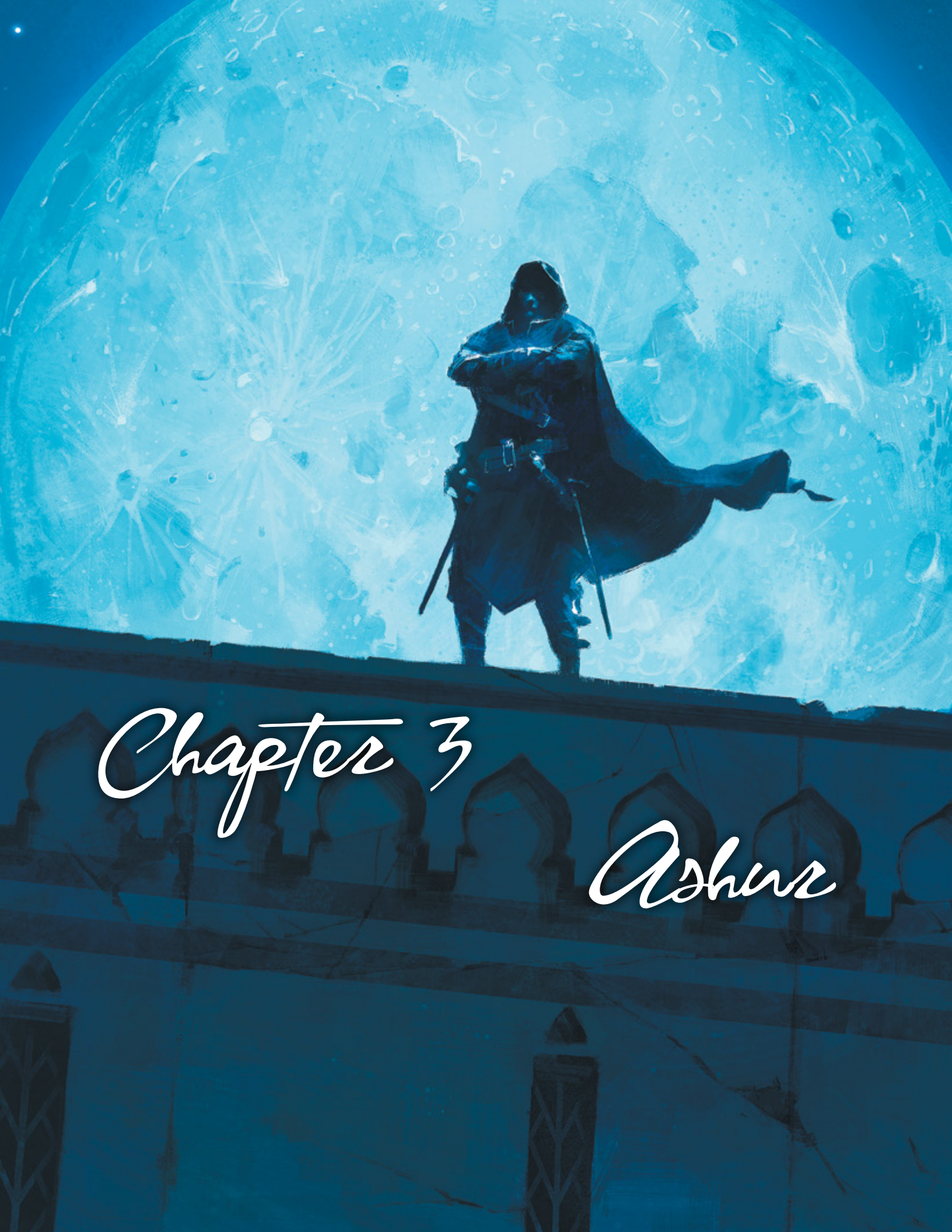
Story Hooks

- Davud recently seized control of the small Anatoli kaffee farming province of Baebur. The local bey asked Davud's platoon to leave after they had taken advantage of the province's hospitality for a over week. In return, Davud challenged the bey to a duel and killed her. Now, the bey's son Efe ibn Haydar looks to secretly get word to Ali Hakhan ul-Barrayun wa al-Bahrain before it is too late for his province.
- Davud's mother, Makbule, was once a well-respected mufti. When she found proof Davud had used intimidation and bribery to gain his current position, she reported him to Idris ibn Haluk, the qadi she worked with. Idris swept this secret under the rug and Makbule disappeared. She has hidden herself in a traveling caravan within the 8th Sea, but her son's agents have found her and Makbule needs someone to help smuggle her to freedom.

DAVUD IBN IHSAN, BÖLÜKBAŞI OF THE 1ST COMPANY, JANISSARY CORPS

"A duel to the death then? I never require a respected man such as yourself to live with the dishonor of your actions."

STRENGTH	INFLUENCE	RANK
10	5	15



Chapter 3

Ashur

ASHUR

Ashur is a tiny independent city-state surrounded on all sides by the Crescent hegemony. How is this possible? The pithy answer was always "Assassins and Elohim." Ashur's feared Assassins kept enemy armies from advancing on the Nation, while the mysterious Elohim planted the magical fruit that kept Ashur from starving whenever the empire attempted economic warfare.

The infrastructure that kept those two systems afloat is failing—fast.

For 800 years, the Assassins bloodied their hands at the behest of the Guardian of the First Garden, a mysterious immortal who, rumors say, has the power to see all possible futures. But now the Guardian is dying from an infected wound—and at the same time, Yesu's tree, the tree to which the Orthodox attribute all of Ashur's bounty, fails to bloom. As the tree withers so too the crops all throughout Ashur, and though the people have stored food, it won't be long before famine hits.

In the empire, Ashur is called "Fanatic Country," a country held by Orthodox zealots and Dīnist heretics, co-religionists who take their competing creeds extremely seriously. How can two such extreme religions live side by side with one another? Simple: a devoted Dīnist or Orthodox, heretic and otherwise, considers her fellow "fanatic" a better bedfellow than she does the distressingly "secular" denizens of the Crescent Empire.

To put this strange plurality in perspective, Ashur is 50 percent Orthodox, 40 percent Dīnist and ten percent followers of other creeds. It is worth noting, however, that of those 40 percent Dīnist, most are Anasheed, an offshoot Dīnist sect. All these religions inform the Ashurite class system, a four-class system that pervades all of Ashur.

History

They say Ashur did not exist before Yesu's followers found it.

That seems unlikely on the face of it—and yet, the Numanari were not the first to find Ashur. It was the sort of land they should have found, too, the sort of land they should have adored and exploited; hidden in mountains, utterly defensible, cool and misty all year round, with lush vegetation and soil so fertile it has become the subject of legends. When the followers of Yesu found the string of mountain valleys that became Ashur, the ground was entirely untouched. And when Yesu's followers planted figs, a thousand gardens grew.

The Prophet's Daughter

In 620 AV, Khalil ibn Mustafa al-Thaji came to Ashur with his dying daughter, Irshad. He carried her up the slopes of Ashur's highest peak and descended the mountain without her. The Green Mountain had never before been successfully climbed, and this feat impressed the Orthodox; many tried to convert then and there, but so the story goes, Khalil told them to wait.

For 80 years nothing happened. Then the Anatoli invaded.

The Orthodox, living in the fruitful forests, were technologically primitive and abhorred violence. The Anatoli easily conquered the string of mountain valleys and the sultan eagerly anticipated exploiting Ashur's fruitful forests. When the Orthodox refused to cooperate, the sultan forced them to flee into deep forests or chained them to work in plantations.

By the time the Vodacce invaded the region, Ashur was firmly under control of Anatol Ayh, and when the Crescent Empire formed, Ashur provided a wealth of vegetation to sell and gain wealth. Ashurites became cynical, still praying, but disillusioned with pacifism and passive resistance. Then in the year 800 AV, Irshad bint Jamila, the Prophet's daughter, descended Ashur's highest mountain.

The first thing she did was lead a resistance. Her followers fled their plantations, hid in outposts and hollowed out the Imperial government, replacing oppressors with puppets. In 803 AV, with Ashur still in state of guerilla warfare with the empire, Irshad declared Iskandar needed her and left. As she left, she led a blind boy up the Green Mountain. She told him to watch over the Nation, announcing to her followers she was the daughter of Khalil al-Thaji, and a Prophet as he had been.

The Orthodox who followed her felt betrayed by her claiming to be the Prophet's daughter, but many more converted. In 807 AV, a tribe of disillusioned Orthodox cut out the tongues of a family of Irshad's followers, nearly starting a war between the Anasheed and the Orthodox. The blind boy, however, was heavy-handed and possessed of many magics: he trapped the would-be belligerents on both sides in a nightmare until they agreed to cease hostilities.

Independence

In 819 AV, the empire was riven by a civil war, now named the Fetret Devri (War of the Twin Empresses). Two children of the sultan, Aisha and Melike, tried to claim the throne. Melike had the largest army behind her, so it came as a shock when Aisha won the deciding battle. At her first banquet as empress, Aisha, with a glint in her eyes and a shaking voice, raised a toast to "the Guardian of the First Garden," and declared Ashur fully independent from then on. It was only after that the rumors began to spread. Ashur had produced terrifying Assassins, sycophants only answering to a blind boy on top of the mountain…

Firmly in control of the Nation, the blind boy, known as the "Guardian of the First Garden," allowed former Anatoli bureaucrats—unhappy with Anatoli customs—to stay in Ashur, to create the Pleroma. The Pleroma governmental body gave Ashur the infrastructure it needed to stay independent. Shrouding a governmental organization within Ashur's long religious tradition, the bureaucrats modeled the Pleroma after a monastic order, built great stone halls, recruited acolytes, created councils, coordinated projects and enshrined laws. Ashurites duly despised the Pleroma, despite ruling at the Guardian's grace, until it became clear the country could not function without them.

ASSASSINATION NATION

Gruesome and frightening stories abound of those attempting an invasion of Ashur. Often, the Crescent Empire has tried to retake Ashur. Each time they failed, as did the Khazari, as did die Kreuzritter. No invasion ever lasts long. "Assassins and Elohim," Alwarithlı say, "the Guardian's murderers prevent all armies from advancing." Even embargoed, the country won't starve.

911 AV: The Imperial army tries to retake Ashur, led by the Emperor Mehmet V. The day after he reaches Ashur's border, the emperor wakes to a dagger in his pillow, and a note saying, "We have you in our power." Poison is found in all food and wine supplies. The emperor retreats the next day.

1120 AV: A platoon of Rzeplitan and Curonian knights split from what would become die Kreuzritter to raid Ashur. They are never seen again.

1230 AV: The Iron Khan makes it to the cliffs just beyond Ashur's southern border. There he meets, under flag of truce, a blind boy who bids him look to an Assassin at the top of the peaks. At the blind boy's signal, the Assassin jumps to his death and a new Assassin climbs to take his place. "I can afford to waste followers this loyal," the blind boy says. He signals again and the second Assassin jumps to his death. A third one climbs the cliff. "Can you?" The Iron Khan rides on.

1388 AV: Saboteurs, sent into Ashur by the Empress Seyma, find daggers in their pillows after being in the country for six months. Half immediately defect or flee; the other half are asphyxiated in a steam bath. Their boiled corpses are sent back to the empress.

1658: Mehmed Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier of the Emperor Istani, suggests an invasion of Ashur. The next morning, he finds a knife in his pillow and bottles of poison pills in his son's bedroom. He subsequently rescinds the suggestion.

Government

In all of Ashur, there are three laws everyone follows.

First: Murder is abhorrent. No one may kill except Assassins.

Second: Respect the desires of peoples not your own.

Third: It is forbidden to cut down trees.

The Pleroma drew up these laws in 831 AV, carved them in stone and posted them in every homestead, outpost, urban center and Cathedral. They were, and are, all compromises.

Ashur is a country of creeds not necessarily compatible with one another. In particular, the creeds of the Nation's two most important sects, the Elohim and the Assassins, conflict directly on the question of murder. The pacifist Elohim abhor murder, while the Assassins have a holy man who orders killings. The first law is a compromise between the two groups, and because of it, Ashur will never allow legal duels and never raise an army, but the Assassins can work unfettered. Neither side is entirely thrilled about the law as it stands, but it provides a necessary compromise, since Ashur is surrounded by an empire that tries to conquer them at the slightest sign of internal dissent.

The second law speaks to similar conflicts. Nearly everyone in Ashur is unhappy with another sect or school of thought. An Ashurite thinks, privately or publicly, that the world would be better, more holy, without that sect or school of thought. However, Pleroma law is clear—the sword cuts both ways. Everyone is disgusted by certain lifestyles, everyone lives a life that appalls someone and barring violent chaos or tyranny, the only way to deal with this is to "live and let live."

The third law was the last law to be canonized, a compromise for the Elohim upset about the first law at the time. Even more than the other two, it is a relic of Ashur's colonial trauma: the Crescent Empire's abuse of Ashurite forests loomed large when the Pleroma made the law. Currently, villagers can file for permission with the Pleroma to get around this law when deemed absolutely necessary, though this remains controversial.

Other than that, all laws change, and all government is local. Assassins obey the Guardian. Orthodox follow scripture. Villages govern themselves.

The Pleroma organize themselves by location, employing many bastardized Alwarithlı laws for their nation to function normally, but cutting away at the endless Crescent bureaucracy to make the laws work on a local level. Each district is led by a Metropolitan, much like a mayor, who meets with her underlings at least once a month and meets other Metropolitans at least once a year, in Bit Habubati on the summer solstice. The Metropolitan of Bit Habubati presides over the Council and acts as the tie-breaking vote.

Religion

Ashur tries to be pluralistic—infighting, the conventional wisdom goes, inevitably leads to an Alwarithlı invasion and besides, religious tolerance is only sensible. The country has no clear single majority religion. But Crescents call Ashur a fanatic country for a reason: Orthodox, Anasheed Dīnist, Yachidi or Yasnavan, citizens tend toward the deeply devout, and where such passion is concerned, even very vaunted pluralism can feel stretched. The majority religions—Orthodoxy and Anasheed Dīnism—have not gone to war yet, but there have been close calls, and there has always been tension in particular between the utterly pacifist Elohim and Assassins.

Meanwhile, those not Orthodox or Anasheed often feel forgotten by the Nation as a whole. Ashur has three laws, all made to cater to the Anasheed and Orthodox specifically, other religions be damned. This is particularly galling to mainstream Dīnists, used to being the majority in the empire. Loss of privilege is not pretty, and it is made more bitter by stereotypes: many Ashurites honestly believe mainstream Dīnists are imperial spies.

A Yachidi fares better. Outside of Sarmion, he is used to being a minority. In Ashur, at least, he is usually a healer who immigrated to Ashur from elsewhere in the Crescent. The oldest Yachidi settlements date to a century before the Anatoli invasion.

Yasnavan and Vaticines, rare in Ashur, fare the worst when pluralism fails. An Ashurite believes the Assassins killed the Third Prophet and with good reason—he was a murderous warmonger. She is not quite so rude as to say that within Vaticine hearing but, well…it is not unheard of. As for a Yasnavan, the conventional wisdom is that his theology is infantile, barely worth being called a religion.

Assassins and Elohim

Many outsiders assume the Assassins and Elohim, despite their differing creeds, cooperate perfectly. That is not the case. Throughout Ashur's history, tensions between the two groups have ratcheted up and down and never entirely dissipated. After the gruesome assassination of Empress Seyma's saboteurs in 1388 AV, the Assassin order went through a dark period, the Guardian employing increasingly brutal tactics to keep Ashur safe. This sparked a push back from the Elohim who, while wishing Ashur to be left in peace, could not condone the Assassin's actions.

While the Assassins have for the most part cleaned up their act since that time, most recently with the aid of the Guardian himself, the damage between the Elohim and the Assassin seems impossible to ever truly solve.

Ashurite Classes

Any discussion of Ashurite culture must begin with the classes, the citizen categories, enshrined nowhere, but defining so much. In theory, any Ashurite may at any time choose to become a member of any class but in practice, that decision is not made lightly. Switching class, for example becoming an Assassin, requires a grave commitment, and every change extracts a cost.

The Assassins

Anyone in Ashur may climb the Green Mountain and ask to become an Assassin. However, few become one. The Guardian accepts all and so misfits and criminals climb, those drawn to death in a Nation that abhors it, those not satisfied by simple kindness in service to Elohah. If a person climbs to the top, the Guardian always accepts her and then her training begins. The Anasheed say to be morally prepared to kill, you must know how to die.

The Guardian of the First Garden is clairvoyant, prophetic, omniscient. To the Anasheed, he is less a person than a phenomena. He is a holy person who inherited Irshad's legacy. However, contrary to what many Théans believe, not all Assassins are Anasheed. If an Anasheed wishes, she may try to become an Assassin, but most Anasheed prefer to live a life of peace.

But among the Guardian's many magics is the ability to resurrect the dead: those who pledge to him he kills, traps in dreams and kills again. Hallucinating, the would-be Assassin lives the lives of all those the Guardian has slain. She lives and dies and dies again, ten, twenty, a thousand times. Every time she perishes, the Guardian offers her a choice: do you want to descend the Green Mountain, go back to the world, go back to your tribe, never to become a bringer of death or will you die again?

Many descend the mountain after only ten, twenty deaths. Though not an Assassin, she descends changed: wiser, sadder, stranger. One who stays continues dying and changing, until one day the Guardian asks him: do you want to descend the Green Mountain, go back to the world, go back to your tribe, never to become a bringer of death or will you kill for me?

In Ashur, only an Assassin may kill, for only he truly knows death. Wherever he travels, he receives awed stares, lavish gifts and a wide berth for the death he brings.

The Guardian

After years of immortality with a singular goal of protecting the First Garden and Ashur, the Guardian became disinterested in his order. He trained the men and women who climbed his mountain, he killed them so they may live again, but the years and darkness of murder wore heavy on his shoulders. Through the years, orders the Guardian gave out turned bloody. Ruthless edicts meant to protect Ashur and send a message to its enemies no matter what the cost. A schism formed in the Assassins' ranks: many Assassins became bloodthirsty sellswords, demanding steep prices for dealing death, buying into the violence the Guardian seemed to espouse with his orders.

Other Assassins sought to stop this cruelty, forming the Alnniqabat Lilnnusr. Protecting the noble goals of the Assassins, the Alnniqabat Lilnnusr monitored the organization from within and weeded out corruption wherever they found it.

When the Guardian stepped down from his mountain for the first time in centuries to fight a shadowy figure threatening Yesu's Tree, he received a mortal wound. Having assumed nothing could kill him, the banality of everlasting life corrupted his thoughts. Faced with death, the Guardian finally took a long look at what his Assassins had become and realized he needed change, a change in him, a change in the Assassins. With the time he has left, the Guardian works once more with the Heroic Assassins in his order to ferret out any corruption left in the society and to earn back the respect of Ashur.

The Collars

In Ashur, only Assassins can kill, but not all Assassins have climbed the Green Mountain.

When a would-be Assassin makes the commitment to kill, the Guardian ties a piece of leather around her neck. The leather is no simple string, but an elaborate work of art; each knot represents a death, and each choker is unique. Only the Assassin can untie it, and only after she has killed the target assigned to her by the Guardian. Post-assassination, she may choose to keep the collar herself, or grant it to another.

If an Assassin wishes to grant her collar to another, she must un-knot the string and re-tie it around another's throat. This process can take hours, and during those hours, the grantee experiences all the deaths borne by the Assassin. Those she suffered on the Green Mountain, and those she engendered after descending. Experiencing this is exceedingly difficult and painful; the majority of would-be grantees cannot bear it and beg the Assassin to stop.

One who wears the collar gains permission to kill, for he has died. Some who have been granted the collar become Assassins, climbing the Green Mountain and pledging loyalty to the Guardian. Others simply become *Hatapu* (sacrifices), people bearing the burden of death. The magical collars Hatapu wear are considered retired, passed down via painful ritual to an Ashurite worthy of wearing it, a symbol of the great sacrifice Assassins make to keep Ashur safe. Gifting her collar to a Hatapu is favored by an Assassin who cannot find someone to take the long walk up the Green Mountain to become a true Assassin; it means her legacy, and magic, lives on.

The knotted string has power, but wearers rarely consider it a gift. All collars grant the person access to Nawaru, a Sorcery that allows the wearer to manipulate light.

THE OLD MAN ON THE MOUNTAIN

In Théah the Guardian of the First Garden is called the Old Man on the Mountain, a term which perplexes most people in the empire.

The first Théan to make the long, treacherous trek to the Guardian was a Castillian woman by the name of Euria Jiminez. Shaken in her faith after the death of her son, she toured the world in search of answers and heard that Ashur had a place that could grant her the wisdom of Theus.

Heavy with the burden of grief, she sought the First Garden hoping to answer one simple question—what god takes a woman's son before she could see him grow old? When Euria reached the summit she met a boy, the spitting image of the son she had lost. The question she had flew from her mind and she sat to speak with the boy. She spent years with him and, so it is said, saw him grow into a man, then an old man, and eventually she saw his death. The now old woman took the long trek back to Castille and just before her own death, the final words she uttered cemented the Guardian's name in Théah forever: "I have seen my son and he wears a shroud of death. He is the old man on the mountain and I am at peace."

The Elohim

An Elohim is an Orthodox forest farmer. Living life in service of others, he is afforded an honored place in Ashurite society. Greatly respected for the sacrifices he makes to live as Yesu did, an Elohim commands a great deal of respect, because of the bounty he provides the Nation each harvest.

She plants trees that bear fruit, roots, bulbs, berry bushes and vines in and amongst the trees. In spring, her tribe of Elohim plants a piece of ground. Once the ground is sown, she walks to where another tribe has planted, tends the fruits and nuts and weed, and finally in fall, she moves to a third piece of ground and harvests. She does this because she believes owning property individually inherently corrupts. All that exists belongs to everyone, and to insist otherwise separates the believer from Elohah. Elohim are pacifists, vegetarians, collectivists, refuse to handle money and refuse to cut down trees. She believes the best thing a Disciple can do on this earth is live his or her life in imitation of Yesu, orchard-keeper and slave.

An Elohim builds nothing, but he does grow Cathedrals. Mimicking the First Cathedral, Elohim spend years coaxing trees, roots and bushes to grow into amazing living architecture. Multiple stories high, with windows wreathed in flowers, the Cathedrals serve as shelters from the rain, places of worship, as art and exaltation. They also provide a way for tribes to communicate with one another across long distances since every Cathedral is equipped with a carillon, one of the only items within its walls not grown from the ground up. Each tribe that uses a Cathedral is obliged to maintain and beautify it, thus keeping the Cathedrals in top condition even though they belong to everyone.

The Pleroma

Pleroma recruit heavily from Orthodox tribes and isolated Anasheed villages, drawing from an inhabitant of those communities who finds herself feeling stifled. New recruits "apprentice" with older Pleroma, coordinating projects, brokering compromises and wrangling groups of fanatics with compatible needs but often-incompatible dogmas. Between jobs, she lives and sleeps in "Halls"—dark, columned dormitories modeled after Ussuran monasteries, sparsely furnished and built from dry, interlocking stone.

One of Ashur's most prominent Pleroma, Moonif Benu Pleroma, busily campaigns, trying to tie the disparate villages in Ashur into a cohesive body. He believes that by all the villages pulling together as one, Ashur can step out of the past and into the present. Most recently, Moonif has introduced the idea of a national guard, hoping a neutral party comprised of all walks of Ashurite life will soothe the tensions between Elohim and Assassins.

Moonif is well respected in Ashur. However, recently he has been pushing boundaries in the name of progress. Most controversially, he has invited Princess Batya of Sarmion to visit Ashur. The charismatic Pleroma hopes by showing the princess what Ashur has to offer it will lead to an alliance with Sarmion and eventually even Anatol Ayh. With the crown of Anatol Ayh on Ashur's side, perhaps he can stop the 8th Sea Tribes from raiding the border towns.

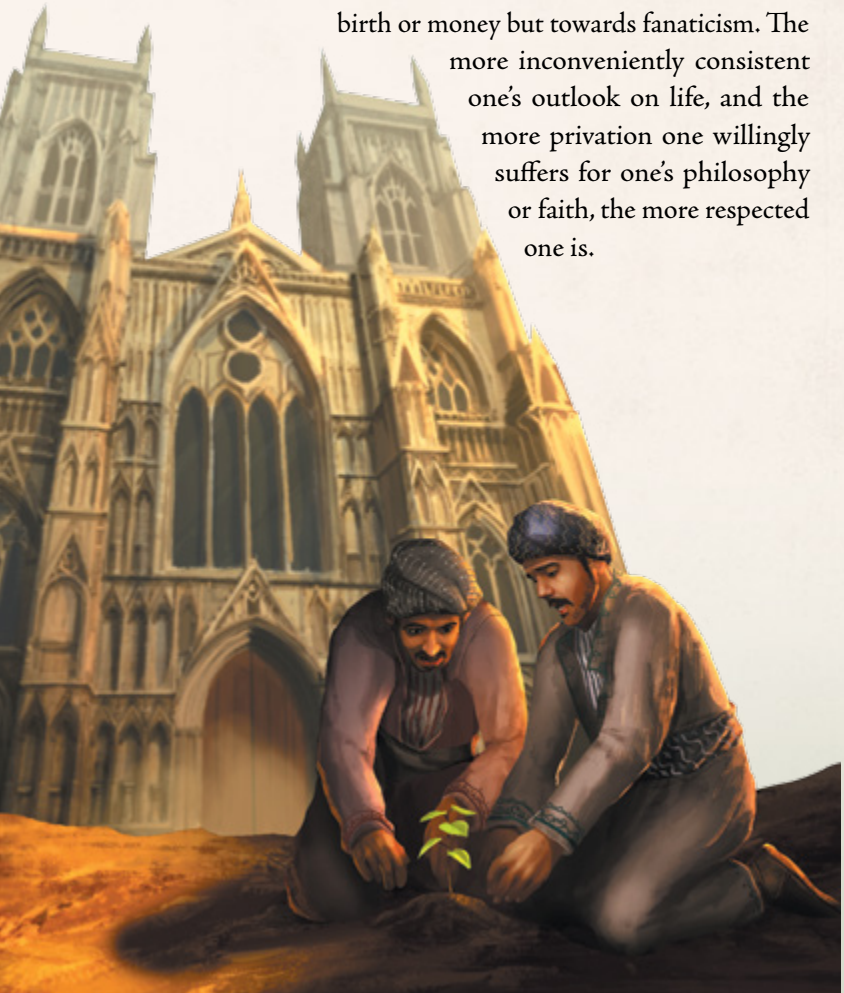
The Villagers

Ashurite villages, whether Orthodox or Anasheed, tend towards eccentricity. Influenced by the Orthodox Enclavest tradition, many aim to become personal paradises for all who those live within. This works better in theory than in practice. After all, one person's paradise is another person's terrifying cult. The most terrifying, of course, are the most famous outside of Ashur.

Nearly everyone in the Crescent Empire knows, for instance, of the Ennoia Village, whose inhabitants regularly engage in barbarity—torture, vivisection, self-cannibalism on the theory that they can go to Heaven by only loving the world completely and ensuring they love the world completely by experiencing the worst of it.

But villages need not be so painful to be all-consuming—there are pigmentist villages whose partisans worship Elohah in color, vocalist villages where everyone only sings, intellectual villages dedicated to painfully reconstructing holy texts and a thousand other strange so-called paradises.

Finally, the majority live in relatively normal villages, but these villages have a lower status among Ashurites. What exists of social class in Ashur hews not towards birth or money but towards fanaticism. The more inconveniently consistent one's outlook on life, and the more privation one willingly suffers for one's philosophy or faith, the more respected one is.



Thus, the Assassins undergo horrific training to earn the right to kill and receive respect, the Elohim live in voluntary poverty as per their creed and receive respect, the Pleroma devote themselves to the thankless task of running a state and receive respect, but the villagers—well, it depends on the village.

Culture and Customs

Conversation and Debate

Ashurite conversation is intense. Questions signify engagement and interest, while insightful questions indicate wit. With no taboo against prying, unprepared foreigners often feel interrogated. Religion pervades Ashurite discourse and a follower of a foreign creed especially finds in Ashur his beliefs dissected with questions: after all, to Ashurites, discussing faith is only good sense.

Though arguments in public happen, Ashurites consider public debate vulgar. The point of public debate, as done in the empire, is to convince the audience. Ashurites say this leads to tricky tactics, bad rhetoric, demagoguery. Instead, the point of debate should be to convince your opponent. This leads to rather different tactics.

The most characteristically Ashurite form of debate is called an *arahu* (conversion). It involves the two parties sitting down in a quiet, private space, drinking tea, and for the first part, engaging in exercises meant to make all parties feel more open and less defensive around each other. Only when that finishes do the debaters get down to discussing and dissecting beliefs, meeting every fortnight for a year and a day. Originally intended for conversions, it is now acceptable to use the form to debate any beliefs of import.

Trade

The Elohim produce the majority of Ashur's food: thus a lot of the Nation's trade revolves around them. Since an Elohim refuses to handle money he barters instead. An Elohim trades for clothes and tools, and services, arts and craftwork to beautify his Cathedrals. He trades for classes, performances of plays, acrobatic acts, spectacles; he trades a meal for a story. He does not trade for baubles, and he rarely trades for things that cannot be shared amongst an entire tribe. Being nomads, Cathedrals aside, he also rarely trades for anything he cannot carry.

Trade is less restricted amongst the other classes in Ashur, largely because they use the empire's lyra. Still, the prohibition on tree cutting makes some economies strange. Books in Ashur are rare, and almost entirely imported. Native Ashurite text is generally considered either *muacat* (temporary), scratched in chalk or wax pencil onto slate, or *daimon* (permanent), vinegar-etched or carved into copper sheets or stone. Most Ashurite "copies" of *The Book of Yesu*, for instance, are etched, carved or otherwise made permanent in parts of the walls of outposts or Cathedrals. Especially for intellectuals and skilled laborers in Ashur, memorization is crucial. Ashurites value songwriting, rhythm and rhyme as ways of encoding information paperlessly.

Dead timber is not plentiful enough to serve as fuel, but Ashur has oil pits and pitch springs, so many that some have been simply lit aflame and allowed to burn for centuries as constant bonfires. Other seeps see their product refined into wax and lamp oil, particularly a clear, clean-burning paraffin called *naft abyad*. The coke found in and around these seeps can be used as hot, slow-burning fuel for heating baths and ovens.

Food

Ashur has a kaffeehouse on every street corner, usually with a small, cozy terrace. Customers engage in passionate discussion over a cup of strong black kaffee and a sweet cake to balance out the bitterness. Round cakes with a dried fig in the center are a delicacy in Ashur, often served atop a fig leaf and traditionally baked to celebrate the founding of Ashur and burial of the First Prophet Yesu.

Ashur is also known for the large platters of small appetizers served before meals known as *mezze*. These can include olives, grape leaves stuffed with rice and herbs, spicy garlicky sausages, briny goat cheese and many other savory snacks.

Clothing

Most Ashurites dress in long flowing robes with slits along the side and angular sleeves. She decorates the neckline with embroidery and appliqué of patterns, trees and flowers. The robes are held to the body with ropes around the waist, the most popular color being black, the same color worn by Yesu. Over her robes, a person of Ashur often wears a dark coat, heavily embroidered with bright colors. How men and women cover their heads, hide their hair or even their entire faces, depends entirely on their village. However, most Ashurites own at least one form of head covering, a simple shawl, for times of worship.

An Elohim dresses in old, sturdy brown kaftans with little more than a pair of leather sandals upon his feet, sometimes even choosing to go barefoot. Pleroma follow suit in simple, grey robes, albeit clean and well put together, and with shoes. Finally, an Assassin dresses much like everyone else, one notable exception being her leather collar with thousands of tiny knots. Wearing a brutal form of intricate lacework, it is hard to miss an Assassin who allows herself to be seen.

Ashurite Names

Ashurite names are simple. They consist of a given name, then the patronymic *Benu* meaning "village of" and then the name of the village the person is a member of. For example, Ninsun of the Ennoia village would be Ninsun Benu Ennoia. It is not uncommon for an Ashurite to change her village name based on where she lives. The most common occurrence of this is when two people from different villages marry; the spouse who relocates takes the name of his new village to symbolize his new life with his partner.

Aside from village names, a Pleroma or Elohim commonly takes his occupation as a surname. For example, Sami Benu Elohim is Sami of the Elohim. Since both organizations function as a society, a village of sorts, the patronymic Benu is still used.

Female Names: Athra, Brula, Isla, Istir, Layah, Maryam, Ninwa, Nahrin, Sharukina, Shefrin

Male Names: Afrem, Augin, Gewargis, Hano, Kanun, Malko, Sabri, Saliba, Sargon, Tamuza

Places in Ashur

Bit Habubati

Ashur only has one city and by some definitions, it is not a city at all. Founded only a century ago, it is nothing more than a cluster of villages sharing space in an enormous natural cave system. The villages cluster together, exploiting the earthy catacomb, each having their own customs and rules.

A traveler walking Bit Habubati knows what village she enters by the colors and stencils chalked and wax-penciled on the ground, ceiling and walls. Territories change with a swirl of color, as a glass-blowing enclave gives way to one whose partisans work occasionally with paraffin. Often the Orthodox Enclavest villages' walls are quite lovely, a point of pride for the village itself. Villagers are very often artists, encouraged by the fact that Orthodox trade for art easily. A village that only writes stories and songs can easily feed itself for a year if its members leave Bit Habubati, find Orthodox and entertain them. Anasheed villages are as equally unique, sporting walls painted in poetry and the air filled with the beautiful notes of prayers lilting across the winds five times a day.

Sites where several villages meet, intersections in the tunnels of the cave, are called "collaborations." As per the name, they are usually the site of literal collaborations between two or more villages. These can be anything: libraries, stages, kaffeeshops, laboratories, brothels. In addition, the Pleroma coordinate huge central markets in high-ceilinged caverns with walls hung with glass and painted with reflective rainbows; in these markets, villages barter amongst themselves and exchange lyra.

No map of Bit Habubati is up to date and villages move constantly. Foreigners often underestimate the fluidity of these communities, which continually split, schism, re-form, absorb and create new collaborations. A villager rarely coordinates or embellishes his spaces carefully: he bores holes through ceilings and strings them with rope ladders, he rigs rifts with elevators, and too often he places safety secondary.

Menial tasks in Bit Habubati—stringing rope ladders and bridges, building pipes, removing sewage, even reshaping rooms in the bedrock—are most often done by Abnegant Orthodox, near a thousand of whom currently swear themselves to the city.

Abbunatu

Every city needs a neutral ground, and that goes double for Bit Habubati, Ashur's first real experiment in close-packed urban living. Abbunatu, a kaffeeshop fortuitously located in an intersection, also serves as a social hub, where people from different villages can meet, greet, eat appetizers, swap songs, arrange dates, play cards, try each other's beverages and generally become more cosmopolitan. The proprietors are two enormous men who may or may not have a history of violence. The cafe currently serves as the site of a thousand tiny rituals: very deliberate meet-and-greets, barter worked out over kaffee and spats between towns resolved before the Pleroma get involved. It has

gotten to the point where the few villages that forbid their members from going to Abbunatu are seen as a little...sketchy. The proprietors also both speak fluent Katabic and Dibre, and often help foreigners bewildered by Bit Habubati.

The Great Hall

The largest Pleroma hall is built along the lines of a Vaticine Cathedral, all pinched annexes and enormous flying buttresses. Finished only five years ago, it since has become the center of government: hardly a wonder, since Bit Habubati is Ashur's only *de facto* city.

Inside the Hall, the Mauve Chamber holds the council of Metropolitans when it meets, and the building contains enough dormitory bedrooms to house the whole of the Pleroma, as well as enough food to feed them for a year. Unknown to the public, it also contains many hidden passages, some leading outside the cave system while others provide a concealed way into villages. In fact, for a place supposed to be a meetinghouse, the hall is designed an awful lot like a fortress.

The Mauve Chamber is run by Tarek Benu Pleroma, the mastermind behind the Great Hall. While the Metropolitans work as a council, Tarek's voice carries the most weight in the Chamber. Many young Pleroma worry that Tarek has gained too much favor over the years and his antiquated ideal of what Ashur should be stifles progress. Lording secrets gleaned from years of service over villagers and younger generations of Pleroma, Tarek despises change and pushes for Ashur to remain as it is.

Most recently, Tarek has begun a political war against Athro Benu Nairu, a woman trying to bring paper to Ashur. Having invented a form of reed paper, both cheap and totally complying with Ashur's laws, Athro fights an uphill battle thanks to Tarek's views of a "strong Ashur, in keeping with the traditions passed on from generation to generation."

The Green Mountain

The Green Mountain is a strange, sad mountain, twisted and tall, towering over Ashur's other great peaks. Its summit is ever veiled in mist. The oldest carvings, at the base of the mountain, date from the first century, and as the carvings get higher, they also grow deeper, more recent, more celebratory and elaborate.

Khalil climbed to the highest peak with his daughter on his back, and to this day no one knows how. When Irshad descended, no one other than her father had reached the top. When she took the blind boy to the summit, he became the third to reach it. Descending, she left a rope by which others could summit. The rope has not broken yet.

Would-be Assassins climb the mountain, and sometimes others climb as well. Curiosity seekers and those requesting a task of the Guardian. Outposts and inns at the mountain's base offer fruits and nuts, a warm place to spend the night. But as the path wends ever upward, it splits into sets of stone-carved steps so steep they act as ladders, and up again, to a set of rope bridges that one must cross foot over foot, hand over hand. Those who run the outposts at the base of the mountain say best cross the bridges at night, when darkness prevents from seeing too far below. Atop the mountain is the First Garden.

The First Garden grows in the mouth of an extinct volcano. The wall that surrounds it was once splashed from stone that glowed red-hot but now sits dormant. A blind boy, centuries old, guards the Garden and takes in every climber saying he wishes to become a killer and tests him. Another climbs to praise him, to give him gifts, to ask for tasks that she can do to make the world more fit for the eyes of Elohah. To the Anasheed, he is more holy than any except the Prophets themselves.

It is widely supposed that the boy can see the future; he knows who to kill to prevent needless deaths. Rumors say he can read minds, how else could he know a person more deeply than she knows herself? Speaking to him is less like speaking to a fallible human and more like speaking to a mountain, a city, a sky.

Those who kill for the Guardian receive leave to walk in the Garden, but no woman or man who kills sees the Garden the same—every Assassin eats a different fruit and every Assassin comes out changed.

Many wonder what the blind boy was before he ate from the Garden.

But now, the Guardian is injured. Black liquid seeps from a wound in his leg, a wound that cannot be healed, and while wounded, he refuses to enter the Garden. Many have begged him to enter, saying there is nothing the Garden cannot heal, but he refuses. The black liquid leaks down the mountain like pitch, glowing darkly.

The Valley of Ghosts

On the foggy far side of the mountain—the side that no one is meant to climb—sits the Valley of Ghosts. Built inside the remains of a copper mine, the valley village looks like a parody of Bit Habubati: a slab of the mountain twisted upon itself, all warped earth and stone. The Assassins there walk undisguised, stare at each other with broken eyes and share the strange intimacy of killers in a Nation that at once worships and abhors them. In many ways, it is like any village—there is tea and ganjifa games and even a smithy—more normal than most in Ashur, really, since an Assassin does not feel the status pressure to make her home fanatic. In other ways, it is just as strange as every other cultlike paradise, because while an Assassin does not flaunt his oddities, he nonetheless came here to live in death. Only other killers can truly understand the ghosts that come with so much murder.

The First Cathedral

When Yesu died, he told his Disciples to carry his body into the desert, to follow the sun for five days, and on the fifth day, to bury his body in a parched mountain valley where the small smooth rocks that lay in the earth looked like polished pieces of bone.

When the Disciples buried Yesu, a fig tree grew where his body had been. Water from his open mouth soaked the ground, filling the valley. This miracle turned it from a parched piece of land into a clear, deep lake, at the bottom of which still can be seen the small white stones that looks like polished pieces of bone. The fig tree rooted itself into the stone, and the roots of the tree grew so wide and so tall that they became islands in themselves, thrusting above the water so that other seedlings could nestle in their bark.

These seedlings grew into other trees, chestnuts and tamarinds and oaks and jujubes, and those trees, in their infancy, were bent, looped and tied, trimmed to form a tree Cathedral, buttressed and arced, towering as any spiring steeple of stone. And when those trees that had been shaped into a Cathedral grew high, Orthodox pilgrims hung the branches with pieces of mirror to reflect sunlight and starlight below the canopy.

Yesu's tree is a popular pilgrimage site all year round but especially during the five days following the Spring Equinox, when Orthodox from all over Ashur visit to eat picked figs and celebrate Yesu's being laid to rest. On these days, the Orthodox bring new mirrors to thread on the Cathedral's trees, and dance and sing to celebrate the founding of Ashur.

The last and latest anniversary of Yesu's burial was different.

The first day of celebrations experienced a total solar eclipse. The eclipse lasted all five days, and on the fifth day, the Guardian of the First Garden arrived, who in recorded history had never before left his mountain. The celebration hushed to see him appear and the low mountain valley trembled—and then, from the shadows of the valley walls, a shrouded figure appeared, who none of the celebrants could say they had ever seen before.

The Guardian summoned a great shield created from pure light and bathed in darkness. Using the shield, he fought the shrouded figure back across the festival ground, driving the sad creature into a corner it could not escape. Triumphant, the young boy drew a scimitar of pure sun from his shield, but then faltered. The Guardian stumbled back, a look of shock spreading across his face. His focus faltering, the Guardian's shield dissipated and a great gaping wound appeared on his leg, oozing a pitchy black pus, given to him from a concealed weapon of the shrouded figure. With a scream the young boy slammed his sword into the ground and the shadowy figure was gone...

Now, no amount of herb-lore seems to heal this insidious wound. And in the days subsequent, the lake at the First Cathedral began to grow dark with murk, and Yesu's tree no longer bears fruit. Perniciously, the other trees in Ashur seem to imitate it, the nuts and berry-bushes near the valley growing barren. They say if the phenomena continues to spread, in three years, four years, five, all of Ashur will be fruitless.

GARDEN OF THE FIRST

But what should I have seen when through the holy gate,
But the pale leaves and branches of my sad fate?
Mauve plums, green pears wreathed in floral decadence,
Crying grim shame, my lost heart as evidence.
And in each blessed inch of emerald I heard,
The beautiful larking song notes of a bird.
It sang to my heart that I had surely died,
For the verdant beauty I had known and spied.
Only those who have died can truly know death,
A thought that consumes me until my last breath.

Current Relations

Anatol Ayh

An Ashurite stays suspicious of Anatol Ayh. She views the heart of the Crescent Empire as a government of conquerors just waiting for Ashur to show weakness—and she may be right. Empress Safiye has sent two delegations of "diplomats" since the disaster at the First Cathedral, and while these diplomats say they want to help Ashur recover, many believe they merely scout and spy for the Imperial war machine.

Persis

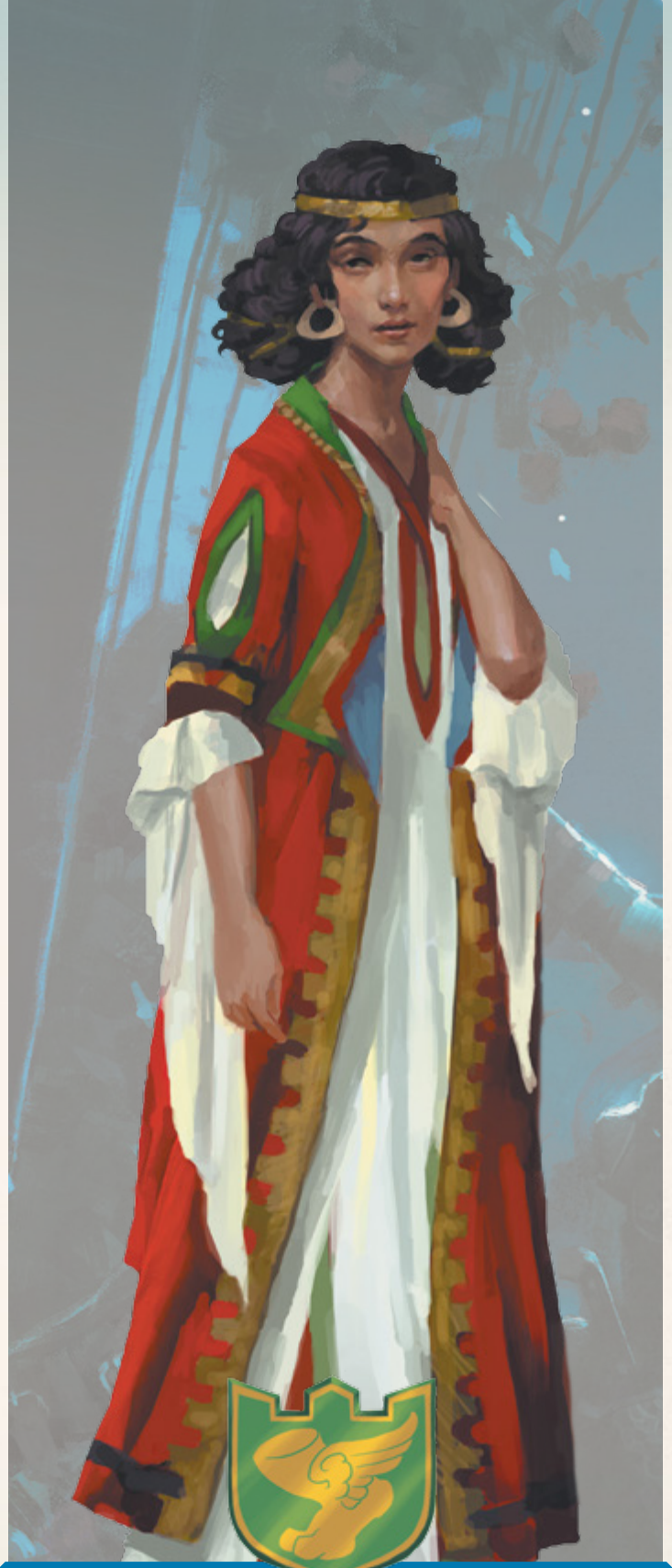
Persis is the home of Ahurayasna, which does it no credit in Ashur's eyes. At best, an Ashurite considers Ahurayasna infantile; at worst, he sees it theologically dead, a religion prone to denying the complexities of Heaven, Earth and human nature. Nowadays, rumors have the darkly dressed figure who attacked the Guardian at Yesu's Tree somehow Yasnavan-related; this has not made the Ashurites feel better about Persis.

Sarmion

Ashurites pepper all travelers with questions, but that goes triple for travelers from Sarmion. Few practicing Yachidi live in Ashur and, particularly since it was the faith of the First Prophet, Ashurites want to know everything about it. Because Yesu came from Sarmion, and many of his first followers were converted Yachidi, the Orthodox are particularly eager to convert current-day Sarmions; discussions and lines of questioning can (not infrequently) turn awkwardly evangelical.

Tribes of the 8th Sea

Many Ashurites consider the 8th Sea Tribes comfortably similar to different Orthodox villages—and if they are more violent in practice, at least they are not much more hierarchical. Many villages have made arrangements with 8th Sea tribes, trading nuts and fruit for cheese and butter. More disappointingly, tribes from the desert sometimes raid villages for fruit, but for centuries, this caused little tension—the raiders rarely killed and there was always more fruit to be found. But now, with the fig tree fading, fruit grows rarer, and some Orthodox tribes have started to speak of striking back.



ATHRO BENU NAIRU

"Progress isn't our enemy, ignorance is."

Athro Benu Nairu

Before Athro, Ashur had no paper, not naturally, anyway. Most Orthodox resented paper imported from Anatol Ayh and Persis at great price because it came from wood pulp.

Athro grew up Elohim and learned how to make reed-paper while playing near the river by her home. As a teenager she created batches, but her parents told her the Elohim did not need paper. A month later, her tribe visited Bit Habubati, where she saw a library. She struck up a friendship with the librarian, but when he told her how much he had paid for the paper, she was stunned.

The next two years saw Athro go from Elohim to industrialist. Assisted by the librarian, she set up a papermaking factory, hired apprentices and paid a premium for reeds. Money poured in, the factory grew and Athro threw her considerable energy into marketing: she brought stacks of paper to Abbunatu and urged people to take pieces for free, arranged for classes teaching people to cut silhouettes and started a side-business selling ink, pens and brushes. Now, as Ashur's richest woman and its only industrialist, she looks for partners, particularly people with access to lithography technology and printing presses.

But as with all successes, there has been pushback. Athro's very enthusiasm makes her polarizing. Her love for lyra is considered "un-Ashurite," and lately purists claiming she "endangers" the division between muacat and daimon have begun rather vocal.

Story Hooks

- Athro's latest batch of paper was destroyed in a fire which burnt down her secondary workshop and killed her lead apprentice. She found a note signed with a stamp of a horned vipernext to her bed—it warned her to stop production before it is too late.
- Her parents turned against her, accusing her of chopping down trees and petitioning the pleroma to have her exiled. They refuse to talk to her, hiding from her. Athro believes this has something to do with the stress of her parents losing their home in a recent fire, which destroyed their village and left many homeless. Athro needs someone to help find her parents so she can talk some reason into them.

Sami Eliyahi

Unlike many Ashurites, Sami's parents loved the Empire. As privateers for the Empire they were able to raid to their heart's content protected under Crescent law. And for a while, Sami loved the Empire too, seeing a life of freedom on the sea through the rosy colored view of a young child.

The boy grew into a man and Sami's love for his parents could not still the feeling of dread in his gut: they were unlike many other pirates he knew. Rather than holding to many of the Empire's higher ideals, his father was cruel and his mother was bloodthirsty.

When his father broke Crescent law and took slaves from a raid on a Numanari vessel, Sami had no choice to rebel. Under cloak of night he stole away, freeing his parent's victims. He headed to a place Ashurite pirates sing of, the Green Mountain, a place where he could unburden his heart—find peace.

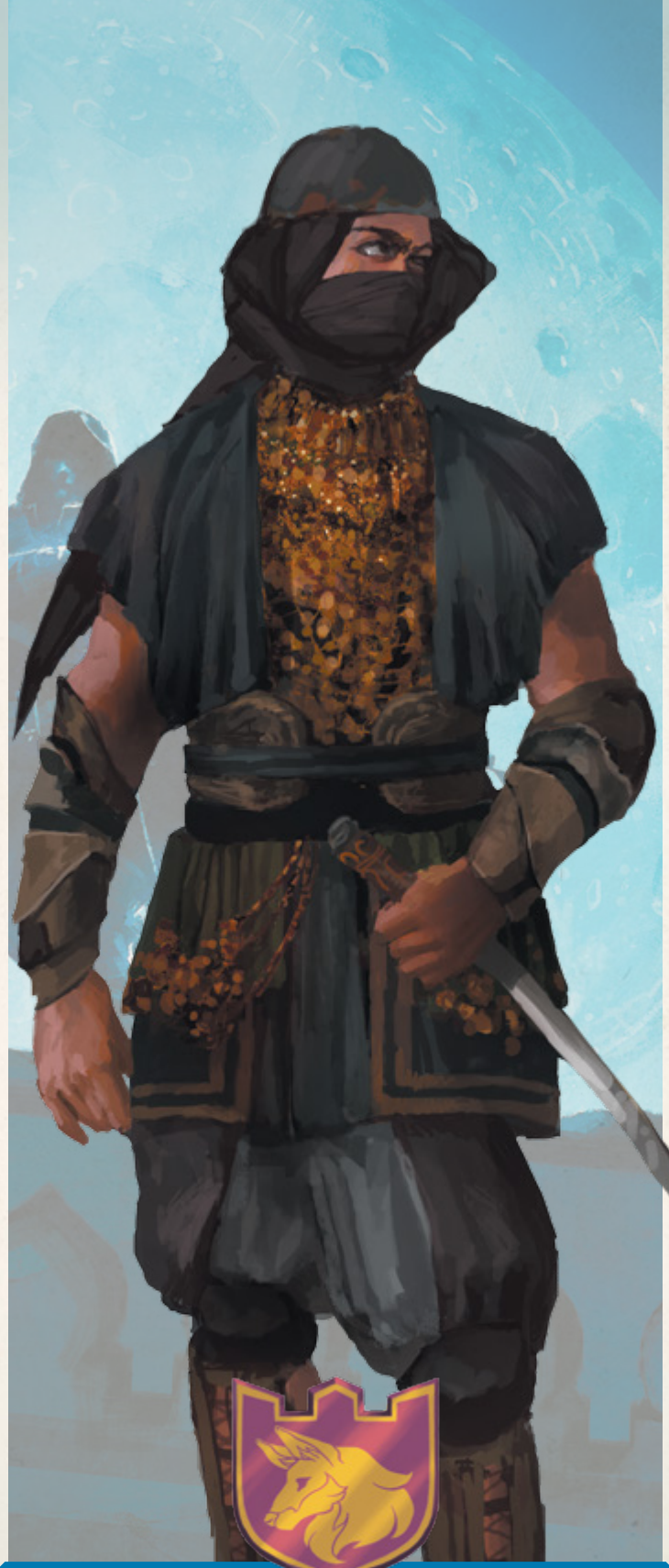
Climbing the last treacherous step to the top of the Mountain he met the Guardian of the First Garden. Sami confessed his sins to the young boy, but when done his heart was still heavy with guilt. Despite his lengthy confession, he remained troubled.

Speaking with a wisdom far beyond his years, the boy smiled. "Justice is not bought by confession, but action."

And so Sami took his first steps towards a new destiny. He died, and lived, and died again. Until one day the pirate woke up to find he was an Assassin.

Story Hooks

- The Guardian of the First Garden is dying. Sarmion healers visiting the Guardian say no mortal cure exists. However, rumors abound of a great ginnaya living in the 8th Sea who grants three wishes to any mortal clever enough to find it, Sami seeks help to launch an expedition to find out if the rumours are true.
- During his fight with the shadowy figure who mortally wounded him, the Guardian left the Garden attended by Sami. Yet, somehow someone stole a fruit from the Garden. Sami never saw anyone enter—could this have been an inside job? As an agent of the Alnniqabat Lilnnusr, the Guild of the Eagle, Sami seeks someone to help discover what truly happened in fear that the thief may come from within their ranks.



SAMI ELIYAHI

"By the cold, leaking teat of a thrice damned jinn! The breadth of dog's hair closer and that bolt would have hit him."

MIRAN BENU PLEROMA

"The only true power on Terra is what we claim for ourselves."

STRENGTH	INFLUENCE	RANK
4	6	10

Miran Benu Pleroma

The river Arantu's floods terrified Miran. They came in a flash and sat for weeks, spoiling food and spreading disease, but nothing could be done about it, or so Miran thought, until an aunt took him to Persis.

In Persis, Miran saw the irrigation channels, dikes and levees that held the Idiglat River and kept it from flooding. Inspired, when he returned to his country, he immediately joined the Pleroma and so learned how intransigent the provincial people of Ashur could be.

Village matrons of Bel declared diverting the river would usurp the will of Theus. Nearby Elohim said they saw no need for irrigation, and everywhere he went, he faced the same old story: even lifesaving measures encountered resistance because someone somewhere was invested in the way things were. In Persis, the shah could have forced the changes through, but in Ashur, the Pleroma were weak.

And everywhere he went, Miran saw the results of this inflexibility. Broken roads, unfixable because trees grew through the gravel. Vigilantes, employed by villages to keep raiders back in lieu of armies or police. Ashur is broken, hardly a Nation, hopelessly beyond the times, but Miran can fix it, if given the power.

As the Guardian dies, Miran builds a standing army, equipping his loyalists with weapons secretly imported, planning a coup d'état and her reign as Ashur's first shah.

Story Hooks

- Miran is not the only member of the Pleroma who thinks Ashur needs reforms. His most bitter rival, Moonif, campaigns for support of an elected Council and national guard to relieve the tensions between the Elohim and Assassins. Moonif's calls for reformation have been met well by the Ashurite people. Moonif believes Miran has sent an Assassin after him and it is only a matter of time before he ends up dead.
- Contrary to what the village of Bel wants, Miran dammed the river Arantu in secret. The idiotic matrons of the village believed it is by the grace of Elohah that there have been no floods in two years. When he announced he had been the architect, the village rejected him once again. To punish them, Miran has sent mercenaries to break the dam and cause massive flooding.

Ziyane Benu Tamra

Born a member of the Anasheed, but with a startling knack for botany, Ziyane clawed, scraped and fought to gain respect in her field. As a child she was mercilessly bullied for trying to "take the rightful place" of Orthodox and for practicing a hobby she loved. Despite her hardships, Ziyane became one of the leaders in the field of agricultural innovations. Her most famous: the forty-fruit tree, a multi-graft that grows forty different kinds of stone fruits. Those who see what she has created call her inspired, touched by al-Musawwir—and unfortunately, Ziyane has taken those words to heart.

Arbella, a jealous rival planter, spiked Ziyane's tea with Amanita mushrooms which should have killed her. Instead they gave her visions—visions where al-Musawwir spoke in adoration of the forty-fruit tree, so much so that They wish it to replace Yesu's fig tree as the tree in the center of the First Cathedral.

Replacing Yesu's fig tree is easier said than done. Most think the shadowy figure who fought the Guardian poisoned the tree, but Ziyane knows better. In one of her visions, al-Musawwir showed her how to make a black, pitchy poison to kill Yesu's tree. The fight with the shadowy figure, she suspects, was merely a diversion set up by al-Musawwir to allow her time to rub the elixir on the roots.

Now that Yesu's tree is dying, Ziyane needs to replace it with the forty-fruit. If the other Anasheed accept her as a Prophet, it should be an easy matter to uproot the tree with the tribes' combined labor.

Story Hooks

- While the tea gave Ziyane her "visions," it also made her violently ill, something she still blames Arbella for. Ziyane plans to poison Arbella's family with the same mushroom. For they will surely have the same visions as Ziyane and worship her a Prophet—the best form of punishment she can think of for her rival.
- Al-Musawwir sent Ziyane a vision. She poisoned Fathi Benu Elohim, a respected Elohim who supervises the lands around Yesu's trees. When Ziyane cures Fathi with the fruit of the forty-fruit it will be seen as a miracle, showing Ziyane's holy abilities and also the power of the forty-fruit. Unaware of this plan, the Elohim are in desperate search for a cure.

ZIYANE BENU TAMRA

"Could you lend me a hand? Al-Musawwir's grace will be upon you if you do."

STRENGTH	INFLUENCE	RANK
3	8	11

Chapter 4

Persis

PERSIS

"Look back in our history and you'll see the highest examples of nobility and Heroism crumble into centuries of misunderstanding and mistrust. We've made every mistake our religions warned against, in the name of our religions. I don't know if we can save this country."
—Archmaga Şivan of Siphon

Persis borders Anatol Ayh and the 8th Sea to the west, the Qazvin Sea to the north and the Persic Gulf to the south. The weather varies wildly, from the snowy mountain forests on the northern shore to the arid southern coastal plains. Rugged, rocky mountains define the Nation's borders, a challenging barrier which has frustrated (but never stopped) many waves of invaders. In between the highlands, the terrain smooths into idyllic valleys ideal for grazing livestock, each lowland basin defining a province which sovereigns and warlords have fought over for Persis' entire history.

Persis is a tense and dangerous place. Shah Jalil uses military force and ideological suppression to dominate a passionate, independent culture. Now-stricken Imperial laws prohibiting native sorcery and religious expressions have stoked violent opposition, a rebellion that now stoops to desperate measures to drive out a stronger occupying force. The flames of ambition and spite may immolate years of cultural exchange unless a Hero dares oppose the tides of history.

The Shah

Shah Jalil Khaṭāʾīzadeh ascended to the throne in 1642. He immediately met and fell in love with Caliph Istani, the ruler of the Crescent Empire and Sultan of Anatol Ayh. Shah Jalil adopted Emperor Istani's view that Anatoli norms needed to overwrite Persic culture to cement Alwarithlı control and modernize Persis. With Istani's support, Jalil declared martial law in Persis in 1648 to crack down on the insurrection.

The Persic Army's Ilmān Corps became the police state's enforcers. These elite foreign mercenaries despoiled Yasnavan places of worship, educational institutions, traditional Persic gymnasia and predominantly Yasnavan neighborhoods hunting insurgents and separatist intellectuals. But the next year, Caliph Istani shared a taste of this oppression with the entire Crescent Empire through the Sihirbazların Kaydı (Magician's Registry).

Sihirbazların Kaydı

The Sihirbazların Kaydı of 1649, written into law by Shah Jalil and Emperor Istani, mandated life imprisonment for any practitioners of devil-worship. As part of the enforcement provisions for this law, the Registry called every sorcerer in the empire to divulge his name, whereabouts, and spellcasting ability to the Imperial Av (hunt).

On the surface, the Sihirbazların Kaydı was a bulwark against idolatry. Both Dīnists and Yasnavan denounce the worship of devils and the practice of the sorceries they grant. An individual governor also had great discretion in how she choose to enforce the Act. Sarmion, for instance, did not outwardly oppose the Act, but never put it into practice. But in Shah Jalil's Persis, the Imperial Av had free rein to investigate any Yasnavan, given that the worship of devils is often visually indistinct from ordinary Yasnavan practice. Avcılar (aave-jeh-lash, hunters; singular Avcı, aave-jeh) could interrupt any Yasnavan service looking for "sorcerers" or "diabolists."

At great expense to himself, for example, a law-abiding sorcerer would leave his home and travel to the nearest Av office, where he suffered through invasive, insulting interviews and aggressive suspicion. A compliant Yasnavan would break her staff, as it were, giving up sorcery entirely in lieu of performing it in front of Jalil's spooks. Others knew it was finally time to rebel.

While Your Kings and Queens Fought for Decades...

Imperial and rebel fighting destroyed many ancient Yasnavan holy sites and sorcerous sancta. At best, the devastation was a cultural and artistic tragedy. At worst, it freed literal demons.

Historically, Yasnavan practiced and preserved the art of demon- and jinn-binding. During the Haxāmanišiya Empire, marauding demons largely ceased to trouble Persis as government-sponsored summoners and binders hunted them down and trapped them underneath daxdanas (open air grave sites) or Temples of Hymn, or inside mountain tombs and necropoleis. Over the past hundred years, though, many of these locations became rebel meeting or hiding places. When Shah Jalil caught on, *Ilmān* violated many of these sites, allowing demons to break free into the world.

Most spirits are scary, but are not much more intelligent or threatening than Persic wildlife. Mightier spirits and jinn are subtler, harder to catch. Many are invisible and intangible, preferring to empower weak-minded or emotionally vulnerable individuals to do their dirty work. Sorcerers once served as Persis' first line of defense against such monsters, but publicly practicing sorcery—let alone sorcery involving demons—is now a great way to attract Avcılar. Dīnist abjuration can block and discharge a spell cast by a demon, but an entire demon is too tall an order for all but the most expert abjurers. So the number of demons infesting Persis continues to climb.

The New Boss

Shah Jalil and Empress Safiye treat one another with unfailing politeness. They have shared meals, tea, wine. Listened to poetry recitals and concerts together. Jalil has personally guided Safiye around Siphon. But make no mistake: Shah Jalil hates Empress Safiye. She damned her brother, Jalil's true love, to slow and certain death.

Shah Jalil's propagandists ensured that Safiye's first Persic tour revealed as little strife and oppression as possible. There is no war in Siphon, they told her. But the insurrectionist Eternal Flame's attack, marring the end of her visit, targeting both Safiye and Jalil and foiled by Safiye's fierce Chavra warriors, proved otherwise.

Safiye ended her visit by telling Shah Jalil of the Kaldırma, the law she put in place repealing the Magician's Registry. Jalil protested that Persis' national security would suffer. Safiye reminded Jalil that the empire meant unity, protection. She then informed Jalil of the Değiştirme, her law banning any caste system within the empire—Jalil said nothing. The empress gave him ten years to apply her decrees; three have already passed.

While sorcerer registration has formally ended, Jalil's intelligence service retains their records. They have spent the past five years developing the infrastructure to continue surveillance, but in secret. At the head of this movement is the Ox's Fist; modeled after the Imperial Av, they report directly to Jalil. Amira Fridazadeh, the leader of the Ox's Fist fanatically loyal to Jalil, refuses to stop until she brings every devil worship sorcerer to justice.

The average Persic citizen is not sure what to make of his new, fearless empress. She is intelligent and graceful, which still counts for a lot in a country that believes a divinely empowered ruler should literally radiate farr, the light of royalty. A Persic Dīnist doubts her commitment to keeping him safe from rebels. A Yasnavan doubts her because she leads al-Dīn. So far she has favor most with Persis' dwindling supply of moderates. Her calls for reconciliation between Dīnists and Yasnavan appeal, but what will she do to counteract almost a millennium of disunity, with Shah Jalil helping as little as possible?

History

To ensure Persis' history motivates even its youngest sons and daughters, Persic parents regale children with epic poems of the Nation's ancient monarchs, Heroes and Villains. They learn of Payman, the first Persic, ruling from the mountains and commanding humans and beasts as her army when she fought the demons who slew her son. They learn of Ashty, discoverer of fire; Tahmures, the first herder, first human ever to bind a demon; and the Villainous interloper from ancient Katab who first conquered all Persis: Aždahâ.

Establishment of the Shah's Throne

Because he coveted Persis for himself, the archdevil Namirha, the master of lies and brother of the Yasnavan God, enthralled Aždahâ, a young Katabic lord. Namirha cursed Aždahâ with twin serpents growing from his shoulders, whispering stolen insights and magical incantations into his ears. Their influence drove Aždahâ to murder his own father, seize his lands and conquer many tribes surrounding his new royal capital at Siphon. This first shah demanded daily human sacrifices to feed his shoulder-snakes, who only ate human brains.

Hoisting her own apron on a pole as her standard, the blacksmith Ziba united Persis' pastoralists, the 8th Sea's tribes and beasts of the wild in

resistance to Shah Aždahâ. Her prayers for triumph drew Dawna, Angel of Victory into her own body. The angel granted her massive vulture's wings, which bore her into the sky and granted her the strength to raise an ox-headed mace and bend a bow no other warrior could handle. Although Ziba's coalition prevailed against Aždahâ's army of humans and demons, Namirha's blessing had immortalized the Devil-King.

Ziba nailed Aždahâ to a wall in the Haykal Alzzalam, his Dark Temple to Namirha beneath Siphon's royal palace. There he writhes in torment to this day, his shoulder-serpents eating his brain over and over each time it regenerates. The last curse he uttered as Ziba nailed him there: "Just as you damn me to darkness, so I damn you to your own. A devil born of your own heart will haunt you and every Shah who sits the throne you stole from me."

Sure enough, a qarīn beset Ziba the Beloved and every shah who followed her. Only the shah can perceive his qarīn, his own self-destructive and Villainous tendencies' whispering, lying personification. Only the shah can bind the qarīn away. Not all shahs have succeeded.

The Rise and Fall of Empires

Shah Korvash the Great of House Haxāmanišiya conquered the largest empire Terra had seen since the Aztlán Empire, extending into Khemet, Numa, Curonia and Ussura in the west, and the 8th Sea and Cathay in the east. The Haxāmanišiya updated and expanded the Solar Code, a set of laws an ancient sun god granted King 'Ammurāpi of Karanduniash of ancient Persis. The Code established Persis' class system as well as many governmental and military traditions. Its *satrapy* system still organizes Persic government: client-kings called *satraps* govern provinces but pay taxes and homage to Siphon's *Shahanshah* (a Persic term for emperor). Persic art flourished in this period; the Haxāmanišiya shahs' tombs, featuring reliefs and statues built into mountainsides, are particularly memorable examples of Persic stonework and architecture.

Foreign Conquerors

When the Haxāmanišiya Empire finally outgrew its ability to collect taxes, numerous satraps revolted, then fell to Iskander the Great of Malcedon in 400 AV. Malcedon overtook the Haxāmanišiya's former holdings, giving Anatol Ayh back to its people and driving the Persic people back within their own borders. Iskander the Great claimed much of what eventually became the Crescent Empire, leaving the rest of the once great Haxāmanišiya Empire to the Numanari.

After the Second Prophet died, trade and cultural exchange spread al-Dīn swiftly through Persis, to the universally Yasnavan upper class' consternation. The younger religion's anti-authoritarianism and mysterious paradoxes seemed to glorify unholy anarchy and lies. Many satraps outlawed al-Dīn as "a threat to Persic civilization," which they considered inextricable from Ahurayasna. During this time, Anatol Ayh began the process of invading Persis and Ashur. When Sultan Jalal decreed his country a Caliphate and brought the Ashurites quickly to heel, the Anatoli redoubled their invasion efforts under the guise of liberating Persic Dīnists. The fighting between the two Nations ceased only when the Vodacce attacked Sarmion in 705 AV and they were forced to unite to protect their mutual ally.

While the Crescent Sultan replaced the shah in Siphon, Anatoli dance, fashion, poetry and customs flourished in Persis. The Nation pushed back first culturally, then politically against Anatoli influence in the ninth century. Using the chaos of the Fetret Devri, Persis reclaimed their country for the shah and threw off the caliph's yoke. With its independence, the struggle for shahdom between former satraps, not to mention tension between Dīnists and Yasnavan, persisted in Persis until the Iron Khan arrived.

In 1219, Persic people murdered the diplomats the elderly Khitai Khan had sent from the east to open trade negotiations. In retaliation, the Iron Khan spent the next two years conquering Persis. The Khanate's free religion removed Dīnist-Yasnavan tension from politics, cooling the conflict somewhat. Various Khazar khanates held Persis until Khaṭāʾī seized power in 1507.

HEROICS AND SLAVERY

Only a few years ago, Persic society included a slave caste, the ardu, and many people were not happy about it. Persis' Crescent neighbors found the practice cruel and outdated. To the Persic people it was a reality of their life, their government, but they knew there was a better way. The other Nations of the empire were shining examples of that. Not one Heroic person in the empire or beyond supported the ownership of ardu, of slaves. In fact, if not for Emperor Istani and his malicious wars against all magic users, the practice would have most likely been outlawed years ago.

Establishment of the Khaṭāʾīd Dynasty

The warrior-poet Khaṭāʾī emerged from the Khednegu Order, determined to protect peaceful Persic Dīnists with the power of the throne. He led Dīnist zealots to victory over the nominally Dīnist, but unpopular Gūrkāniyān Khazar Khanate, establishing the Khaṭāʾīd Dynasty which rules Persis to this day.

Khaṭāʾī enthusiastically modernized Persis. Many Persic people, especially the upper classes, converted to al-Dīn, enjoying the shah's favor in business, politics and high society. When the Crescent Empire invaded Persis in 1532, Khaṭāʾī's son Shah Tehmasib fought back for two decades.

Nevertheless, Persis capitulated in 1555. In fact, many Persic Dīnists welcomed the empire's rule, their privilege solidifying. Incensed at Crescent soldiers destroying Yasnavan holy sites, despairing at what they perceived as the loss of their Nation and culture, many Persic people—mostly Yasnavan, but even a few Dīnists as well—rose up in an insurrection which has only grown more violent and desperate since then.

Culture and Customs

Persis originated much of what we now consider Crescent culture. Religious imagery, poetic forms, painting, sports, governmental organization: many of these things were Persic first, or so the Persic people claim.

Caste and Class

Before it was formally abolished, the Solar Code defined three castes of people: the free, or *amelu*; the slaves, or *ardu*; and the *mushkenu*, or everyone else. Social mobility was hardly common under the Code, but not unknown: for instance, a slave could buy his freedom, mushkenu could learn a privileged trade and an amelu could lose her status for committing serious crimes.

Amelu comprise hereditary nobles, government officials, commissioned army officers, priests and professionals including doctors and artisans. A crime committed against an amelu incurs a greater retribution, but an amelu also suffers heavier fines and penalties for various crimes to prevent her simply buying her way out of trouble.

An ardu is chattel, his masters directing his occupations. However, he may own property (including other slaves), which masters may not simply confiscate. A slave's child is also a slave unless he marries an amelu, in which case their children are amelu. The law protects a slave's rights as well: for example, a crime committed against a slave is generally considered a crime against his master, and a crime committed by a slave is his master's crime as well. A master has some, but not complete, discretion over how to punish a slave who commits a crime: death and permanent injury, for example, are off the table unless the shah says otherwise.

Mushkenu are everyone else. Unskilled or migrant workers, artisans of low status, enlisted or conscripted soldiers and many of the urban poor fall into this category, among others. She may own slaves, but rarely does. The severity of punishments both against and by mushkenu is reduced. So a mushkenu harming a mushkenu incurs a minimum penalty, an amelu harming an amelu incurs the maximum penalty and a mushkenu harming an amelu or vice versa incurs a middling penalty.

Empress Safiye ordered the caste system abolished at the beginning of her reign, a decision Persis bemoaned primarily because it generated a hell of a lot of paperwork and it freed the ardu who provided a cheap Persic workforce. For all his wickedness, Shah Jalil actually enacted this change in his Nation quickly, the empire's laws being more clear and straightforward; but bureaucratic and societal inertia still fights him. Since this system predated Shah Korvash, the majority of the Persic noble saw Solar Code class divisions as a form of protection, which they had now lost.

Some of its flaws were undeniable, but now what happens to the property an ardu used which technically belonged to his master? Can an amelu commit petty crimes unchecked, since most fines are inconsequential to her fortunes? Is robbing a priest really no worse than robbing a loan shark?

Moreover, Safiye's executive order has done nothing yet to abolish informal social class divisions, which define daily life and etiquette far more readily than the caste system's legal distinctions. Persic people are still prone to heap scorn and disrepute on a former ardu who fails to speak deferentially to a former amelu. Within each former caste, social status varied widely: professionals who write and read for a living enjoyed greater social acclaim and access to elite circles and entertainments, for which even the best carpenters and masons could not hope to achieve. Longstanding classism enforces social distinctions for which the law has not yet compensated.

Economy

Persic history begins with herders raising sheep, goats, donkeys, water buffalo, mules, horses and cows. While it is not more prestigious to be a herder in Persis than to be any other kind of peasant, defending herds against predators and robbers defines Persic national identity, in the same way that, for example, soldiering defines Eisen and Nahuacan identity or seafaring Castillian identity. Agriculture supports these herds, with wheat as the most important crop followed by rice.

Persis' mineral resources create a blessed nuisance, which has attracted would-be conquerors since early in its history. The Nation will never run out of salt, iron, copper, lead or gold.

Persic handicrafts make up a significant portion of exports. Pottery, bronzes, rugs, fine clothing and sculpture fetch high prices internationally, drawing merchants from across Théah, Ifri, Cathay and the Atabean.

Family

Persic people usually live in compounds housing an entire extended family. In cities, families often specialize in a business and trade with others for needs outside that business. Rural family compounds aim to be self-sufficient. They grow their own food, educate their own children up to the secondary level and minister to their own sick and injured. Elders too old to work lead and speak for these compounds. Multiple families come together outside compounds for worship. Recent years' suppression has pushed much Yasnavan worship back into the family space. The hearth became a makeshift Temple of Hymn for Yasnavan families, many of whom also attend Dīnist services to avoid suspicion.

Clothing

Modesty demands a Persic citizen or visitor to the country cover his head and minimize how much skin he shows, especially bare shoulders or legs—although windy, chilly nights even in summer and the hot sun keep you to those habits better than any law of modesty. In high-security areas, the Ilmān ask citizens to remove your veil if you have one.

Every walk of life prioritizes good grooming and fashionable dress. Either you look like you thought about what you put on in the morning, or you are socially delinquent. Even the cheapest fabrics are handsome, comfortable and sturdy. Bright and contrasting colors appear in even the poorest clothing, and nothing—*nothing*—is flimsy. Persic people generally dress in layers, but the basic costume for all genders consists of a shirt; loose trousers; a vest, jacket or robe; boots; and of course a hat, turban or headscarf. Wool is the most common material, although finer clothes incorporate a great deal of cotton, silk and precious metal. Disposable income goes to elaborate jewelry or to impressive headdresses; the rich often wear their hair and beards long and coif them into elaborate structures using jewelry and tiaras.

Food

Honey, syrup, sugar. The people of Persis are sweet toothed. Persic cooking combines dried fruits like dates, raisins and figs into many savory dishes. Desserts and pastries are often soaked in honey or syrup and filled with ground pistachios or walnuts.

Saffron, an important spice in the kitchen of Persis, can be found in dishes both sweet and savory. Made from the stigmas of flowers, saffron does not just add color to the food but to the landscape as well. When the fields of vibrant purple crocuses bloom, it is a breathtaking sight.

In the regions of Persis where Ahurayasna predominates, chicken and lamb dishes have popularly replaced beef. Chicken filled with a sweet pistachio stuffing is served with rich sauces and saffron yellow rice that has been washed, soaked and steamed to perfection. To fully experience Persic cuisine, best eat a meal on a humid night in one of the many sheltered gardens where the sweet scent of flowers mingles with that of the food.

Persic Names

A Persic person mostly goes by a single name of local, Katabic or Numanari origin. Epic Heroes' or even ahuras' names are common. For disambiguation or when traveling in a foreign country which uses surnames, she adds a patronymic—the name of the parent of the same gender plus the suffix "-zadeh" (descent of)—or a toponym—usually formed from a variant of her hometown's name ending in the letter "i."

So Musa's son Rostam, who lives in Siphon, mostly introduces himself as Rostam; but if he visits Avalon he might go by Mr. Musazadeh or Mr. Tesifoni. Some people's names also have Numanari versions as alternatives to make them easier to pronounce for foreigners.

Male Names: Ardashir, Baraz, Korvash, Khashayarsha, Dārayavahush, Eskandar, Fereydoun, Hossein, Jamshid, Kambiz, Mehrdad, Nima, Payam, Reza, Sam, Vahid, Yasin, Zartosht

Female Names: Arezu, Bahar, Delara, Fairuza, Ghoncheh, Hamide, Katayun, Laleh, Mahsa, Narges, Parastu, Roshanara, Sakineh, Yasamin, Zeynab

Unisex Names: Azar, Çinar, Dilshad, Ehsan, Golshan, Golzar, Hozan, Iman, Khurshid, Omid, Roshan, Shahnaz

Military

The Persic Army once led the Haxāmanišiya to conquer the largest empire the world had ever seen. Now it polices the populace it once swore to defend. Persis is best known for specialist units, which do a limited number of things extremely well.

Immortals

The Numanari nicknamed them "Athanatoi," or "Immortals," because as soon as one soldier fell, another immediately took her place. Dressed in coats of scale armor, the Immortals carried bows or slings, but specialized in close-range combat with large wicker shields, short spears, swords and daggers.

Current Immortals carry modern versions of those arms and armor, filling the Persic and Crescent armies' heavy infantry role. They are best suited fighting in built-up areas or in breaches of fortress walls.

Cataphracts

This cavalry counterpart to the Immortals comes from another Numanari epithet describing their head-to-toe (or chanfron-to-hoof) mail or scale armor. A cataphract fights with a shield and either a lance or a *sagaris* (a heavy-headed hammer or axe). He specializes in quickly flanking and finishing off sections the rest of the army has softened up.

Executioners

This section's appellation comes from certain shahs' habit of having elephants crush their hated captives. The Executioners ride war elephants into battle. Elephants, almost unknown in modern warfare since most tacticians learned to counter them long ago, devastate unprepared armies. The Executioners either fight with long spears and muskets from a *howdah*, elephant seat, or fire small cannon and ballistae mounted on the elephants' backs.

Tribal Levies

In exchange for land or wealth from Shah Jalil, a tribal chieftain or satrap raises her own troops to provide most of the Persic Army. These sections may be anything from Khazari-style horse archers to artillery crews, but most ride horses or camels.

Ilmān

Shah Tehmasib formed the Ilmān Corps during the sixteenth-century Anatoli invasion as a counterpart to the Janissaries, recruiting the toughest prisoners of war from regions Persis had conquered. The first Persic section to adopt muskets universally, Ilmān were technically ardu, but received high salaries and great social acclaim.

Shah Jalil turned the Ilmān into his military police, reasoning that he could easily compel foreign slaves to control unruly Persic people. The Ilmān grew to hate this task and the never-ending fight against rebel forces. When Safiye abolished the caste system, the Ilmān thought their hateful war over; but Shah Jalil and his qarīn have damned them to a worse fate. His forbidden sorceries allow him to sway minds by evoking the lesser qarīn therein. So far he has tested his powers out on the Ilmān, implanting loyalty and orders to ensure no interruption in their service.

Pahlavani

The term *pahlavan* literally means wrestler, but commonly refers to a rebel fighter, who often met in *zurkhānehs* early in the insurrection (though she now prefers less conspicuous gathering sites). A pahlavan prioritizes stealth and mobility over armor, dressing in dark-colored, padded common clothing that blends into dark crevices or large crowds.

A rebel has a hard time getting her hands on muskets, although the Atabean Trading Company has contacted various rebel factions hoping to change that. Most weapons are meant for ambushes or house-to-house fighting: bows, slings, cheap pistols, crude grenades, cudgels, short swords and knives. Snake venom laces many armaments.

Ichneumons

An ichneumon is not from the regular troops, but a specialist from Danavad, a Dīnist city in the far north of Persis. This society defends Dīnists in general and hardcore pacifists in particular. He trains with the composite recurve bow, popular throughout the former Khazar Empire. While it demands greater strength than a musket, this weapon is incomparably quieter, faster to reload and more accurate at up to four times the range.

He comes and goes as he pleases; while still officially a member of the Persic military, he receives a great amount of freedom. He wears a traditional Persic grinning metal war mask to conceal his identity, and speaks little—his imposing appearance scaring off most people wishing to ask him questions.

The closest thing to a commanding officer the Ichneumons have is a Dīnist chaplain, Gilda Banuzadeh, who passes battle plans to the Ichneumons by leaving notes at shrines. In recent years, this military regiment has had increasing contact with the empress, much to the chagrin of Shah Jalil. Namely, under the encouragement of the empress, Gilda has secretly redoubled her efforts to find an ancient Dīnist artifact—*the Journal of Muna*, from one of Khalil's most loyal followers. Within its pages lie the entirety of Khalil's belief of peaceful protest and kindness. If Safiye were able to get this text, it would support her newly enforced laws, something Jalil wants to stop by any means necessary.

Politics: The Persic Insurrection

In many Nations, the upper classes' political machinations wax and wane, rage and relax without ever touching the common folk's experience. Persis is not one of those countries. The Nation, a political, martial and ideological war zone, drags peasants and viziers alike onto its front lines.

Before Shah Jalil took the throne, Persic Insurrectionists were divided into a few parties, but all wanted Persic independence from the Empire of the Crescent Moon. Now, the face of the rebellion has changed. Some still fight for Persic independence, but many turn their efforts to within Persic borders, fighting Jalil's archaic laws and scrambling to save what Yasnavan society remains in the Nation.

The Simurgh's Feathers

The Simurgh's Feathers is the most moderate rebel faction. They named themselves after the legendary simurgh, king of all birds, which appears in both Dīnist and Yasnavan folklore, and whose feathers have magical properties. Early in the rebellion, a member had no additional demands beyond Persic freedom from the empire. Now with both Dīnist and Yasnavan peers, he envisions a free Persis including harmony between al-Dīn and Ahurayasna, returning to the freedom of religion Persis enjoyed under Khazari rule.

As Shah Jalil tightened his vise on the country, a man by the name of Sajad Dariushzadeh took control of the faction. His sensible, pro-caliphate views changed the Feather's goal: to depose the mad shah before he decimates the country. To that end, the faction secretly works against the shah's plans, having numerous run-ins with the Ox's Fist as they attempt to protect Persic sorcerers from persecution.

The Eternal Flame

The conservative Eternal Flame have been gaining traction in recent years. A member advocates the restoration of Ahurayasna as Persis' state religion, as well as the expulsion of caliphate influences from Persis. A member does not explicitly oppose al-Dīn, but generally resents its primacy in what she sees as an Ahurayasna Nation. Flames have launched several "off the books" attacks on mosques and Dīnist communities.

A member's strategy involves action at every level of resistance. She puts on nonviolent protests and acts of large-scale civil disobedience, deploys agents to infiltrate Crescent government offices to sabotage operations and convenes cells of soldiers to attack the Persic Army.

The Bivar Asp

This faction named itself after one of Aždahâ's epithets, Bivar Asp (Ten Thousand Horses). A member wants the shah's throne restored, but not to Ziba the Beloved's lineage, whom he believes failed Persis. No, he wants Aždahâ's descendants on the throne, by any means necessary. A Shah of Aždahâ's line just might unleash Aždahâ himself to wreak vengeance upon the Nation that betrayed him, letting Namirha scourge the world once again.

This extremism makes the Ten Thousand Horses the most feared rebel faction. Their low-level operatives, thugs and terrorists, beat up dervishes, torch mosques and poison water supplies as flagrantly as possible. But worse yet are the Shoulder Snakes: elite hired killers, saboteurs and spies who infiltrate the Imperial bureaucracy and military, tipping the scales towards chaos and disorder one accidental-looking death or stolen document at a time. The Horses' leader is Sepideh Aždahâzadeh, descendant of Aždahâ himself, who teaches Aždahâ's serpentine powers to eager Shoulder Snakes who maraud throughout the empire.

The Peacock Cult

Brîska Naynawi has begun to preach the Peacock Angel Azazel's gospel (see the section **Important People of Persis**). A corps of Ilmān arrived at the Naynawi *zurkhāneh* almost immediately to arrest her for heresy, but she sent them packing with peacock-feather arrows. Now she travels from town to town near Karanduniash, drawing new followers, blasting evil jinn with holy arrows. She seeks the other six angels in Azazel's choir, whom she suspects has chosen prophets or champions like Azazel chose her. In the meantime, she has to dodge Persic authorities as well as Yasnavan radicals who do not want this love and unity business upending their theocratic insurrection.

Places in Persis

Siphon, Capital of Persis

Siphon has hosted the shah's throne since time immemorial. Once, the City of Pyre and Hymn's houses of worship burned with flame and faith. Its streets teemed with poets, horseriders and sorcerers. But since the Crescent Empire absorbed Persis, it has been a city besieged even in peacetime. Shah Jalil's mind-controlled Ilmān Corps patrols the streets for any sign of defiance. Inhabitants live in fear: Dīnists fear the rebels, Yasnavan fear the Dīnists, rebels fear the Persic army and everyone else fears being caught in the middle.

The Qazvin Sea

The broad Qazvin River brought Siphon's first settlers, its sediment-rich banks attracting first farmers, then ranchers. They cut channels into the earth to irrigate fields and feed their livestock and then shipped goods up and down the river all the way to the Qazvin Sea in the north.

The Persic navy is no more. The Khaṭāʾīds tried to construct a fleet to resist Anatol Ayh in the 1500s, but could not accumulate enough lumber. Since then, sanctions have prevented them from building any large vessels. Even the riverboats that travel up and down the Idiglat are foreign-built in Cathay or Ussura.

Little does the empire know many riverboats belong to the infamous Atabean Trading Company. The rich merchant Dārayavahush, whose family has dominated the docks for nearly a century, has fallen into the Company's employ. Dārayavahush backs the Simurgh's Feathers, hoping the Company can throw its resources behind his cause. The Company, in turn, has secretly made deals with all three major revolutionary factions, eager to support any challenge to the Imperial throne, which denies it economic traction in the empire.

Eastern Bank: The Ox's Head

The Ox's Head is the shah's palace. A single towering megalith juts upward from the otherwise flat alluvial plain beside the Qazvin. Figures and reliefs cover the entire surface of the rock, which serves as a de facto museum of Persic stonework and statuary's history, surmounted by the eponymous giant bull's head. The interior, hollowed into halls, apartments and treasure rooms, shows off the shah's artwork, couture and military equipment collections.

In the center, a limestone flower curls upwards towards the ceiling surrounded by a ring of flame with a stone bridge over it. The serpents carved into the stone have been there since Ažḍahâ sat the throne. They are unearthly in their realism, centuries ahead of the sculpting technology available at that time. No one has been brave enough to unmake them. A secret stairway underneath the throne room leads to a portal that opens on the Haykal Alzzalam, which imprisons Ažḍahâ and all of the jinn every Persic shah has bound over the millennia.

A full square mile of parkland and supporting structures surrounds the palace. Here are the Ilmān barracks and training grounds, the royal *zurkhāneh* and circus, and Khaṭāʾī's splendid mosque on the edge of the park, facing the former-amelu district of town. A modern mansion on the riverbank receives and houses visiting dignitaries. The Ox's Head's drafty stone halls are great for issuing royal decrees and intimidating minions, not for entertaining heads of state used to creature comforts like central heating.

Miça's Arch

Upstream of the palace, a rock formation spans the river, supported by pylons of natural stone in the water with ceramic plates surrounding them to offset erosion. The cult of Miça, Angel of Contracts, built this stone-hewn, tomb-like structure before disappearing from it overnight in 1511 AV, leaving their possessions behind never to be seen again. Afterwards, a Dīnist mosque took over the structure and has remained in operation ever since. During the war with the caliphate, all the Dīnists in Siphon took refuge in this structure, which the caliph's guns ignored. It remains under heavy Ilmān guard today, as multiple revolutionary plots have targeted Miça's Arch—a Dīnist gathering point—for demolition.

Western Bank: The Ash Plain

Under Khaṭāʾī, the western bank sported a broad riverfront park all city dwellers used. Further out, on more solid ground, towering universities, Temples of Hymn and residential neighborhoods sprawled around market squares and sidewalk cafes. But the caliph's mammoth cannons leveled most of these structures between 1550 and 1555. Now, only their foundations and first-floor walls remain. More temporary structures, of brick and mud and timber, grow out of them like fungi out of a dead insect. Locals have occasionally attempted to rebuild the more iconic structures, particularly Temples of Hymn; but the incentive to do so weakens when the Ilmān look closer at them, watchful for diabolism or sorcery.

This is a rough part of town, a far cry from the eastern bank's noble residences. Ilmān patrol the streets, muskets in hand, as sullen Persic people look on from café windows and market stalls. Thieves' guilds and protection rackets rule large swathes of the town, since hunting rebels distracts Imperial law enforcement. Every other day, an explosion or gunfight breaks the peace as a rebel cell attacks a Ilmān station or vice versa.

The Tomb of Infinite Devils

The century of conflict that ravaged Persis' holy sites unleashed hundreds, perhaps thousands of evil spirits upon the world. Trapped and tormented within sacral bindings for over two thousand years, nearly all these wretched monsters fled into the empire to infest innocent minds and twist them towards ruin.

Two millennia of imprisonment have unpredictable effects on a mind, even a jinn mind originally wrought of pure evil. Many missed doing harm, but some missed sex or liquor or sunlight. Some missed poetry or sports or puppies. One demon spent the entire two thousand years thinking about a loaf of fresh bread she smelled but could not eat because a sorcerer trapped her in a bronze mirror and then (adding insult to injury) ate it herself.

Since their liberation, these outliers fled from civilization, from where sorcerers might trap them. Twelve congregated in the northern mountain tomb of Shah Atossa. Among its cavernous subterranean halls, their claws cut a new home into the stone. Originally they marked the stone lintel with an invisible sigil that read "Tomb of a Dozen Devils" in the twisted tongue of Namirha; but they eventually realized the name might imply no vacancy to future neighbors, so they crossed it out and wrote "Tomb of Infinite Devils." Sure enough, new friends arrived in droves.

The Tomb and the secluded valleys that hide it now abound in jinn. It features apartments, farms, stores, workshops, libraries, pubs, a little theater, a *zurkhāneh* and one bakery. The decor is a little morbid, as even demons with a positive outlook still retain affection for thrones of skulls or antique torture equipment.

In many ways, the Tomb of Infinite Devils is an ordinary, quaint mountain settlement, with inhabitants taking turns as the village elders (or "Archdukes of Hell on Terra," as they call themselves), running town meetings and deciding where new chicken farms should go. But its denizens sit on secrets of history and magic a thousand years old: extinct schools of sorcery or martial arts, poems spoken but never written down and the hiding places of potent relics.

Occasionally a lost mountaineer, ambitious grave robber or eccentric adventurer comes across the Tomb, then staggers down to civilization raving about demons playing mountain goat polo. Or, he tries to steal a demonic artifact to sell or consume for power. The latter worries the Infinite Devils: even if the artifact fizzles, it might attract more adventurers, and eventually demon hunters, to their painstakingly maintained haven.

But the secret will not last forever. Eventually humans will find them. Will die Kreuzritter burn them out? Will the Ten Thousand Horses enslave them to Namirha once again? Do demons, some who have done unspeakable things, ever deserve to live free? They may have walked away from evil, but now they have something to fight for.

The Duelists

A Dīnist fenced a Yasnavan in Reşide's
time. Although the fight grew more and more heated,
neither prevailed. They wrestled next, then played chess:
stalemates again. Days went by with neither best-
ing her foe. Crowds gathered, both sides holding fire
to watch the perfect match. They only retired
to sleep or eat. Their last duel was with verse.
One spoke a line, the other rhymed with it, spoke her
own line, and so on. The battle wrought poems
so fine that when they heard, nary a soul am-
ong the listeners withheld tears. One confessed,
"I sought to destroy you. Yet through this contest
you have perfected my poems, and I yours."
"Where does your work end and mine begin? This war
we began as equals, as equal we cease,"
the other said, and in their embrace was peace.

Current Relations

Anatol Ayh

Relations between the Anatol Ayh and Persis have always been strained. When Istani sat on the throne of the empire, political tensions eased, but are now back stronger than ever. Many common folk in Persis admire the new empress for what she has done for the empire, but they are unable to voice their support in fear of the shah or extreme groups of insurrectionists.

Ashur

Ashurite and Persic relations are virtually non-existent as both nations rarely have cause to come across one another's paths. In recent years, rumors say "government officials" tried to employ the Assassins for a mission to kill the empress, but were swiftly rejected. Whether or not this is true, Ashurite attitudes towards Persis have worsened due to the implication that their national protectors are so easily hired to dispose of Heroic targets.

Sarmion

Sarmion and its royalty supported the empress seizing the throne of the empire and in return the shah of Persis cast a great curse on the Nation causing many of their tribes to disappear. While Sarmion has no proof of the shah's wrongdoings, his merciless persecution of magic users and religious intolerance have shut off any chance of friendship between the two nations.

Tribes of the 8th Sea

Of all the Nations in the empire, the 8th Sea Tribes share the most links with Persis. Many tribal leaders maintain these relationships with their Persic counterparts today, enjoying a strong bond with one another. Recently, 8th Sea tribes have taken in Yasnavan refugees fleeing Avcılar. This has put a strain on Persic-Tribal relations as etiquette requires the tribes to take in refugees and keep them safe, but many see this as impolite of the Persic government who essentially forces the refugees on them, knowing their archaic laws.

BRÎSKA NAYNAWI, THE PEACOCK PROPHET

"Rather than focus on our differences, let us focus on all we have in common. There is so much we can do together."

Brîska Naynawi, the Peacock Prophet

Brîska Naynawi's parents worried when her childhood imaginary friend, whom she described as an invisible talking peacock, persisted through adolescence. The friend in question is not at all imaginary: he is a once-important angel. Uncommonly talkative about his history, this angel Azazel—if he tells the truth—validates many elements of both al-Dīn's and Ahurayasna's cosmologies. Azazel says he was cast from Heaven with six of his fellow angels for his sin of pride after the Angels helped al-Musawwir to create the world. Azazel repented and once again serves al-Musawwir, although his weak, Terra-bound form cannot hear al-Musawwir's voice. However, Azazel and Brîska have figured out a way for him to manifest his form and powers through her.

In her revelatory form, Brîska manifests two expansive peacock wings, a brilliant peacock-feather robe, a mighty composite bow and a traditional Persic tiara. Her voice echoed with birdsong when she assumed this form in public for the first time, sharing Azazel's message of unity between al-Dīn and Ahurayasna. Now Brîska and her nascent cult travel beyond Karanduniash, searching for Azazel's six fellow angels.

Story Hooks

- After hearing of Brîska's growing followers, the shah was displeased. He has invited Inquisitors from Vodacce "purely for the sake of diplomacy," but they have been hot on her heels ever since they entered the country. If they catch up with her, they have the shah's blessing to make her disappear.
- Firuzeh, a woman rumored to be immortal and a witch, turns any mortal who crosses her path into an animal. Her description reminded Azazel of a woman who fell in love with one of his fellow angels. His brother returned the woman's love and voluntarily fell from God's grace with Azazel to be with her. Because of her antics, Firuzeh is hunted by Avcılar. Being another high priority on their list, Brîska needs someone less conspicuous to investigate the witch before the Avcılar get to her.

慕容才 Murong Cai

Murong Cai's poor Madhyamika family moved from rural eastern Persis to Siphon, hoping for opportunities, finding burnt-out slums instead. Murong always wanted to fight for a street gang or the rebellion, but he bruises easily, and athletics vigorously risk dislocating his shoulders or ankles due to connective tissue issues he does not understand. He spent a lot of his childhood talking with older folks and reading. One day, while his friends stressed over a rumble they were sure to lose with a tougher gang, Murong suggested, "If you're worried they'll kill you, why not challenge them to a poetry duel instead?"

The subsequent poetry duel took place in broad daylight in a market square stage. A city guard judged it, and it was close, but Murong snuck his crew some similes ahead of time, so they eked out a victory.

Murong has convinced the rebels to replace exactly one conflict with a poetry duel: the Simurgh's Feathers and the Eternal Flame settled a recruiting dispute with a verbal duel at a daxdana outside town. The poems involved have appeared in graffiti all over town, and are on the lips of everyone from beggars in the street to elite Eastern Bank salons. Since Murong coached the Simurgh's Feathers to victory, everyone from gangs to rebels to the university wants him.

Murong's next step was to convince the Persic Army to take the same deal. Officers are overeducated nobles, right? If Murong's idea takes off, perhaps Persis will be the first nation to replace battle completely with poetry.

Story Hooks

- Murong has challenged Persic commander Goli Donyazadeh to a poetry duel. If Goli loses, Murong will train her elite squad of Immortals the art of poetry dueling. If Goli wins, Murong must indenture himself as her squire, a position no one survives for long. Murong's only problem—the judges officiating the duel *hate* him. One is a staunch believer in violence, another a secret supporter of the more militant members of the Eternal Flame and the final is Goli's uncle, a decorated war veteran. If Murong does not get help to bring them to his side soon, when the duel comes along, all is lost.

慕容才 MURONG CAI

"Violence is never the solution. Only words can offer a peaceful resolution."

SEPIDEH AŽDAHÂZADEH, THE SERPENT SCION

"Why have a Shah when you can have a goddess as your leader?"

STRENGTH	INFLUENCE	RANK
9	9	18

Sepideh Aždahâzadeh, the Serpent Scion

When noblewoman Sepideh Akbari came of age, her parents revealed to her that their family descends from Aždahâ, the ancient tyrant whom Namirha corrupted and set against the forces of Ahurayasna.

Although the Haykal Alzzalam hidden beneath Ctesiphon imprisons Aždahâ himself, his descendants have infiltrated Persis' institutions of power for thousands of years, subtly tipping the scales towards violence, intolerance and instability. The rebel conspiracy they founded, the Ten Thousand Horses, has brought them closer than ever to their goal: to reconquer Persis and rule it with an iron-scaled fist.

Sepideh's golden serpentine eyes and forked tongue—physical manifestations of the serpentine abilities found in Aždahâ's lineage—require her to wear a mask in public. She has inherited more powers than any previous Aždahâzadeh: a pit viper's infrared sense, fangs whose venom stops a victim's heart and the ability to transform part or all her body into writhing masses of snakes. An expert infiltrator, interrogator and assassin, she reinvigorates the Insurrection with surgical strikes, terrifying secrets out of captured enemies with her powers. She recently attacked Ashur to steal its magic fruit, hoping to end Aždahâ's suffering by freeing or killing him.

Hymn after hymn predicts Ziba's scion overcoming Aždahâ's to pacify and unify Persis. Sepideh knows the hymns, but has not discovered her parents' other secret: she also carries the blood of Ziba the Beloved.

Story Hooks

- Sepideh has created a giant viper pit under the capital. With each sacrifice made, the pit grows. She wishes to draw an Offspring of Gōčihr to it by creating a massive hammer, causing catastrophic seismic damage to the city as the Offspring is called to tunnel towards destruction.
- Sepideh has heard of an ancient staff deep in the Persic mountains "hidden within the cave carved by claws." The staff bequeaths the wielder with the heads of serpents each bestowing a different magical power. If she finds this staff, she will truly be unstoppable.

Shah Jalil Khaṭāʾīzadeh

Jalil Khaṭāʾīzadeh was born in 1632 AV, became Shah at ten, and began to rule by himself at fifteen. A few years later, he met Caliph Istani and they worked together for a decade and a half to pacify Persis. They expanded Persis' ancestral Solar Code with draconian legislation to keep the nation Alwarithlı and Dīnist, disenfranchising Yasnavan who hated Crescent rule.

Meanwhile, Jalil and Istani fell deeply in love. Their wedding in Iskandar was days away when the new Empress Safiye returned and chased her brother to the 8th Sea. In his heart, Jalil knows if anyone could survive the 8th Sea, it would be Istani.

Shah Jalil fled to Siphon. All hope seemed lost to build the Persis, and the family, he dreamt of. In his grief, he visited the temple under his throne where the ancient tyrant Aždahâ was imprisoned. There, Jalil was instructed how to unbind Araska, his own qarīn. That very night he exacted revenge on the Nation of Sarmion for helping the Anatoli take the throne. He used Araska's power to cast a terrible Numanari curse across their lands, damning many tribes to the same fate as his great love—to suffer and be lost forever.

Shah Jalil craves revenge on the Crescent Empire, Safiye in particular. Jalil plans to build Persis until the Nation is strong enough to invade Anatol Ayh and kill Safiye. The mind-control powers Araska has taught him have made the Ilmān Corps of slave-soldiers his obedient pawns. The rest of the government is next. Araska urges Jalil to contact the extremist Bivar Asp (Ten Thousand Horses) insurrectionists.

Story Hooks

- Under guise of making peace, Jalil met with the head of the Simurgh's Feathers Sajad Dariushzadeh. Normally a peaceful man, Sajad's mind has been twisted by the shah. No matter how much Sajad tries to resist, only one thing occupies his thoughts—on Empress Safiye's next visit to Persis, the Simurgh's Feathers must see to it that she burns.
- A magic-free empire was the dream of Istani. Jalil has formed his own covert squad of magic hunters, the Ox's Fist. Their first mission? Destroy an Ahurayasna Temple of Hymn just outside of Persis' borders in the 8th Sea, said to be sheltering non-registered Persic sorcerers.

SHAH JALIL KHAṬĀʾĪZADEH

"A man who has nothing is the most dangerous. The empress has left me no choice."

STRENGTH	INFLUENCE	RANK
6	13	19

Chapter 5

Varmion

SARMION

"Sarmion lanetzach, l'sof haolam. ***Sarmion forever, until world's end."***

—Popular Sarmion toast

The kingdom of Sarmion might be a small part of the Crescent Empire, but its influence has long since changed the face of Terra. From the rise of the First Prophet to the explosive escape of old gods, now twisted into evil spirits roaming the region, actions taken by the little country and its leaders have shaped much in the empire. Within one generation, Sarmion helped to both throw off a Numanari attack and aided in restoring the empress to her rightful throne. The cost? Most of its population and its greatest city, its capital of Salemoria.

Sarmion remained peaceful for hundreds of years, loyal subjects of the empire's royal family and provider of the monarchy's most ferocious army of personal bodyguards. When the Princess Safiye left to travel the world, many of Sarmion's greatest warriors went with her. Few remained when the old emperor died, so Prince Istani rose to become emperor instead of his sister. King Josiah and his three daughters, Esther, Batya and Dinah, maintained their loyalty to the Princess Safiye, publicly speaking out against the emperor.

A Terrible Sickness

When King Josiah was poisoned with a magical malady none could cure, many believed the emperor responsible. The three princesses stepped in to help their Nation. Esther stayed behind to help their ailing father rule, Princess Batya left to seek out Princess Safiye and Dinah left to find a cure. Esther was murdered by agents of Emperor Istani while Dinah disappeared into Théah, never to be heard from again. The king lingered on, weakened and unable to face down the power of the emperor, who did nothing to help Sarmion when their ancient enemy, Numa, invaded once more.

In 1664 AV, Numa attacked Sarmion as retribution for its involvement in Emperor Istani's failed invasion attempt after Numa gained independence. Left without powerful leadership, Sarmion was ravaged by Numanari raiders.

Return of the Empress

Only the return of the rightful Empress Safiye gave the Sarmions hope for salvation. When Safiye reappeared with the intent of retaking her throne, King Josiah sent his Nation's greatest warriors, the Chavra, led by Princess Batya, to help the empress capture the palace. After a night of terrible fighting, the unworthy Emperor Istani fled into the 8th Sea, and the rightful empress sat the throne again. Yet the victory came with a heavy price.

In retaliation for the Chavra's interference, Shah Jalil used magic to unleash a terrible curse on Sarmion. The Numanari had hatched a plan to break the rebellious spirit of the Sarmion people. Though the Numanari never managed to accomplish their goal, Shah Jalil came across the heinous plan while torturing a Numanari spy. As the Sarmions marched on the palace in support of the empress, Jalil used his foul magic to send a dark mist across Sarmion and overnight nine of the nineteen Sarmion tribes disappeared from the land. Only a handful of people from each tribe were spared, left behind in horrified mourning while the rest of their tribes were decimated.

The empress, safe upon her throne, dispatched Sarmion's warriors along with 5,000 great warriors from across the empire to push back the Numanari and bid the Tribes of the 8th Sea to attack from the east. But storms at sea pushed the ships off course. They landed just in time to watch the Numanari in retreat.

The battle was brutal. Quabilat al-Hisan warriors from the 8th Sea flooded into Sarmion's borders, driving the Numanari army back to the coast. The desperate, heartbroken population of Sarmion, infuriated by the loss of their brethren, drew on their most powerful magic to transform their own bodies into living weapons against the Numanari. Worse, they used their magic to violate their one law against creating life and animated stone warriors, long held as weapons of last resort, to wipe out any enemies they found.

Defiant to the end, the Numanari set fire to the capital of Salemoria, burning the Yachidi High Temple at its center and murdering King Josiah before fleeing the empire altogether.

In the aftermath, Sarmion was saved, but what remained would hardly be the same.

History

Sarmion began as a country of individual tribes warring at the whims of their gods. In the days after the Covenant of the Longest Night, the country divided into two groups: the followers of Elohah, ruled by Isaak's family line, called the Yachidi, and the family of Ishamal and the remainders of the other tribes who lived in the land.

The country's dedication to peace created a short Golden Age under Yakob son of Isaak and his many children. The new dynasty invited all the tribes to come together in Salemoria, a city rediscovered by the Yachidi, to create a ruling body to unite the tribes, both Yachidi and otherwise, into a single, peaceful Nation. In the fourth century, Yakob's strongest son, Yedha, should have been crowned the first king of a united Sarmion. Instead, Numa invaded. When the Numanari ambassadorial contingent came ashore, Yedha greeted them as friends. To everyone's horror, they cut him down for his insolence and the Numanari marched on Salemoria.

The city would probably have been destroyed if Yedha's youngest brother Yousef had not negotiated for a settlement. The Numanari colonized Sarmion, but did not slaughter all of its people. Instead, they scattered the tribes, sacked Salemoria and sold a

huge part of the population into slavery to fund Numa's invasion of the Haxāmanišiya Empire. Yousef's son and daughter, Manashe and Ephraya, eventually led a revolt against Numa after their father died, but it was quickly quashed. Numanari soldiers murdered Ephraya's entire family, and in despair, Manashe killed himself, ending all Yachidi leadership in Sarmion for a time.

The Slave Revolt

Sarmion remained an occupied territory until a century later when a Yachidi leader, Moesh ben Amram, managed to lead a slave revolt in Numa and brought back the slaves to break the empire's hold on Sarmion. King David became the first free king after the Numanari invasion and his son, Solomon, became the wisest, most powerful king in the Nation's history, a student of magic whose power to bind demons became known the world over.

As the Crescent Empire and Numa struggled for control of Numanari lands in the eighth century, Sarmion saw two more invasions by Numa, leading to a bitter enmity between the two Nations. These invasions saw more of Sarmion's people taken into slavery and Salemoria occupied once more. Yet from the southern mountaintop fortress of Hatriza, the Yachidi Queen Elisheva led an ongoing rebellion even after her husband and children were taken to Numa in chains. Eventually the queen's daughter, Ruth, was smuggled back into the country where she led her people to freedom once more. They eventually broke the back of the Numanari invasion, earning Sarmion the gratitude of their neighbors in Persis and Anatol Ayh.

The Second Prophet

After an unprecedented period of peace in Sarmion, the rise of the Second Prophet and his eventual death destabilized a great deal of the region. The rise of al-Dīn converted many and soon several tribes turned away from their worship of the old gods. This led to a crisis, as the spirits of the old gods stirred once more when Ishamal's descendants forsook their part of the Covenant of the Longest Night. When the tribe of Epher converted in 650 AV, the old gods broke free and brought havoc and destruction across the entire country. King Zedekiah and his Chavra warriors managed to bind many back into captivity in a vault beneath Salemoria, but the king was killed in the attempt. The spirits who escaped, twisted in their captivity, fled to all corners of the empire to gather power and followers and plot their revenge upon Sarmion.

The Vodacce Invasion

Shortly thereafter, the kingdom of Vodacce in Théah saw the instability in the region and attempted an invasion. They landed in Sarmion with the intent of using it as a base of operations into the neighboring kingdoms, as so many others had done in the past. They never imagined the Sarmions putting up such a fight. While the Vodacce invaders launched raids into Persis and Anatol Ayh in 705 AV, and even managed to advance into the 8th Sea, the Sarmions broke their supply lines through their land.

When Persis and Anatol Ayh united under the common banner of the Crescent Empire, they invited Sarmion to join as an honored neighbor despite their religious differences, and Sarmion accepted. The Nation followed the empire shortly thereafter in their invasion of Numa and Castille. Though many, including Queen Atara, did not wish to see Sarmion involved in a foreign war, the old grudges against Numa led many to seek vengeance against their far-off enemies. The years of conquest led to many Sarmions dying on foreign shores, and many never returned home, settling instead in northern Théah, spreading what became known as the Diaspora. The combined force of the newly formed Crescent Empire led to the collapse of Numa, which fell under the empire's control.

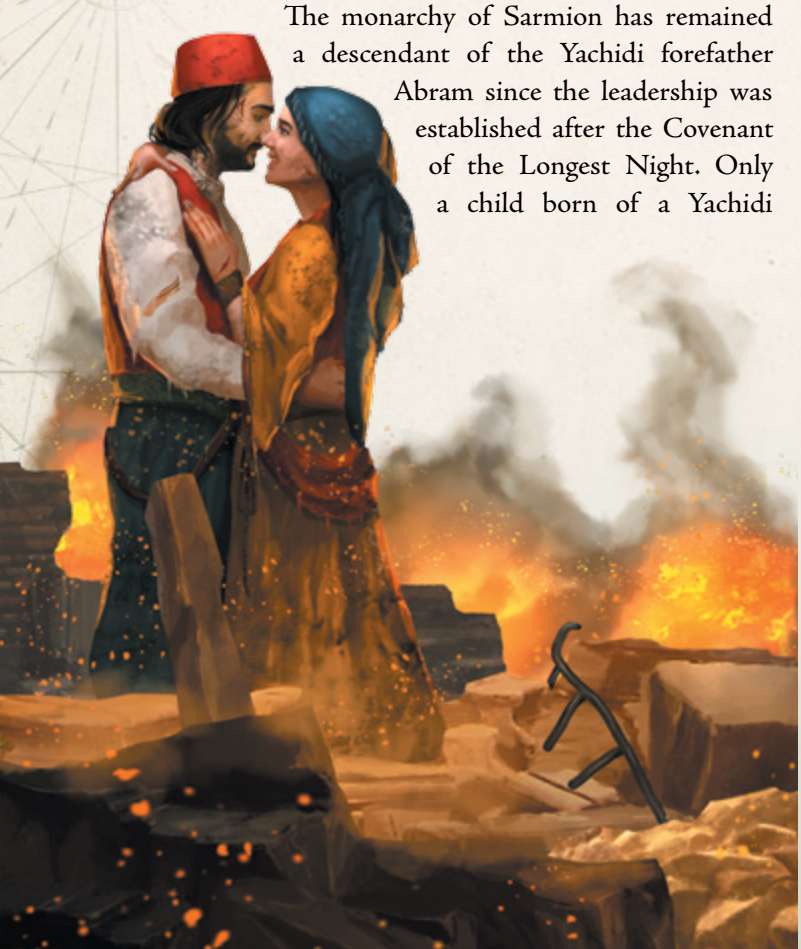
Government and Military

Sarmion is a representational monarchy, with a king or queen ruling with the help of the Moatrat Achim, the Council of Brothers. The Council, commonly known as the Moatzra, consists of leaders from every tribe in Sarmion, with one delegate assigned for every 300 in the tribe. The Moatzra also advises the monarchy on all matters of state, including relations with other Nations in the Crescent Empire.

The monarchy also assigns regional governors within each tribe to act as liaisons with the monarchy and the Moatzra, enforcing the laws and keeping the peace within each tribal territory. The Moatzra can call up tribal chayalim (warriors) to make a national army in times of trouble, though the royal family leads them into battle.

When the emperor helped Shah Jalil of Persis establish a registry for all magic users across the empire, for example, the Moatzra declared the law assur, completely forbidden by religious practice, encouraging their people publicly and privately to defend magic users across Sarmion. The Nation bases much of its law on Yachidi ethics, with freedom of religion as a given across the entire country. Proselytizing, outlawed in Sarmion as well, is assur in the Yachidi faith.

The monarchy of Sarmion has remained a descendant of the Yachidi forefather Abram since the leadership was established after the Covenant of the Longest Night. Only a child born of a Yachidi mother may sit on the throne, though intermarriage into other faiths occurs often in the polygamist Sarmion households.



With the death of King Josiah, the Moatzra has fallen into factionalism and fighting. Many non-Yachidi leaders call for the monarchy to be abolished altogether in favor of an independent representational government. Meanwhile, tribal leaders scramble to fill seats left empty by the lost population and their representatives. With nine tribes gone, the voice of the Moatzra has dropped to a mere fraction of what it once was. They have diverted remaining resources to manage huge swathes of land left emptied by the emperor's last curse.

Military

The military of Sarmion is a powerful force. Made up of chayalim from every tribe, the army consists of light infantry fighters armed with short swords called *sicar*, daggers, staves, spears and light shields. Most are lightly armored, trained instead in hand-to-hand combat using *lechima*, a fast-moving style born of the guerilla tactics against the Numanari. A cavalry unit is more heavily armored, and an archer, known for throwing herself off her mount and into the fray, draws down from horseback or chariot. A Sarmion fighter devastates on foot, racing over any terrain and up walls with only the slightest handholds to get through defenses. And that is before she even uses her magic.

Every part of the military embeds a sorcerer in every unit. Trained to use his magic to augment his body and use nature against his enemies, many of these soldiers became casualties of their own dedication to victory. The veterans of the last Numanari battles broke Yachidi law and used *kishuf* (forbidden) magic to twist their bodies into grotesqueries to defend their Nation.

Called the Lokkem, "the Warriors," many of these veterans can no longer transform back into their former selves and have been left forever marked. Despite their sacrifice, many more religious Yachidi shun the Lokkem and drive them out of their settlements, leaving the government with a very powerful magical population with nowhere to go and a lot of resentment.

Religion

Since the days of warring tribes each worshipping their own patron gods to its unification into a single Nation, Sarmion has been primarily a Yachidi country. Since the Yachidi brokered the Covenant of the Longest Night long ago, they accepted rulership over the land and flourished under their core tenants of promoting peace, acceptance of magic, respect and cooperation with their neighbors and dedication to the betterment of the world at large.

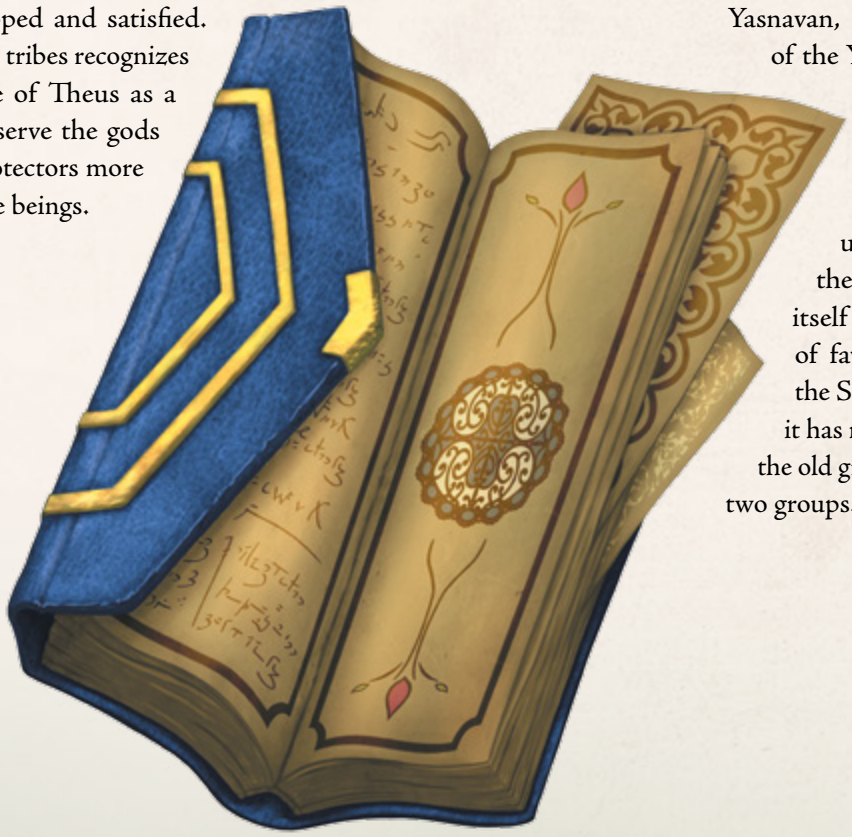
Though the Yachidi are the dominant population in Sarmion, their religion is by no means the only one practiced there. The Ishamali tribes who worship the old gods are accepted as keepers of the Covenant, with the Nakor worshipping the goddess of life Naana-Astarte, the Shuar worshipping the twin gods of dawn and dusk Shachar and Shalim, the Midaen worshipping the god of plenty Baal-Hammon, and half of the Essa-Edomi worshipping the god of death and fire Mot-Melok.

These gods are much like the Ahurayasna ahuras, or even jinn, but the Covenant kept the tribes peaceful and the gods well-worshipped and satisfied. Each of these tribes recognizes the existence of Theus as a creator, but serve the gods as patron protectors more than supreme beings.

The other Ishamali tribes, the Epher, Jokshaar, Massa-Dumah and half of the Essa-Edomi have converted to al-Dīn, and the practice flourishes in Sarmion, though the conversion has been a source of tension for those who believe the Covenant kept the old gods happy and at peace.

Some Vaticine Church followers have also come to Sarmion to learn more about the homeland of the First Prophet. A Yachidi, often bemused by Vaticine Church members, cannot fathom how one of her rebbeim, her holy teachers, managed to make such a strange impact on the rest of the world. Still, she respects the Vaticine Church's right to practice except in regards to the Church's beliefs on sorcery. A Yachidi also vehemently opposes the actions of the Inquisition within the Vaticine Church. Many Yachidi who traveled north into Théah have reported persecution by agents of the Inquisition, and word has reached back to the empire about Yachidi disappearing in Nations like Castille and Eisen.

The most difficult religious conflicts come between the Yachidi and the Yasnavan, who disapprove of the Yachidi practice of ritual animal sacrifice. While the practice is done with the utmost respect for the animal and has itself recently fallen out of favor with many in the Sarmion population, it has not abated much of the old grudges between the two groups.



Culture and Customs

Sarmion is a land rich with cultural traditions tracing back to long before the birth of the First Prophet. The tribes of both the Yachidi and the Ishamali embrace a belief that life is nothing without the traditions of the past, ingrained into every aspect of everyday practice and actions.

Family

All life in Sarmion is deeply based on one's tribal and family identity. To say Sarmion life centers around family is an understatement. Sarmion families form the backbone of living, with a child raised to be loyal to Elohah, to his family, his tribe, his country and the monarchy, in that order. Sarmion society allows multiple partners, with the head of household often having multiple spouses. Families raise all children together with the eldest as the natural inheritor no matter the gender. As Sarmions live extremely long lives thanks to magic, medicine and balanced living, with many reaching well over 100 years, family units can get large and extended.

A child traces her tribal identity through her mother, though a father within the family claims her and acts as her mentor and guide in life. Every child in a household is known as the child of a single pairing, even though all adults have a hand in her raising, and that child inherits her birthright from those parents. A birthright constitutes any inheritance of money, objects, businesses, parcels of land or herds after her parents' passing, all kept within the tribes as often as possible. Though intermarriages between tribes and even outside of the tribes occur, the business of family lines and inheritance means anyone coming into a Sarmion family brings a dowry or something of value to contribute to the whole's prosperity.

The Land

It is almost impossible to separate a Sarmion's identity from the very land itself. From the rolling hills around Salemoria to the barren desert of Gilead, any Sarmion will declare that he is one with the land promised to him by right of ancestry and birth. A Sarmion loves his country with a dedication almost unparalleled, singing songs and dedicating prayers to its preservation and protection. Tribes, therefore, protective of their land, can often squabble over the simplest parcel changing hands, as every inch of the country is important to protect and cultivate in the name of a better Sarmion.

Brotherhood

The heart of peace in Sarmion is the bonds of tribal affinity keeping the Yachidi and Ishamali tribes in concordance. The Covenant of the Longest Night decided the rulership of the country and brought the tribes to peace in ancient days, but if not for the tradition of Brotherhood in the land, old grudges might have shattered the country in half. Instead, all the tribes recognize the connection they share as inheritors of Sarmion and view one another as beloved neighbors and honored extended family. Each tribe treats any other with respect, offering aid and comfort to any Sarmion in need. This respect also extends to recognizing and honoring each other's religious practices and often sharing in them together.

Sarmion's tradition of brotherhood also extends to its fellow Nations of the Crescent Empire. A Sarmion sees his national neighbors as somewhat contentious and difficult family members, but protects the rest of the empire ferociously. He is especially loyal and dedicated to the monarchy and the empress in particular.

Clothing

A Sarmion's modesty is rooted in a tradition going back to the time of Abram, who taught his sons that envy feeds every conflict, and to encourage envy in others due to one's actions invites strife into the home. Therefore, showing off is considered an embarrassment. A Sarmion prefers her actions and intentions to speak for her and avoids ostentatiousness, even among the wealthy.

A Sarmion practices modesty in his dress as well. He believes every body, no matter its size, is only but a single component of a person. Therefore, both men and women wear flowing tunics and dresses, with men wearing skullcaps or turbans and women using scarves as long wraps and shawls.

One area where a Sarmion gives over to a bit of ostentatiousness is in his jewelry. Jewels are seen as a measure of tribal wealth and worn to indicate status. No Sarmion would ever make comment on another's finery, or risk being considered envious, but the system allows for a Sarmion to recognize another's wealth and standing without anything ever being said.

Dibre

A single language binds the people of Sarmion together. Spoken in the earliest days of the country, Dibre is perhaps one of the most ancient living languages in the world. The language, steeped in deep spiritual and mystical meaning, not only fuels Yachidi prayer but also the shared Sarmion magical practice of Chozeh.

A Sarmion believes all words have meaning and therefore chooses his phrasing carefully. A common cultural belief says all people are born with only a certain amount of words in this life, though the number varies from person to person, so Sarmions do not waste words. Because the language is sacred, Sarmions also consider lying the highest insult, if one is caught. To use Dibre for ill intent profanes the language and requires the proper penance.

Dibre has several differences to other languages, in particular a single sound often mistranslated and mispronounced: namely the "ch" sound. The "ch" in words like Yachidi is pronounced with a sound made deep in the back of the throat closer to an "h" sound. While many travelers to Sarmion find the pronunciation confusing, outsiders familiar with pronouncing the "j" sound in Castillian names like Jorge or the old Highland Marches word *loch* can approximate the sound easier.

Celebration

Historically the Sarmion people have endured much. Yet despite all the hardship, a Sarmion embraces her history of difficulties with a passion for life and appreciation for the good times. She takes every opportunity to celebrate, turning every holiday and event into a time for large family gatherings, feasts and parties. Drinking is a favorite pastime of many in Sarmion, unless her religion says otherwise, and toasts are grand affairs bringing up all the good fortune anyone can note.

That is not to say a Sarmion does not recognize her shared difficult past. In fact, known for her sardonic sense of humor about her tragedies, she often jokes about her ability to survive and raises a glass no matter how many times her people near annihilation. Celebrations are often punctuated by hours if not days of music, food, dancing, singing and storytelling, with adults staying up far into the night to share in everything good life has to offer.

Food

You are what you eat; maybe not literally, but for a Yachidi, food is a big part of his religious identity. As part of his covenant with Theus, he does not eat meat and dairy together. This rule and a tendency to rarely eat meat has led to innovative deviations from other Crescent Empire cuisines.

Most people in Sarmion only eat animals that have received a good life. This means a farmer keeps a limited amount of livestock, which she tends to with great care and kindness. A lot of vegetarian dishes made with chickpeas, lentils and other types of legumes have replaced the chicken, lamb or beef based fare found in the rest of the Crescent Empire. Dips made out of chickpeas or aubergine and without the use of dairy products like cream are popular since they can be combined with meat if so desired.

Sarmion Names

A Sarmion name is based on one's ancestry, recited as evidence of one's family and tribal legacy. A Sarmion child receives a first name, as well as any middle names, usually chosen in homage to a deceased relative. A girl's is then identified by her given name, "bat" and then her mother's name, while a boy is identified by his given name, "ben" and then his father's name, with both reciting their tribe at the end with an "M'Shevet" (from the tribe of) before their tribes' name. For example, a girl named Yael from the tribe of Yedha would be known as *Yael bat Hana, M'Shevet Yedha*: Yael, daughter of Hana from the tribe of Yedha. A boy named Gidon from Daana would be *Gidon ben Yakob, M'Shevet Daana*: Gidon, the son of Yakob from the tribe of Daana.

While the naming conventions between Yachidi and Ishamali tribes remain similar, the names themselves differ slightly. The influence of al-Dīn on the Ishamali tribes has taken away many traditional names in the Ishamali, while the Yachidi have kept their original naming conventions.

Male Yachidi Names: Akiva, Barak, Benyamin, Chaim, David, Efram, Elijah, Gavriel, Hillel, Isaiah, Kalev, Matityahu, Shai, Yonatan, Zev.

Female Yachidi Names: Ahuva, Batsheva, Chaviva, Dalia, Elisheva, Gavriella, Hadassah, Kayla, Meyrav, Nechama, Orli, Sigalit, Tamar, Yehudit, Zahava.

Male Ishamali Names: Asad, Essa, Farad, Haamid, Imram, Jalal, Kareem, Maalik, Nasir, Omar, Rahim, Raza, Tahir, Waheed, Zahir.

Female Ishamali Names: Amani, Basma, Dania, Fatima, Hala, Isani, Jadara, Kalima, Midha, Nadira, Rihanna, Suraya, Thana, Yasmeen, Zahira.

The Tribes of Sarmion

Beyond a Sarmion's identity as member of a family, the second greatest piece of her identity is her tribe. The country of Sarmion is split into nineteen separate tribes, twelve Yachidi tribes and seven Ishamali tribes who worship various gods or who have converted to al-Dīn. Each of the nineteen share territory long since established during the creation of the Moatzra, and each has its own history and place in the larger kingdom.

Each tribe is descended from either Yakob's sons or Abram's son Ishamal and his brothers. These tribes each have their own structure and cultural identity, and their laws slightly differ. All follow the basic laws of the empire, though they resisted laws that broke with Sarmion tradition during the reign of Emperor Istani.

The Yachidi Tribes: Aysher, Ben-Ephraya, Daana, Gaad, Levis, Manasha, Nephelen, Raam, Shimean, Yedha, Yesekar, Zevulon

The Ishamali Tribes: Epher, Essa-Edomi, Jokshaar, Massa-Dumah, Midaen, Nakor, Shuar

Yachidi Tribes of Note

Gaad

The best wine, olive oils, and produce flow from the lands of Gaad. Home to some of the most prosperous vineyards in all the Crescent Empire, the lands of Gaad are fertile in the extreme. Sitting at the base of the Aranat Mountains in what is known as the Galilee, the Gaad trade along the inland Sea of Galill down the rivers to the rest of the country. They are eager exporters and work closely with the Daana and the Ben-Ephraya to spread their wares across the world.

Levis

Descended from the prophetic daughter of Yakob, the tribe of Levis long ago dedicated themselves to a higher calling as the spiritual leaders and most learned of the Yachidi. All the priests who tend the High Temple in Salemoria are from the tribe of Levis, and serve either as religious leaders or lay people providing for their more spiritual tribal members. Members of their tribe are known to be gifted with the power of prophetic dreams, and rumors claim the current High Priest Gidayon prophesied the loss of the missing tribes.

Raam

The Raam tribe was meant to inherit the leadership of the Yachidi, but when Raam became obsessed with magic, his birthright was stripped and given to his brother Yedha. Their southern territory borders on the Gilead desert where they house schools of martial training and education. Their leader, Kanah bat Mirah, the first woman to rule the Raam, mysteriously did not disappear with most of her tribe, leading many to believe she surrounded herself with magic in her manor house in the sparkling and now empty city of Beer-Maat.

Yedha

When Raam lost the birthright, Yakob's bravest son Yedha received rulership of the land. That rulership nearly perished by Numanari hands during their first invasion, but thanks to Moesh's return to the land and the dynasty of King David and his son Solomon, Sarmion has had a line of monarchs ever since. With King Josiah dead and the surviving princesses abroad (or missing), Josiah's widow Queen Peninah sits on the throne and protects Esther's son, Prince Amon, waiting to crown the next leader of her people.

Yesekar

A pragmatic and practical tribe, Yesekar is the food production center for all of Sarmion. Along with the Ishamali Jokshaar, the Yesekar hold the most fertile land south of Salemoria, full of rolling valleys perfect for farmland. Yesekar land provides the country with the wheat, barley, pomegranates, dates, figs, and other greens that make up Sarmion diet, and their toil makes sure the rest of their neighbors can eat.

Ishamali Tribes of Note

Essa-Edomi

The Essa-Edomi are the descendants of Essau, Isaak's renegade son who left with Ishamal, and the Edomi, a tribe who worshipped the dangerous fire god Mot-Melok. Always contentious and violent, the Essa-Edomi roamed the desert of Gilead, attacking neighbors for supplies until half the tribe turned to human sacrifice. The other half converted to al-Dīn and moved north to make peace, leaving their more dangerous counterparts to harry travelers and their neighbors, the Manasha, in the desert wastes.

Midaen

Descended from Ishamal's daughter Midaena, the peaceful tribe of Midaen has long since had deep connections with the ruling family of the Yachidi as well as their fellow shepherds in the tribe of Aysher. Together with the Aysher, the Midaen pasture their flocks in the country's center under the protection of their god, Baal-Hammon. The Midaen are a mild, happy tribe, enjoying music and weaving, dancing and nature. But endanger their flocks or neighbors and they can prove to be rugged survivalists, capable of withstanding anything.

Nakor

The tribe of Abram's brother was all but destroyed in the war leading to the Covenant. Ishamal took over the tribe, and his descendants led them in peace and prosperity in the hills east of Salemoria. Considered the princes of the Ishamali tribes, the Nakor are well-educated, wealthy entrepreneurs and artisans, as well as the best producers of oils and pottery in the land. Their city of Ramaleh is a cultural center and business hub in the region.

Places in Sarmion

Salemoria

"Im eshkachech Salemoria, aso l'eshkach shemi l'olam va'ed. Should I forget Salemoria, may my name be forgotten until the end of the world."
—Sarmion prayer

The prize of Sarmion, the capital city of Salemoria, was ancient before the time of Abram. Discovered abandoned by Abram and his people while they searched for a home, the architectural marvel sits high among the hills of Moriah in the center of the country. A wonder made of towering stone buildings built taller on the ancient foundations, Salemoria is as mysterious as it is beautiful, adorned with ancient Katabic inscriptions from the civilization that existed long ago in the region. In the generations since its resettling, the Yachidi and the Ishamali tribes turned the city into the crown jewel of Sarmion, a shining walled city with seven golden gates and parapets rising high towards the sky.

Yet Salemoria is a city recovering from the unbelievable damage done by the Numanari upon their most recent defeat. At the center of the city lies the Holy Temple, a beacon of white stone and golden rooftops set on the highest point in the entire country. There the Yachidi once gathered and worshipped in peace, led by their priests and taught by the many spiritual rebbeim in the holy schools that surround the temple. The Numanari set fire to the Holy Temple, burning the original structure until the white walls scorched and the golden rooftop melted. Repairs have only just begun on the temple and until completed, no sacrifices may be made inside, leaving the Yachidi religiously stymied.

Nearby, the white-walled palace, called Sofian, housed the royal family and the court until the time before the Numanari attack. Only recently has the royal court returned to rebuild, and the palace has begun to flourish once again as a bastion of lush gardens, flowering trees, halls full of music and libraries of learning. The Moatzra's Council House next door to the palace was also looted and burned, and the tall marble building sustained heavy damage. Still, the high ceiling painted to look like the realistic night sky, considered an artistic marvel of Sarmion, was spared. So too were

many of the temples to the ancient gods and the great mosque of al-Dīn in the city, set on the far side of the High Temple to the north.

Below the mount, the city extends out down the hillside to the great walls, housing rings of homes, businesses and places of learning, all built either in or on thousand-year-old buildings. The great souq, the marketplace, runs alongside the grand midway leading to the main Zaphon Gate and serves as the center of commerce for not only Salemoria but all of Sarmion.

The western half of the city houses the many educational centers, including the Ner-L'Olam medical college and Yamey Bahar University. The university brings together teachers from all across Sarmion and the Crescent Empire, studying history, culture, science, math and especially magic. Sarmions have expanded their outreach to bring in teachers from outside the empire and prize exchanges with teachers and students from Théah and beyond.

Har Hazetim

Just outside the city walls in the west also houses the greatest cemetery in Sarmion, Har Hazetim, the Mountain of Olives. The cemetery, known as a somber if often terrifying place, houses bodies from long before the Yachidi settled the city until today. The ground is so chock full of corpses that even the barest whiff of magic in the area awakens terrifying spirits and ghouls up from the ground. Yet tradition says the dead must still be buried there, and so a person enters at her own risk.

The cemetery is not the only dangerous part of Salemoria. Deep underneath the city lies a network of tunnels and catacombs dating all the way back to the time before the city's resettlement. Many believe the ancient King Solomon hid a vault below ground full of artifacts, as well as treasure and a hundred bound demons, each in their own container.

Hatriza

Only a half day's travel on foot east from Salemoria is the ancient Numanari fortress of Hatriza. Before one of the early Numanari invasions, Hatriza served as a gathering place, a city meant as a place for all the tribes at the very center point where four tribal territories met. The trading town was an oasis with fresh springs full of healing waters and flowering fruit trees. Ancient stories say Hatriza was a paradise until the Numanari came.

They razed Hatriza to the ground and built their fortress of Cerynos on top, modeling it after their own fortresses back home. On top of the natural beauty, they paved down marble streets and built columned halls to their own gods. Legends say on the day of the conquest and while held in captivity by the Numanari, a Levis priestess, a Naana-Astarte worshipping Nakorite and a Dīnist from the tribe of Epher all cursed the city, swearing that one day the land would swallow Cerynos whole. It took nearly three generations, but one day a massive earthquake struck Cerynos. It scattered the Numanari and destroyed the city, helping the Sarmions to break their hold on the region and eventually drive the invaders away once more.

Today, Hatriza is an oasis again, rebuilt among the ruins of Cerynos. The Sarmions have incorporated the fallen city into their new design; most repurposed the destroyed buildings to their needs as an ongoing snub to their would-be invaders. When the Numanari tried to retake the city in their recent invasion, they found Hatriza protected by some of the fiercest fighters, all willing to transform and warp their bodies to make sure no Numanari could set foot within Hatriza's gates. After the war, the city became a haven for such soldiers; the inns and taverns and meeting houses are full of Sarmion veterans, all looking for a fight and willing to atone for letting themselves be taken too far by magic. It also serves as the headquarters of the Chavra, the Yachidi organization created as guardians of Sarmion and of all Yachidi across the empire and the world.

The Desert of Gilead

There is a Sarmion saying: *L'Aph Echad Lo Magiah Ha'Gilead*. "No one deserves the Gilead." The giant desert of Gilead stretches from the east to the western coast of southern Sarmion, an inhospitable region home to only the heartiest of tribes, the Manasha and the Essa-Edomi. Travel across the desert is difficult, with water very scarce and food almost non-existent. People band together in caravans to head north to the edge of the country and the trade port of Eytal, and the wandering tribes who call the desert home make their business ferrying travelers back and forth.

Mazada

Scholars believe the desert is an ancient battleground, perhaps where the ancient Katab people met their end. Ruins buried under the sands and discovered by travelers seem to lend credence to the idea, as they are inscribed with the Katabic script found all over Salemoria. Still more evidence lies in the desert fortress of Mazada, a walled citadel set high on a flat-topped mountain in the southern desert. The mountain was artificially molded at the top to create the fortress, and the Sarmions have often used it to repel invaders, surviving for years under siege by utilizing freshwater springs inside the walls. Mazada not only contains a castle and barracks to house the royal family during times of trouble, but holds a vast library of magical treatises and artifacts preserved in the fortress for their protection. The southern route from Mazada is also the fastest route to the hidden oasis of Ein-Gedi, a blossoming paradise around a fresh waterfall inside a difficult-to-find canyon.

The desert may contain little worth fighting for, yet contention has brought the tribes of Manasha and the Essa-Edomi to near warfare in the last few generations. The two tribes, pressed to work together during the last Numanari invasion, held Mazada against their enemies, but ever since, the battle for resources had left the two tribes at each other's throats. Now with the Manasha missing, the Essa-Edomi have taken over most of the desert, harassing travelers and taking over abandoned Manasha towns as they go. Their only real challengers are the Massa-Dumah, a Dīnist Ishamali tribe dedicated to protecting Sarmion and the Crescent Empire from jinn, evil spirits and those who would do evil in the name of their gods.

Current Relations

Anatol Ayh

The Anatoli and Sarmion people have a long history of friendship and it is no different now. Princess Batya is Safiye's closest and most trusted friend and holds her ear on many matters. The relationship between the two peoples is sometimes the cause of contention between Sarmion and the other Crescent nations who believe that Sarmion has too great a say in the empire.

Ashur

Ashur very often likes to think of itself as the most tolerant Nation surrounded by a Nation of intolerance. However, any rebbe who has visited the Nation in hopes of engaging religious debate can tell you their tolerance extends only so far as their borders. Furthermore, Sarmion is wary of Ashur and its Guardian of the First Garden, a man beholden to no one with a force of trained killers who has far too much sway in the Nation.

Persis

The royalty of Persis and Sarmion have far too many idealistic differences to ever see eye to eye. Sarmions are a tolerant people who strongly support the use of magic, and the Persic persecution of magic-users has caused their opinion of Persis to sour even further. While Sarmion would never start an all-out war with Persis, the Nation has placed their political support firmly behind the empress.

Tribes of the 8th Sea

Tribal assistance during the most recent Numanari attack on Sarmion led to the nations sealing a great bond of friendship. Sarmion and the Tribes have slowly been working together to grow relations and trade resources. Misunderstandings have arisen, mostly with the political influence of Persis, which fears loosing an ally in the 8th Sea, but many tribal members hope the budding relationship is one that will last.

Sarmion

Saraya, courageous
mother, bore us,

Abram, wisest of men,
is father to us all,

Roam we did once,
but now we abide,

Molded by Yesu in
their holy name.

In what other place does
brotherhood live?

On what other shores does
sisterhood thrive?

No place like Sarmion is
the cradle of blessings.

PRINCESS BATYA BAT PENINAH M'SHEVET YEDHA, HEIR APPARENT

"We shall never lose hope, Sarmion is strong."

Princess Batya bat Peninah M'Shevet Yedha, Heir Apparent

Second daughter of King Josiah and Queen Peninah, Princess Batya was sent to the court of the Crescent Empire's monarchs to grow up beside the future Empress Safiye while her parents groomed first-born Esther for leadership. Safiye and Batya became childhood friends and cemented the ferocious bond of loyalty between the Sarmion people and their future empress. Safiye went off to tour Théah; King Josiah called Batya home. War with Numa loomed.

Batya returned home, finding her father struck down by a magical poison. Her country invaded, Batya knew only Anatol Ayh could help. Yet the old emperor had passed on, with Safiye's brother Istani usurping the throne, ignoring the Sarmion people's plight.

While Batya's sister Dinah searched for a cure for their father's sickness, Batya left home to find the rightful empress of Anatol Ayh. Soon after, her sister Esther was murdered by Istani's agents. With a heavy heart, Batya continued her quest, leading a cadre of Chavra warriors, searching Théah until she found her old friend. It was Batya who led the assault on the emperor's palace and recaptured it for the empress, restoring the rightful throne once and for all.

Batya does not want to return home. She remains at the court of Empress Safiye as ambassador of Sarmion, convinced her kingdom is better off with a competent representative at the elbow of the empress. With her mother acting as regent for Esther's tiny son Amon, Batya does not believe she belongs on the throne, actively resisting the notion of ascending to power.

Story Hooks

- Someone within the empress' court has sent Batya a note threatening the life of her young nephew Amon if she does not leave Safiye's side. Rumors at court abound on who this could be; many point to jealous members of the harems who believe that Batya consumes far too much of the empress' time.
- Batya's sister Dinah is still missing. Her ship, *Elohah's Star*, was last seen sailing from Khemet to Sarmion before disappearing. Safiye has given Batya a ship from her fleet to do whatever it takes to find Dinah.

Yael bat Yeravam M'Shevet Ben-Ephraya, Chavra Warrior

Yael grew up on stories of her ancient ancestor, Ephraya bat Yousef, who died at the hands of the Numanari during the first invasion. Yael knew she wanted nothing but to defend her country the way Ephraya had and went to train for the Chavra.

Yael was not sure she could survive the training in the vicious desert of Gilead, but her ferocious will kept her driving forward. She not only earned her way into the Chavra, but became one of its sharpest minds, a natural tactician as well as fighter. Yael was overjoyed when she received her assignment to the royal palace as part of the detail to protect the newly born Prince Amon.

When the last of the Chavra went to help Princess Batya aid the rightful empress to reclaim her throne, Yael remained alone to guard the little boy. The Numanari discovered their hiding place, and Yael tapped into the magic she had been taught as a weapon of last resort to save the boy. The magic, pushed to its limit, warped Yael's body and made her an outcast among her own people.

Intent on redeeming herself, Yael now travels the land, defending people and helping wherever she can. No task is too small, too dangerous to prove her worth.

Story Hooks

- Yael has gotten word of a traitor in the Chavra who sold out the royal family to the Numanari. Her first step in her investigation is to find any physical proof of the traitor in Anjahr, the ruins of the last village she hid in when protecting the family. However, an ifrīt has made its home there. Yael knows she isn't strong enough to destroy the ifrīt alone.
- In the Gilead, Yael trained with Abra bat Bela, who helped sharpen her skill and hone her martial abilities. After the Numanari attack, Abra went missing with no trace left behind. Yael hopes to find her tutor. It is said to be impossible to survive the Gilead alone, but Yael believes Abra could. Now Yael just needs to find someone crazy enough to explore the Gilead with her.

YAEL BAT YERAVAM M'SHEVET BEN-EPHRAYA, CHAVRA WARRIOR

"Mistakes can be undone, curses lifted, in my heart I know this to be true."

SHIMON BEN ELI M'SHEVET YEDHA

"Regret is the heaviest burden you can carry."

STRENGTH	INFLUENCE	RANK
6	1	7

Shimon ben Eli M'Shevet Yedha

Many noble children grow up dreaming of money, power and position. Shimon grew up dreaming of a family. The eldest son of six, Shimon helped his parents raise his other siblings. He played with them, read them stories and took them around the city of Abib showing them all the wonders it had to offer.

When Shimon was named bey of Abib he met Keren at his induction ceremony and he knew he had met his soulmate. A noble like him, Keren cared more for family than political maneuvering and possessed the sharpest wit, matching her a beautiful mind. Together they had three children and were happy. But…

As Numa prepared for its most recent attack on the empire, raider activity increased in Abib. Shimon petitioned the royal family for troops, but as they dealt with the King's failing health, his petitions went unanswered. Shimon saw catastrophe coming, but he was powerless to stop it.

When the raiders attacked, they made it all the way to the bey's mansion, murdered Shimon's wife and stole his children. Shimon returned home from the long, brutal battle and saw what happened to his family, his love, and felt his heart torn from his body.

Now, Shimon is a ghost of a man, dead inside. To understand what happened to him, to make sense of the butchery, he finds husbands, fathers much like himself and hunts their families—trying desperately to figure out where he went wrong.

Story Hooks

- There is a string of grisly crimes in Abib, men found beaten near death only days after their children or wives have gone missing. All the victims were unable to see their assailant or in a coma. Local constable Meira bat Geula's resources are strained and she needs help to find the missing children and the perpetrator.
- Shimon still has regular contact with Leah, Keren's sister. Recently he's been obsessed with tales of three Yadichi children in a small Numanari coastal village, utterly convinced they must be his. Shimon has jokingly told Leah that he plans to hire a crew and raid the town to reclaim his children. His jokes have taken a vicious tone, and Leah seeks help to stop Shimon before it is too late.

Raza ben Zahir, Dīnist Researcher

Raza ben Zahir, known among his people as Raza ibn Zahir of the tribe of Essa-Edomi, had his tribe split in two. Worse, Raza was a moody, angry boy, prone to violence. Zahir, Raza's father, made the choice to move north to the desert citadel of Mazada where he worked cleaning and cooking for the guards assigned there.

Raza was quickly discovered by the Yachidi rebbe of the citadel, a strange man named Choni. Choni took him on as his pupil, teaching the mysteries of magic, and giving Raza access to his library. Raza soon became an able practitioner of sorcery and a scholar.

Raza's gifts were pushed to the limit during the Numanari invasion. Everything might have been fine, had the Numanari not killed Zahir. Desperate to save the citadel, Choni poured all his strength to defend the walls, animating the stone soldiers on the parapets of the citadel to attack the Numanari below. Secretly, Raza tore life energy out of dying soldiers to fuel Choni's magic. Horrified, Choni confronted Raza, who lashed out and killed his teacher. Wrestling control of the stone soldiers to his side, Raza drove back the Numanari in a bloody massacre.

Mazada's leaders discovered Raza alive and praised him as the Hero who saved the citadel, even as they mourned Choni. In recognition of his talents, they gave Raza Choni's position as chief researcher and sorcerer of Mazada, keeper of its great library of magical secrets.

Story Hooks

- Choni's apprentice Kaela saw Raza's killing of the rebbe, and as such, he abducted her. The only thing that has saved Kaela's life thus far is her hidden journal, which detailed what she saw during the attack. Raza desperately scrambles to find the journal before anyone else does and finally do away with Kaela. Meanwhile, another rebbe, Asaf, searches for the missing Kaela.
- Raza looks for a way to permanently awaken the now-slumbering stone warriors to keep Mazada truly safe. Raza believes siphoning life from others will enact this magic. He has had "disposable, undesirable" people in surrounding towns go missing, but citizens have started noticing the abductions.

RAZA BEN ZAHIR, DĪNIST RESEARCHER

"Faced with insurmountable odds, we do what we must in order to survive."

STRENGTH	INFLUENCE	RANK
3	7	10

Chapter 6

Tribes of the 8th Sea

TRIBES OF THE 8TH SEA

"Everything of the Empire is of the Sea. All tree's roots lead back to the desert."
—Ancient tribal proverb

No one can survive the scorching desert of the 8th Sea. ...Except the Tribes. Dating back to the time of the first peoples, tribes have lived in the 8th Sea. Ancient Katab society grew from this land and spread to every shore of the now Crescent Empire. Their language is still used today; their customs, rituals, schools of thought were all born in the desert and the Tribes remember this.

With scorching sands and fickle jinn, the Tribes of the 8th Sea live much as their ancestors once did. Helping to ferry other Alwarithlı across the Sea from border to border, water to sand, the Tribes know the empire cannot maintain control of the vast desert without them, and no wise empress or emperor ever forgets this fact.

The 8th Sea is filled with many smaller tribes, but the three largest alone decide the ebb and flow of power in the Sea—the Quabilat al-Jamal (Qah-bee-laht al-JE-ml), the Tribe of the Camel; the Quabilat al-Hisan (Qah-bee-laht al-hi-SAHN), the Tribe of the Horse; and the Quabilat al-Thi'b (Qah-bee-laht al-THI-ib), the Tribe of the Wolf. The three main tribes of the 8th Sea typically confine themselves each to their own land, but recent jinn activity and the angering of Saghira, a great sand serpent, has disrupted the delicate peace under which they live.

Current Events

Al-Thi'b have found themselves ousted from their traditional lands by Saghira, offspring of Gōčihr—the sand serpent said to make its home under the 8th Sea. Saghira, only half a mile long, miniscule in comparison to the tales of Gōčihr, did not take kindly to al-Thi'b's discovery of her favorite oasis. Saghira, incensed with rage when the tribe found the Pool of a Thousand Wishes, set about destroying their caravans.

Al-Thi'b have in turn moved into al-Hisan lands, causing tensions as the scarce water and grassland resources come under pressure. At the same time, the proximity of the two tribes, who have long lived with relatively little prolonged contact with each other, now has some unintended consequences.

Obodas, the *walī* (wuh-lee; plural *'awliyā'*, a-wuh-ly-yah; leader) of al-Hisan, settled his tent in the land that now overlaps with al-Thi'b. He expected them not to force custom and settle their tents too close to his. If one places a tent too close to another, the stronger is expected to protect the weaker. This custom was created to show charity to a few people, not the majority of a tribe. However, one of the sheikhs of al-Thi'b, Mumtez, did just that, and now Obodas carries the responsibility for the defense of al-Thi'b tribe members in his vicinity. The walī of al-Thi'b, Abd ibn Alet, has officially disavowed his people's actions, but rumors abound that when they next move tents, matters will come to a head between the two tribes.

Though well-versed in navigating the 8th Sea, al-Thi'b have been forced to enlist al-Jamal for help in crossing Saghira's land. In addition to the humiliation of needing help to avoid her wrath, al-Thi'b are also forced to compensate al-Jamal with the lands they vacated. If al-Hisan became aware of this trade, they might seek payment too—or war— from al-Thi'b for their hospitality.

In the midst of all these machinations, Rahim, the son of Mumtez, has grown to know the al-Hisan people within his neighborhood, and despite his best efforts, he fell in love with Jamila, the only daughter of Obodas. Separated by tribe and religion, they seem doomed to be apart. Rahim, however, has secretly determined to convert to Ahurayasna so that he can marry Jamila. He has seen the foolishness of following al-Dīn in a land full of the old gods. He has also seen the hypocrisy of his father and brothers as they manipulate custom to get what they want. It remains to be seen if Mumtez will put his ambitions over the life of his own son.

In the midst of these internal pressures, the Tribes must navigate intrigue from the rest of the empire. Persis has been secretly campaigning among the three largest tribes to help overthrow the empress. Al-Thi'b might be the ideal allies, due to their historic relationship, but even they question the wisdom of moving against her. Furthermore, they are far more focused on al-Hisan than the empire.

For their part, al-Hisan always stand ready to join the ranks of the Alwarithlı army…if the price is right. Although not part of a standing army, al-Hisan receive a stipend from the crown in case they need to go to war. As such, al-Hisan are generally loyal to the empress, but they were just as loyal to her brother. In the end, al-Hisan may choose once again to remain neutral, unless one side outbids the other.

The last tribe, al-Jamal, may prove the most critical. If Persis rides, they may choose to cut through al-Jamal lands, requiring their escort. Their role in a potential coup may depend entirely on the outcome of the tensions between al-Hisan and al-Thi'b.

One wild card remains. The three tribes believe that one of them harbors a secret: the location of Emperor Istani. When he disappeared into the 8th Sea, he rode directly through al-Thi'b lands that had been usurped by Saghira. Lingering al-Thi'b tribal members might have picked him up, or al-Jamal may have discovered him as they claimed the new land. Istani may also have arranged a meeting with the loyal al-Hisan in case of emergency. Whether the emperor lives or not, and with whom, is a secret that perhaps only one walī knows.

History

The Tribes of the 8th Sea eke out a living on the edge of civilization, but it was not always so. In the distant past, a wetter climate allowed for a more temperate region. Gazelles, horses and ostrich were plentiful. Grasses flourished around now desiccated lakes. And amidst this relative abundance, the proto-Tribes, the founders of the Katab culture, gathered in towns and villages, creating the water systems and pioneering the trade routes that their descendents now depend upon.

Despite the wetter clime, the ancient Katabi might not have survived the desert had they not domesticated the camel. "The ship of the desert," the camel can survive the heat for five days without water and can frequently quench their thirst eating plants in the wild. With the camel, the Katabi forged paths across the desert, digging the wells that remain to this day. They connected oases, spurring trade and access to food. New towns grew along the trade routes, and the early tribespeople creatively captured water for the burgeoning population.

Raqmu

Raqmu (RAHK-moo) proved to be the apotheosis of this skill. Carved out of solid stone, Raqmu served as an ancient capital for the Katabi. Located along the trade routes, the valley provided a defensible respite from the trials of the desert. The ancients carved aqueducts and other feats of engineering to catch the water from flash floods, turning the rocky desert into an artificial oasis. Some took up agriculture, and the results of trade made the Katabi a force to be reckoned with throughout the region. The Katabi were not alone in the desert, however. The spirits also dwelled among them and demanded reverence. Raqmu thus became a center of worship, with temples to the gods.

The Coming of the Great Tribes

After this period of strength, however, Raqmu fell into decline in the first and second centuries, as Persis grew in power. The desert rains lessened, and the waters upon which Raqmu depended failed. Agriculture died, and Katab greatness became a memory. They broke into the Tribes and returned to nomadism.

Some say, however, that Raqmu's success brought it down. The people had grown arrogant in their prosperity and had not performed the rituals for the gods. The jinn themselves retaliated, bringing misfortune on the Tribes. In fact, a person from al-Hisan believes that the ancestors of the Quabilat al-Jamal turned from the path of the gods. He points out that al-Jamal depend on trade and navigation, just like the failed settlement at Raqmu. Furthermore, the stones in Raqmu show cracks throughout the temples and tombs. He believes that the gods' magic struck the town, driving the Katab tribes from it. He cites this moment as the schism that separated the Quabilat al-Jamal tribe from the others.

A tribesperson from al-Jamal claims the separation occurred later in the fifth century, largely due to Persis' influence. The horse had long been a part of the Tribes' existence, often used in cases of war. The desiccation of the desert and the struggle to find water and food turned some of the people to banditry. They began raiding the oases that still survived, as well as neighbors in ancient Ashur and Sarmion. The Tribes, once known as peaceful traders, now took on an entirely different reputation. They charged into caravan trains, stealing what they could, then just as quickly galloped back into the 8th Sea. Tribe raided tribe. She believes her people separated from the main tribes to form the Quabilat al-Jamal, choosing to continue to focus on peaceful trade in place of terror and war.

Members of al-Hisan also believe the Haxāmanišiya Empire, seeking to expand its power, bribed the Tribes on the border to join it. As the empire spread its influence, squads of tribal horseriders marched within the ranks of its armies. The Tribes earned more than this reputation for warfare, however. A new era of relative prosperity swept through the 8th Sea. With Persic coin, the Quabilat al-Hisan built hunting lodges in the desert, offering heated and cooled baths. The nobility of Persis traveled to partake in the unique hunt of gazelles in the semi-desert plains, as did many of the ʾawliyāʾ, leaders of the Tribes.

New God's Arrival

While the desert became more uninhabitable due to the worsening climate, another change made the 8th Sea even more foreboding to those outside the Tribes. As the prevalence of al-Dīn spread throughout the areas of the Crescent Empire, the jinn, once worshipped as gods throughout the region, fell out of favor. These so-called gods sought out the faithful in the only land where they still held sway: the 8th Sea.

Their presence transformed the desert yet again. Due south of the stone of Raqmu, a battle between the ginnayê and the afārīt turned the desert black. Volcanic rock and blackened sands now predominate, the pointed rocks making it treacherous for even camels to cross. Jinn of all types haunt the abandoned hunting lodges of the Black Desert and vex travelers without sufficient reverence. A Tribesperson, even one following al-Dīn, learns the tricks of the trade to ward them off. Even so, she does not leave the known trails easily.

A New Faith

This period coincided with the spread of al-Dīn, but the Tribes carried the religion forward without accepting it. Only those taken into the personal bodyguard of the shah, and given accesses to the few Persic Dīnist mosques, eventually accepted the faith. They even settled in Persis, but soon a schism occurred. Part of the tribe believed in following the more decadent Persic way of life, while others believed that the Persic way would only lead to a softening of their tribe and bloodline. Several of the leaders returned to the 8th Sea. These prodigals are the ancestors of the Quabilat al-Thi'b, though they claim their heritage from the people who built the hunting lodges.

As Anatol Ayh gained in strength, Persis' ability to buy the Tribes' loyalty waned. Furthermore, the desert became even drier, making it increasingly difficult to maintain hunts in the desert. Persis let its influence over the Tribes lapse to only nominal control.

Today, several tribes ply the 8th Sea, but only three rule it. The three Tribes usually only participate in the battles and intrigues of the empire in return for coin. In fact, the Tribes' neutrality in the empress' quest to overthrow her brother was only secured when her forces intercepted payment from Istani intended for the Tribes.

Government

The Tribes serve under the banner of the Crescent Empire, but they function more as allied states. Though slow to react when the empire invades neighboring countries, unless coin is involved, they do not stand for the empire being attacked by outside forces. Where a member of their "extended family" is involved, the tribes are the fiercest warriors.

A walī sits at the head of each tribe. Much like a bey, the walī arbitrates any disputes within the tribe, from water rights and camel trading to marriage, divorce and worship. The role is often hereditary and the heir chosen by the current walī. In al-Hisan, heredity of the office can be overturned if another successfully challenges the new walī in their mastery over horses.

On an average day, a walī only commands his own neighborhood or extended family, moving with the season much like the rest of his tribe. As such, he is rarely seen by the whole tribe, so a visit from the walī calls for a great *mansef* (a delicious meal of stewed meat) to be made in his honor. A tribesperson in the neighborhood often takes this moment to attempt petitions and appeals to resolve whatever issue she faces. The time to make these appeals is limited by custom and reality, however, and gaining the ear of the walī may involve making deals with his host to ensure an audience.

Underneath the walī exists an ever-changing collection of neighborhood leaders, called sheikhs. A tribal member picks up his tent and moves to a new location routinely, shuffling the tents that live in the vicinity of each other. When a collection of tents exists within a spear's-throw of each other, they become connected in a neighborhood self-defense group. A sheikh emerges as the leader of this neighborhood, usually chosen by seniority and experience.

The sheikh is responsible for ensuring the safety of the group, whether from raiders, inclement weather or the jinn that wander the 8th Sea. If two neighborhoods with sheikhs become connected by a tent within a spear's throw of both groups, they become one extended group with one sheikh. The impropriety of forcing this added responsibility on a sheikh usually prevents extended neighborhoods from forming in the first place.

Like the walī, the sheikh resolves conflicts within the neighborhood swiftly and with care to preserve traditions and the neighborhood over any set rule of law. She passes judgment with the idea that the offending person will likely remain among the group. However, the walī can also enact judgment, so a Tribesperson may wish to bypass his own sheikh in order to do so. Since a walī is not required to hear any petition, reaching him often involves pulling strings and making appeals based on passion.

Punishment can include payment in food or camels, exile into the desert or a sort of indentured servitude for a set period as in Alwarithlı law, though the latter sentence is more commonly made by a walī than a sheikh. Most modern Tribal laws follow those set out by the empire, but are simply administered by the 'awliyā' and sheikhs.

The Festival of Ahura

The 'awliyā' also meet once a year at Raqmu to work out any issues, during the Festival of Ahura. While members of the tribe camp out near the ancient ruins, the 'awliyā' and their closest kin gather for a daylong summit. They spend half the day engaging in ritual poetry recitations and social customs to strengthen their bond. They then hash out their differences, discussing issues such as water rights, trade, alimony payments for divorces, relations with the jinn and commonly known issues facing the 8th Sea.

Since the jinn abandoned the settled lands where al-Dīn prevailed, many more than before have arrived in the 8th Sea. They inhabit the stone walls during the festival. Magic users have served as oracles, interpreting their wishes and lending added weight to the proceedings. However, these oracles are not above being influenced by private pleas or exploiting social connections behind the scenes.

While this meeting takes place within the ruins, outside trade occurs, consisting of goods, partners and rumors from the Crescent Empire. A lot of the spycraft on the part of the Tribes, but also on part of the Nations of the empire, takes place here. Alliances form and sever among the tents each year at the festival.

Asya bint Faatin al-Masri, a prominent ship captain of the coastal al-Marsi tribe, has an important role to play in this year's Festival of Ahura. One of the worst kept secrets of her tribe is that the young captain smuggles Fate Witches out of Vodacce, and this year her ship carries an especially important cargo. Greta Schiavone, an elderly Sorte user fleeing her home, has agreed to use her magic to divine a way to defeat the dreaded worm Saghira for al-Thi'b. Now, all Asya has to do is dodge any pirates off the coast and make the long trek inland to deliver Greta to the festival, which is easier said than done.

Religion

The Tribes once all followed Ahurayasna. For centuries, they used the seasonal festivals as cues to take advantage of the change of weather and move their tents. The greatest of these festivals, that of Ahura, celebrates the jinn with feasting, feats of fire and processions to the holy of holies: the ruins of a temple.

Makeshift shrines, dotted throughout the desert, often next to watering holes, give tribe members the opportunity to easily make offerings and pray while on a journey. These offerings have become increasingly important with the presence of the jinn, and even some of al-Thi'b followers of al-Dīn have taken to leaving gifts, just in case.

The Tribes combine learning to navigate the desert with learning the tales of the jinn. To a Tribesperson, one unusual rock formation depicts Sanaea and his horse at the spot where he first spotted his wife, al-Iza. The next watering hole contains a small shrine to al-Iza, marking where she first alighted in the desert. The story of Ahurayasna is written in the sands…and also in the stars. When night falls, the Tribesperson can read a new tale, which connects him with the spirits and helps him find his way home. Even a member of al-Thi'b learns the old tales in order to make her way in the desert. Furthermore, the Tribes that follow Ahurayasna take pains to stop and recognize sunrise and sunset.

In this mix, a member of al-Thi'b, and one from many smaller tribes who have embraced al-Dīn, stands at a distinct disadvantage. To stay true to al-Dīn, she must ignore the rituals that many tribal members secretly believe keep them safe. In order to pray daily, she outlines a mosque wall with rocks. Instead of washing her hands before prayer, she washes them in sand. She does her best to adapt her faith to the desert she calls home.

Cultures and Customs

A Tribesperson of the 8th Sea survives the desert due to his intimate knowledge of the land and the paths to its hidden caches of water. He maintains a precarious balance between the brutality of the desert and the onus of meeting his own needs. That he has done so well for so long testifies to his culture and traditions, handed down through the centuries.

Survival

To the untrained eye, the 8th Sea is a forbidding, uninhabitable desert. To a Tribal member, the desert holds a plethora of trails, dotted with wells and makeshift watering holes, connecting people, trade and ancient ruins. Watering holes may be as surprising and natural as a spring halfway up a mountain, or a waterskin tied between rocks to collect what little rainwater the desert provides. He may also know of ancient aqueducts that still serve their purpose.

But mastery of water is only part of the equation in the 8th Sea. The jinn, spurned by the rise of the Prophets, have taken up residence here and brought with them the influence of magic. A Tribesperson can read the weather, knowing which the type of wind might blow the last of the rain away, and which portends jinn sorcery.

The Tribes largely depend on animal herding to provide. Each tribe keeps to its own traditional lands, moving throughout the season in a circle. They rotate to exploit the best watering holes and untapped shrub grass which can feed their flock, much like how a farmer rotates crops. A family settles in one spot until the herd has exhausted the field. They then move on to literal greener pastures, only to return again the following year after the shrub has grown anew.

Tribal Relations

A tribe does not function as a single unit, however. Families move on at their own pace. Choosing the next location for their tent requires thoughtfulness not only in terms of weather and proximity to resources, but also proximity to neighbors. Any tent that lies within a spear's-throw of another must join in a protective tribal group. A sheikh may find himself with expanded responsibilities if he settles too close to another group, as he takes on protecting both his own branch of the tribe as well as another.

Responsibility for this neighborhood extends not just to family. If a visitor or traveler suffers an injury while in a tribe's territory, a family takes pains to nurse her back to health. If the injury was severe enough, a sheikh might accept her into his household as one of the family to care for her the rest of her life.

Social relations among the Tribes echo the importance of honor and custom throughout the Crescent Empire. Upon approaching a tent, a visitor should stop a ways from the entrance, on the pretense of fixing a sandal or a camel's burden, so that the head of household can come out of the tent and greet him.

While a guest is treated like royalty, he must take pains not to exploit his host's hospitality. Traditionally, a guest does not stay beyond three days. He should avoid asking questions about something that the host has not expressed interest in discussing. In some cases, however, the host, so eager to give a guest what he wants, may fabricate stories in order to do so.

Family

The family unit centers around the tent, which can be packed up and moved in a morning. The tent itself is made of goat hair, cut into strips up to 60 feet long. Once erected, the public area of the tent consists of the entrance, the kitchen area on one side and an area filled with colorful pillows where the family can sit, talk and entertain guests. A couples' sleeping area is curtained off for privacy, though voices carry easily throughout the tent. Tents of the sheikh, or the leader of the family in the area, tend to be quite large. He may have a second tent exclusively for the animals.

After a long day in the sun, people unwind with entertainment, conversation and an *argilah*. Argilahs are water pipes, which filter fragrant tobacco-like herbs through water. Entertainment can consist of love songs accompanied by the *rebab* instrument, or a passionate recitation of poetry. Some natural sorcerers have been known to use the smoke from the shee-hee pipe to illustrate historic poems, as well as to create dancing figures to accompany the rebab.

A Tribesperson typically marries within her tribal group, though marriages between al-Hisan and al-Jamal tribes also occur. Al-Thi'b forbid marriage with the other tribes, unless that member willingly joins al-Thi'b and accepts al-Dīn.

Food

For the Tribes of the 8th Sea, food needs to be practical first and tasty second. The Tribes do not have the luxury of strolling to the souq to pick out delicacies. Life in the 8th Sea means you eat what is available and you do not waste water, ever!

Goats and sheep play an important part in feeding the Tribes. They provide meat and the milk to make herb butter and a hard crumbly cheese. The Tribes punish the theft of a family's goat with death because such an act condemns the victim to the same fate.

A host welcomes a visitor, even a stranger, as a guest of honor into his home, and gives her a feast, called a mansef. The host slaughters a fine lamb, then allows the fat to mix with rice, creating a tasty rice and meat dish. All neighbors come over to enjoy the feast, but the guest of honor must be the first to eat. The host does not partake until everyone else has done so. Hosts who serve the tastiest food have the best reputation among the tribe, and some travelers take pains to make sure their path crosses near their tents.

Clothing

Tribal clothing is based entirely on functionality and durability. In the desert, the days are blisteringly hot and the nights of winter can be frigid. People wear long, sturdy robes made from cotton or sheep's wool known as *t'ob*. These robes fall a few feet longer than a person's height and are gathered at the waist by a belt. The color of a person's robe often depends on the tribe she belongs to, but brown and black are common colors worn by everyone.

Men and women cover their heads with scarves secured to the head with a ring of camel wool. Equally, angular leather masks are often worn while traveling or when visitors come to a tribe. Adopted after the spread of al-Dīn, the masks are a form of modesty, showing the self-respect the tribal members have for themselves. However, they are also functional, keeping sand and debris out of people's faces as they travel.

Tribal Names

Tribal names consist of a given name; then ibn, "son of," or bint, "daughter of"; the name of the parent of the same gender; and finally the name of their tribe. For example, Basit ibn Fuad al-Jamal is Basit son of Fuad of the Camel Tribe. As name mix-ups can occur, it is not uncommon for people to recite names going farther back to their grandparents, great grandparents and so on. For example, Nahid bint Raha bint Talah bint Ghazal al-Thi'b is Nahid daughter of Raha daughter of Talah daughter of Ghazal of the Wolf Tribe.

Female Names: Amshah, Badra, Dunya, Falak, Hudun, Ithar, Judi, Kifah, Mahasin, Rasha

Male Names: Asif, Bushr, Dirar, Falih, Ghiyath, Hashim, Ishaq, Jawad, Kaliq, Lufti, Nimr, Sinan

Quabilat al-Jamal, the Tribe of the Camel

The Quabilat al-Jamal believe themselves to be the oldest and purest tribe, dependent on the camel, the gods and no other. Although not the largest tribe, the area that they claim takes up the largest territory of the three tribes, especially after the retreat of al-Thi'b.

A tribesperson of al-Jamal subsists on herding animals, but she is also well-regarded for the camels she breeds, earning the tribe its name. Her camels are highly prized among the three tribes for their endurance and keen sense of direction. While most camels seem to have a natural homing instinct to join with other camels, al-Jamal camels follow the trails to the watering holes without need for human intervention. This adaptive trait has proven incredibly useful in times of sandstorms that obscure traditional means of navigation.

For the Quabilat al-Jamal, mastering every route on the 8th Sea is essential for full tribal membership. The coming of age custom involves crossing the desert alone with only a camel and some food at the age of 13. Once an initiate has completed this trial, she returns with the camel and undergoes the ritual of initiation, which invokes the jinn. The initiate then earns the reins, which she carries for the rest of her life.

A member of al-Jamal enjoys a large portion of the trade that makes its way into the 8th Sea. He trades the cheese he makes from goat's milk for the dates and fruit that grow in Ashur, and brings much of the jewelry and coinage into the 8th Sea economy. Furthermore, with the angering of Saghira, the few traders or travelers who dare cross the sea often hire him to make it possible. Even so, a member of al-Jamal, like the other tribes, trusts his family first and strangers last. Not easily tricked, he drives a hard bargain.

Despite this distrusting nature, a member of al-Jamal typically does not engage in war. Unlike her al-Hisan cousins, she prefers to ride to war mounted on a camel. This war camel can carry its soldier over long distances to meet their enemy. It then charges forward at its target out of the desert. Those unable to fight gather round the camel, emitting a terrifying ululation, to protect it during the fray. An al-Jamal raider takes no prisoners and harbors no ill will against her defeated enemies. She usually kills the leaders and leaves the rest to find their way back home.

The wealthiest al-Jamal, such as the walī and sheikhs, are permitted to have more than one spouse. While this custom allows more to benefit from concentrated wealth, the dark side of this tradition means that the walī and sheikhs more likely than not banish their romantic competition. In addition, a magic user who does not perform magic for his leader gets ostracized as well, despite the empress' wishes. The vast desert controlled by al-Jamal contains more than its fair share of solo nomads, tending a small flock and barely subsisting.

Quabilat al-Hisan, the Tribe of the Horse

The Quabilat al-Hisan are the largest warrior tribe, as they breed and ride the majority of the horses in the 8th Sea. These horses they sell throughout the known world, earning them their tribal name. While other tribes do own horses, al-Hisan alone developed the horse that can withstand the desert and thrive. Furthermore, their unique fighting style earns them a reputation that benefits everyone who calls the desert home.

Although all the Tribes have a history of war, only the Quabilat al-Hisan make training for it an integral part of their life. A child learns horse riding from an early age, including the feats that are a hallmark of the tribal raids. A warrior is either trained to rush in, engage in close combat and then quickly withdraw, or to focus on ranged support of the attack with more than a few magic users by his side. He calls on the epic deeds of the men and women before him, reaching as far back as the Katabi of Raqmu. While not unheard of for warriors to master both styles, it is surprising. The extended tribe gathers annually to test these skills with each other, as well as arrange marriages and horse trades.

Among al-Hisan, marriage is agreed upon then sealed when each family trades the other a prize horse. This horse represents the families' mutual respect for one another. These beasts are so important to al-Hisan life, they are also used to decide the rulership of the tribe. A walī gains her position when she challenges the hereditary walī for leadership in a duel of horse skills. When she passes away, her eldest child succeeds her and so on until the inheritor is challenged for leadership once more.

Al-Hisan follow the Ahurayasna religion. The increased activity of the jinn in the 8th Sea has only boosted al-Hisan. Their skill in managing dangerous enemies has proven helpful in protecting their herds. One of their magic users has even reported a boost in power, suggesting that a ginnaya may have bestowed a favor on al-Hisan. Even so, al-Hisan have had to face some of the darker jinn settling in the desert, and not all who did so returned.

A tribesperson of al-Hisan is prosperous and tends to look down on al-Thi'b who have moved in on his land. He may also resent al-Thi'b forcing him to bring his warrior skills to bear in protecting them from outside danger. Although he, like the rest of the Tribes, puts his immediate family before even a close cousin, he must follow the rules of propriety above all else.

Quabilat al-Thi'b, the Tribe of the Wolf

The Quabilat al-Thi'b set themselves apart as followers of al-Dīn. A tribesperson of al-Thi'b believes herself to be descended from the hunters of the past, who first accepted al-Dīn. Today, she still takes pride in her skills in herding and hunting, though the gazelles have long since left the Sea.

The smallest tribe, al-Thi'b subsists on herding and makes a modest additional living carving al-Dīn inscriptions in bone and stone and trading it as exotic material to the empire. Overall, a member tends to be poorer than his neighbors, and the takeover of some of his traditional territory by Saghira has constricted his access to the resources he needs to flourish. He has subsequently forced his way onto al-Hisan land.

A member of al-Thi'b is truly a contradiction. Versed in the old ways, she nevertheless holds the precepts of al-Dīn above all else. Poor and struggling to survive the changing desert, she is more educated and literate than a member of the other tribes who do not rely on the words of a prophet. Though loyal to the empress as the leader of al-Dīn, her historic connection to Persis suggests that she might change allegiance for the right price.

At the moment, however, al-Thi'b follow most of the empress' commandments. The changes she has encouraged for her subjects, many of the families of al-Thi'b have already begun to implement. However, al-Thi'b embraced the Sihirbazların Kaydı when it came out and still hold magic users at arm's length. A magic user who dares reveal himself gets pushed out of the tribe. The walī continues forward with his own agenda, regardless of what his tribe or the empress may desire.

Al-Thi'b have one connection that the other tribes do not: they have cousins residing in Persis. The tribe that remained in Persis no longer lives the traditional lifestyle, as they have settled down to pursue agriculture and even higher callings such as, secretly, magic. Their reputation of a mystical connection with the mysterious 8th Sea has served them well. They bear enough in common with al-Thi'b of the desert that they continue to communicate with them through messages that the other tribes have never learned to read. This relationship remains relatively unknown by all, except for the shah of Persis.

Places in the 8th Sea

Asham

With impenetrable stone walls, which have stood since the time of ancient Katab, Asham is a living piece of history. Built atop a plateau bordering Sarmion, it is home to Dīnists, Yasnavan, Yachidi and Orthodox. The infrastructure of the city has existed for so long no one rightly knows any more how old it truly is. Through Bab Yasmin, the main gate wreathed in sweet smelling jasmine flowers, visitors can see the shining gold Grand Mosque. Winding streets, souqs, kaffeehouses and homes buzz with life and energy. Houses built upon houses, ancient roads repaved, caves excavated and rehomed—the city is a living, breathing creature, immortal in its dynamic nature.

When the Numanari invaded in the early fourth century, they pushed through Sarmion's borders and into the 8th Sea. Unable to survive in a scorching desert filled with jinn and giant creatures, the Numanari settled on conquering Asham and using it as their desert outpost. Seeing what happened to the Sarmion peoples, most of the Tribes happily left the city in the hands of the invaders, except Quabilat al-Tuban (the Tribe of the Snake). Using ancient Katabic tunnels, the Tribe invaded the city and struck at the occupying force under cloak of night. Reeling from a terrifying attack, the Numanari fled back into Sarmion and the city has been under control of the Tribe of the Snake ever since.

Since Quabilat al-Tuban overtook Asham, it has been home to more than the human inhabitants. Thousands of snakes, which give the Tribe their name, moved in too. They can often be seen lazing on altars and inhabit the expansive sewer system under the city. Locals, used to these slithering creatures, peacefully co-exist with their scaly neighbors. In fact, many leave offerings for the snakes, flowers and sweet fruits in low hanging shrines around the city. While the city is primarily Dīnist, many people still pay homage to the many-headed snake jinn said to protect the city.

For such a bustling trade hub, Asham oddly has few guards. While most locals joke about the city's flourishing Thieves' Guild, which is less of a joke and more of a way to relieve stress about a very real problem, the truth is the city has thousands of serpentine guardians. A guard of the city receives a gilded silver cane. By slamming it into the ground, she sends out tiny vibrations imperceptible to humans, but a screaming cry to the snakes of the city. Serpents swarm to the area and assist the wielder of the cane, thus putting down any crime in the area. The system is simple and elegant, if only a cane had not most recently fallen into the hands of criminals.

Modern Asham has seen more tribes move into the city, and the city's government follows more Crescent law than Tribal. A hub for international trade and where most tribes pick up caravans who wish to cross the 8th Sea, Gahdir, the bey (and walī) of Asham, pushes her city into the modern world with plans of building a university within its many underground Katabic ruins, if only she could get the Thieves' Guild out of there first.

Raqmu

The ancient city of Raqmu's location is known only to the tribes of the 8th Sea. Hidden for decades by tribal members who revere and respect the ancient Katabi city, Raqmu serves as a make-shift capital city for the tribes of the 8th Sea.

Centuries ago, ancient Katabi carved a city out of solid stone. Each century that passed saw a new great hall, a handful of passageways, homes, souqs and places of worship chiseled deep into stone. Now the city stretches far deeper into the towering rocks that surround it than anyone truly knows. It is said it would take a tribesperson her entire life to visit every room in Raqmu and given the scope of the city very few have ever tried.

Legends say that sleeping jinn make their home deep within the spiraling hallways of the city. As each of the great creatures slumber they feed off the ambient belief poured into the air by anyone who visits Raqmu. Many Tribes believe that if the city were ever attacked the jinn would wake from their slumber and protect the mortals who have fed and cared for them for so many years. And, perhaps, this is what has kept the prying eyes of other Nations from probing too deeply into the mystery of where Raqmu is located.

Other than boasting thousands of rooms and being the governmental hub for all tribal business, Raqmu has an impressive water system running through every room of the city. This water system provides fresh running water for anyone who stays within and also carries waste safely away from its walls. The water system is ancient and while the tribes understand how to maintain it, no one truly knows how it was constructed.

Shakar Hunting Lodge

Shakar Hunting Lodge lies at the edge of the Black Desert, a well-known landmark for those who travel the 8th Sea. In distant times, the lodge sat at the center of a small oasis fueled by an underwater spring and the ingenuity of the Tribes' ancestors. The systems that brought the spring waters into the lodge have long since atrophied.

The lodge lies in ruins, but enough remains to tell a story of who visited here. Paintings on the walls depict ostrich, gazelles—the bounty that once roamed the area when it more closely resembled a grassy plain. A stone basin once held a fountain that pulled up water from the spring. Legends say the water could be heated for baths after a long day on the hunt. Here the royalty of Persis came together with the Tribes when Persis alone ruled the region.

Today, the Tribes largely ignore the wonder of the lodge. A well has been bored down to the spring underneath. A rope and pulley pull up the water, requiring two people or a camel to drag the rope, and another to steady the bucket when it comes to the top. No tribe settles here for the season, but many camp at the entrance for the night before continuing their journey at dawn.

At night, the reason for the Tribes' reluctance to dally becomes apparent. The ruin, long abandoned, emits noises, like knocking, on the mudbrick walls. A wise traveler leaves a cup of tea at the entrance and refrains from entering, or the jinn inside may spirit away her camel in the night. In the morning, she finds the cup missing, but her camel still present.

He who is brave enough to enter in search of treasures from times past may find himself facing an angry spirit…

Current Relations

Anatol Ayh

The Tribes owe fealty to the empress, as long as the empire pays their retainer to fight in any upcoming conflict. Most of the Tribes are neutral to her and her reforms. Al-Thi'b especially follow her teachings, attempting to adapt to the changes she demands. At the same time, the Tribes suspect that her traitorous brother has found sanctuary in the 8th Sea and are both eager and wary to be proven right.

Ashur

The Tribes once had an easy relationship with the people of Ashur, trading homemade cheeses for figs from Ashur's forest. The Tribes never held much respect for them, viewing their war-making capabilities with disdain. Now that the fig trees are dying, al-Hisan have grown bold and raid within the borders to get the figs they use to feed their horses.

Persis

The Tribes like Persis for the goods and coin it sends in hopes of winning them to its side, but otherwise they feel no particular loyalty. Moreover, international relations between the Tribes and Persis have begun to break down due to the large influx of Yasnavan refugees entering the 8th Sea. Tribal cities bordering Persis feel the strain of supporting more people than they can sustain, and many 'awliyā' have reached out to Persic officials, demanding they adhere to the empress' orders and stem the influx of refugees.

Sarmion

The Tribes have historically held a neutral option of Sarmion. After the Numanari invasion of Sarmion, relations have been on the upswing. Sarmion has been particularly helpful to the Tribes in relation to the refugees entering the 8th Sea, offering shelter and land within their borders to people fleeing the Persic regime.

OUT TO YOU

In our first days, I am afraid. You see me as I truly am.

Our first moments teach me longing and trust, as I reach out to you.

I grow in strength. You thrive with me, the mentor, the guide, constant.

No matter my misstep, or wildness of heart, always I reach out to you.

Inside, the frenzy nourishes me. The whirlwind drives me far from home.

I awaken in restless nights and pray. From my sands I reach out to you.

In furious battle, I slaughter. In worship, I pray and wander still on.

By my transgressions, I am abhorred. No longer may I reach out to you.

In candle flames and lantern light, I stumble, heartsick to my soul.

No prize or wisdom comforts me in our parting. I dream I reach out to you.

My last days come, and I will still be forgotten. Yet it matters not at all.

My last words through parched lips carry me, one last time, as I reach out to you.

HALA BINT RAFIF

"Freedom is the desert and to it I belong."

Hala bint Rafif

The al-Jamal tribe claims Hala as one of their own, but Hala herself objects. Her fierce green eyes and long black hair always attracted attention among al-Jamal as she grew up. Some say she knows every inch of the 8th Sea. Her skill and her passion for her people attract more loyal followers than her appearance ever did.

Hala is one of several daughters in a modestly successful family. Her only brother grew strong and handsome and stood ready to take the reins of the family's caravan routes. The local sheikh, however, saw in him a rival for brides. A drunken evening and the sheikh's camels lost in a sandstorm provided him an opportunity. With trumped up charges of theft, the sheikh banished her brother into the 8th Sea.

The family was devastated, but they could do nothing. Hala insisted on going with him, but she was too young and the consequences too dire. She would not be deterred. After several months, she secured a camel and enough rations to search for her brother in the desert. Ultimately, she found his remains covered in sand, mummified by the desert, with strange red markings upon his skin. As strong and brave as he was, he could not stand alone against all the evils that roam the 8th Sea.

From that day forward, Hala renounced her comfortable position in her family's tent. She wanders al-Jamal lands, gathering the ostracized together and any who have lost their way, creating a new band under her. She intends to find them a permanent home, whether on al-Jamal lands, or someplace far afield.

Story Hooks

- When Hala found her brother's corpse, she also found a tiny lizard he had sheltered in the crook of his arm from a sandstorm. A sign from her brother, Hala called her new tribe Quabilat al-Suhulia, the Tribe of the Lizard. Now, Hala seeks the ginnaya known as Am Alssahali, who could grant her the power to speak with the lizard—to know what happened to her brother in the moments before his death. Without a tribe to yet call her own, Hala needs allies to help her track down Am Alssahali.

Baha ibn Quasim al-Zummena

Baha is a young man with a long nose and an easy smile. His thin limbs belie a strength and agility that sets him apart from his tribe. Although respectful of his sheikh, he loves to wander off on his own and has been known to get in trouble for doing so. With an insatiable curiosity about other people and cultures, he willingly puts himself on the line to learn more.

Baha has lived in a small tribe called the Zummena most of his life, though some tribespeople say they adopted him after he was found abandoned. Unlike many of the main tribes of the 8th Sea, the Zummena tribe spends only half their year herding goats and horses in the desert. They then sell or slaughter their herds and spend the other half of the year along the coast. Baha started going a step further when he was 10. He stowed away on a camel destined for Sarmion, and had seen half the empire before he made his way back home.

Since then, he has served almost as an ambassador for the tribe in the settled lands. He takes goods to sell directly, but also helps any fellow tribespeople navigate the strange customs beyond the sea. He also has been known to help those in need in the settled lands, with little thought of what he gets in return, as long as it provides him an opportunity to learn.

Story Hooks

- A rukk was spotted just outside the coastal port of Adin. Unfortunately, Baha was unaware of that at the time, and when the creature attacked the port, it flew away with one of al-Jamal's caravans loaded with goods under his protection. The young man now looks for help to retrieve the caravan before al-Jamal take their offense out on the Zummena.
- Baha found an elderly Sarmion man wandering alone in the desert. He tried his best to save the man, but he was too late. The old man died the very next day, but not before he told Baha his name—Taavi of the Yachidi Raam Tribe. He begged the young boy to find his daughter Kanah bat Mirah in the 8th Sea and tell her the Raam is not lost. Baha hopes to get allies and find the tribe to honor Taavi's memory.

BAHA IBN QUASIM AL-ZUMMENA

"C'mon, you can do it, just one more dune to cross!"

AL-FIDDATA

"My dear child, if you didn't want to deal with the consequences, you should never have made this deal."

STRENGTH	INFLUENCE	RANK
5	9	14

Al-Fiddata

Al-Fiddata claims al-Hisan as her tribe, though she has not lived among them for some time. How old she is, no one quite knows. The silver hair that earned her nickname and her weathered skin only hint at the decades she has lived in the 8th Sea. Although old enough to be a sheikh or even a walī, she prefers to keep her own company. Some say, however, that she prefers the company of the jinn.

No one claims al-Fiddata as a sister or mother, so all the tales of her upbringing are told late into the evening when tongues begin to wag. Some say she showed an early affinity for working with horses, becoming a prized breeder whose care for the horses superseded her care for their owners. She could break in a stallion using only words, and her mares birthed the finest of the breed.

When a young man rebuffed her interest in him, however, she retaliated by slaughtering his family's entire herd. She was exiled and vowed revenge on the tribe. Since then, horses have run in fear from her. Other stories insist that she always allied with the jinn, trading her soul for power over others. When discovered, she was driven from the tribe. Horses' sensitivity to evil is what causes them to run from her.

The true story of al-Fiddata's past remains unknown, but rumors say she now trafficks with ginnayê and afārīt, focusing on growing her powers somewhere in the 8th Sea. Some say she grants a boon to some travelers, but it does not come without a price. One who allies with her may find himself facing something far worse than he bargained for.

Story Hooks

- Al-Fiddata brokered a deal between a young man named Basir and the jinn: his herd of camels would be blessed with good health and in return his firstborn would belong to the jinn. Basir never expected to marry, let alone fall in love, but now his wife Hiba is with child. Basir seeks someone to find a way to break the deal before it is too late.
- Mayhem follows young Rizwana wherever she goes. With her uncanny ability to find water anywhere, her adopted al-Thi'b abide Rizwana's aura of chaos. Now, the young woman is plagued by fevered dreams, flashes of al-Fiddata coming for her daughter.

Mumtez ibn Talal al-Thi'b

Mumtez is a sheikh of al-Thi'b, a respected leader of the tribe. Of average height, he instead imposes his presence with the force of his voice and a quick wit. Those who know him find him the perfect example of tribal social custom, putting his family before strangers and tribe. Those who know him well find him terrifying. He lies without a tell and bends rules to serve himself. He has his eye on becoming the walī of his tribe…and more.

Mumtez came to be the elder of his family after his older brother died. His horse threw and trampled him. A prized gift from al-Hisan, the horse proved to be unstable and was put down. Al-Hisan apologized in horror for this slight and gave al-Thi'b the horse of their own walī in recompense.

Abd ibn Alet, the walī of al-Thi'b, accepted the gift as an apology and smoothed over relations between the two tribes. Mumtez, however, refused to let it pass and has used his brother's death to foment dissent within the tribe against the walī. What no one knows is that even this feeling for his late brother is a lie. Mumtez himself put a burr in his brother's saddle and made sure the horse trampled him.

Mumtez now orchestrates a crisis between his tribe and al-Hisan by forcing their walī through custom to provide defense for Mumtez's immediate family. Mumtez now prepares to fake another death in the family so he can fully blame al-Hisan and bring the two tribes to war.

Story Hooks

- Mumtez plans to kill Galila, his wife. He loved the attention his brother's death brought him and relishes playing the bereaved once more. Mumtez has hired mercenaries in al-Hisan garb to attack his wife's caravan while she escorts a Théan politician to Persis.
- Mumtez's only child, Rahim, has fallen in love with Jamila, the daughter of Obodas, the walī of al-Hisan. Although Mumtez loves his son, he never wants to see the youth marry a member of al-Hisan. Mumtez plans to have Jamila publicly humiliated and dishonored by spoiling the feed of the horses she keeps, murdering her herd. Then Rahim will have no choice but to shun her as tradition dictates.

MUMTEZ IBN TALAL AL-THI'B

"My poor brother, may he rest in peace."

STRENGTH	INFLUENCE	RANK
4	5	9

Chapter 7

Adventuring in the Empire

ADVENTURING IN THE EMPIRE

Crescent Heroes in 7th Sea

Hero Creation follows the same process as in the **Core Rulebook**, but if you need a refresher, here are the steps:

Step 1: Traits

Every Hero has five Traits defining his core strengths. The Traits are the following:

Brawn is a Hero's strength and physical power.

Finesse measures a Hero's coordination and agility.

Resolve is a Hero's willpower and endurance.

Wits measures how quickly a Hero thinks on his feet.

Panache is a Hero's charm and personal magnetism.

Every Hero begins with all of his Traits at 2. You have 2 additional points you can spend to increase your Hero's Traits.

Step 2: Nation

Your decision of Nation affects your Hero's Traits, and also grants you access to Nation-specific Backgrounds and Advantages. Apply these bonuses *after* you have spent points on Traits.

NATION	BONUS
Anatol Ayh	+1 Panache or +1 Wits
Ashur	+1 Finesse or +1 Wits
Persis	+1 Panache or +1 Resolve
Sarmion	+1 Brawn or +1 Finesse
Tribes of the 8th Sea	+1 Brawn or +1 Resolve

Step 3: Backgrounds

In the Empire of the Crescent Moon, few ever pick their own life path. Often, a citizen's career is set before him, laid out by his family and station in life. Your Hero is probably no different. Your Backgrounds represent what your Hero did before the game begins. Was he trained to be an artist or a soldier? Did her parents send her to sea to learn the life of a sailor? Perhaps he was raised with a wandering troupe of actors, jugglers and other performers. Or, maybe she was born into a life of luxury as one of the Crescent Empire's many nobles. This is not where your Hero ends up, but it is where he started.

Backgrounds represent your Hero's past. Perhaps she was a sailor, a performer, or even an Assassin. A Hero is not defined by her past, but it does help shape who she becomes.

Backgrounds give you a few things that make your Hero distinct from others.

Restrictions: Some Backgrounds have restrictions. Make sure you follow these; they are a part of your Hero's story.

Quirk: Backgrounds come with a Quirk, a personality trait common among people of that Background. If you act in accordance with a Quirk from your Background, you gain a Hero Point. You may only gain a Hero Point from a particular Quirk once per session.

Advantages: Backgrounds give you Advantages. Advantages are abilities most Alwarithli never get. If your Background lists an Advantage, you may add that Advantage to your Hero Sheet at no cost.

Skills: Each Background also gives you a set of Skills, which begin with 1 Rank. Skills are specific bonuses for specific tasks. Like Traits, Skills have Ranks that tell you how many dice they give you. A Skill's Rank can only go as high as 5.

Two Backgrounds

Pick two Backgrounds from the following list.

You get all of your Backgrounds' Advantages. If you have duplicate Advantages, take another Advantage of the same point cost, your choice.

You get 1 Rank in all your Backgrounds' Skills. If you have duplicate Skills, add 1 more point (for a total of 2 points) to the duplicate Skill.

General Backgrounds

CASTAWAY

Once you were lost and alone. Nobody should ever go through such a trial.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you go out of your way to save another character from isolation.

Advantages	Skills
Cast Iron Stomach	Aim
Handy	Athletics
Reckless Takedown	Hide
	Notice
	Sailing

POET

You know how to wield your words as ably as any Duelist swings a sword.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when your insistence on protecting or expanding your reputation gets you into trouble.

Advantages	Skills
Linguist	Convince
Reputation	Empathy
Rhyme and Verse	Intimidate
	Perform
	Scholarship

TACTICIAN

For you, chess is child's play.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you successfully disarm the threat of a war (large or small) without resorting to battle.

Advantages	Skills
Experienced Commander	Aim
Reputation (Tactical)	Convince
	Empathy
	Ride
	Warfare

TREASURE HUNTER

Gold and glittering prizes await! Best go find them.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when your hunger for rare trinkets, lost artifacts or a similar treasure gets you into trouble.

Advantages	Skills
Got It!	Athletics
Nerves of Steel[1]	Hide
	Notice
	Scholarship
	Theft

[1] Nerves of Steel found in Pirate Nations

Anatol Ayh Backgrounds

ALHARIS

There is magic in the beauty of the world, and you seek to reflect it in your own work.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use your Sorcery to bring comfort to the disenfranchised or the downtrodden.

Advantages	Skills
The Old Traditions	Convince
Sorcery (Art of the Second Prophet)	Empathy
Sorcery (Art of the Second Prophet)	Hide
	Intimidate
	Scholarship

GHAZI

Diplomacy is weakness. Show the world the might of your people in the only way possible—battle.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when your insistence on a martial solution to a problem backfires and causes you trouble.

Advantages	Skills
Never Say Die	Athletics
Well Read	Intimidate
	Notice
	Warfare
	Weaponry

KURTANOĞLU

While you have distanced yourself from the savagery of your kin, the thirst for glory still sings in your heart.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you involve yourself in a conflict solely for the glory it will bring.

Advantages	Skills
Remember My Name	Athletics
Skirmisher	Brawl
	Hide
	Scholarship
	Warfare

YOL SEEKER

The path to enlightenment is not the same for everyone, but it is a road you walk everyday.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you help another character achieve a moment of enlightenment, clarity or a similar breakthrough.

Advantages	Skills
The Old Traditions	Convince
Osda	Empathy
Reputation	Intimidate
	Scholarship
	Tempt

Ashur Backgrounds

CLIMBER OF THE GREEN MOUNTAIN

You have climbed the mountain, met the Guardian and visited the Garden to become an Assassin.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when a problem could be easily solved by murder, but you find a less bloody solution.

Advantages	Skills
Cover Name	Aim
I've Been Waiting for This	Athletics
Sorcery (Nawaru)	Hide
	Notice
	Theft

ELOHIM

To destroy nature is an affront to Theus, whose greatest and most beautiful art is the world itself.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you defend a natural wonder or protect the natural world from destruction.

Advantages	Skills
Direction Sense	Athletics
Masterpiece Crafter	Empathy
Survivalist	Hide
	Notice
	Ride

HATAPU

You have experienced a hundred deaths. You seek to prevent others from having the same experience.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when your commitment to saving someone else from witnessing the horror and pain of death causes you trouble.

Advantages	Skills
Cover Name	Brawl
Sorcery (Nawaru)	Hide
Sorcery (Nawaru)	Notice
	Ride
	Theft

PLEROMA

In order to thrive, all must work together. It is your task to persuade others to the truth of this.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you successfully persuade a group of people to aid their neighbors with a problem that does not directly affect them.

Advantages	Skills
Connection	Athletics
An Honest Misunderstanding	Convince
	Notice
	Ride
	Sailing

Persis Backgrounds

IMMORTAL

For the honor of the Immortals! For the honor of Persis!

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when your commitment to protecting the reputation of the Immortals gets you into trouble.

Advantages	Skills
My Soul Still Shines	Athletics
Staredown	Notice
	Ride
	Warfare
	Weaponry

KHAHESH

You have a great responsibility to the world, entrusted to you by the Ahuras.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when your connection to the Ahuras becomes known and complicates a problem, rather than solves it.

Advantages	Skills
Sorcery (Khahesh-ahura)	Convince
Sorcery (Khahesh-ahura)	Empathy
Well Read	Intimidate
	Scholarship
	Weaponry

PERSIC REBEL

Down with the Shah!

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you tell someone in authority exactly what you think of him, even when you really shouldn't.

Advantages	Skills
Delay the Inevitable	Brawl
Slip Free	Empathy
Team Player	Hide
	Intimidate
	Theft

STUDENT OF FIRUZEH

You have studied at the feet of Firuzeh, one of the greatest Kavi of modern times.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you turn a rival into an ally, student or friend.

Advantages	Skills
Kwa Damu	Convince
Linguist	Intimidate
Rhyme and Verse (Damu)	Perform
	Scholarship
	Tempt

Sarmion Backgrounds

CHAVRA

You are one of the elite of the Sarmion military. There are some problems so dangerous that only you should face them—alone.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you choose to take on a problem alone, in order to protect others from the task's potential danger.

Advantages	Skills
Reputation	Aim
Student of Combat[2]	Athletics
	Hide
	Notice
	Weaponry

CHAYALIM

You were trained in Sarmion as light infantry, skilled in sword and bow alike.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you defy your superiors, refuse to obey orders or similarly buck authority in order to do what you think is right.

Advantages	Skills
Perfect Balance	Aim
Quick Reflexes (Weaponry)	Athletics
	Brawl
	Ride
	Weaponry

DIVINE LYRIST

Elohah made 12 promises to the world. Part of your task is to ensure they are kept.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you keep a promise that it would be to your advantage to break.

Advantages	Skills
Linguist	Convince
Sorcery (Chozeh)	Empathy
Sorcery (Chozeh)	Notice
	Scholarship
	Tempt

YACHIDI DOCTOR

Patients are stubborn lot, but not as stubborn as you.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you coerce, persuade, threaten, cajole or otherwise force a character to allow you to give her medical attention.

Advantages	Skills
Extended Family	Empathy
Indomitable Will	Intimidate
Triage	Notice
	Scholarship
	Tempt

[2] Student of Combat found in Nations of Théah: Volume 1

Tribes of the 8th Sea Backgrounds

KHADIM

The only way to survive is to trust. You know this more than most.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you retrieve your thiqa from another character.

Advantages	Skills
Cast Iron Stomach	Empathy
Sorcery (Mithaq Alqadim)	Notice
Sorcery (Mithaq Alqadim)	Perform
	Ride
	Theft

MURSHID

You lived your life in the 8th Sea. Now you show others how to survive.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you help another character avoid danger through leading by example.

Advantages	Skills
Step Where I Step	Aim
Team Player	Athletics
	Hide
	Notice
	Ride

MUSTAKSHAF

The desert hides many treasures. You have "found" one or two.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when your pursuit of ancient treasure and fabulous riches gets you into trouble.

Advantages	Skills
Signature Item	Athletics
Multi-Tasker	Hide
	Notice
	Ride
	Theft

ZAHRAH'S COUSIN

The history of the Tribes is as rich and colorful as any people. Your words will be heard.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you convince another character to commit to a course of action by appealing to his bloodline, family honor, national pride or a similar aspect of his personal history.

Advantages	Skills
Direction Sense	Empathy
Amab Almadaa	Notice
Rhyme and Verse (Hakawati)	Perform
	Ride
	Scholarship

Step 4: Skills

You gain 10 points to add to existing Skills from your Backgrounds or to add new Skills to your sheet. Each point buys you one more Rank of a Skill, whether you already have any Ranks in it from your Background or not. You cannot raise a Skill above Rank 3 when making your Hero.

Achieving certain Ranks in Skills grants your Hero additional bonuses beyond dice.

- At 3 Ranks, you gain the ability to reroll any single die when you make a Risk using that Skill.
- At 4 Ranks, you gain the ability to earn 2 Raises per set by creating sets of 15, rather than only 1 Raise per set for creating a set of 10.
- At 5 Ranks, all dice that roll a 10 explode, allowing you to roll an additional die and add it to your total.

Step 5: Advantages

Although you already have some Advantages from your Backgrounds, you may now buy new Advantages. These distinctions set you apart from everyone else.

You have 5 points to buy new Advantages.

Advantages cost between 1 and 5 points and may cost different amounts depending on your Hero's Nation of origin. Some Advantages have restrictions.

All Advantages may only be purchased once unless explicitly stated otherwise.

An Advantage with the Knack tag ( ) requires a Hero Point to activate, but no Raises—meaning that it does not take an Action, even though it probably activates on your turn.

An Advantage with the Innate tag ( ) can only be selected at Hero Creation.

If you choose the Sorcery Advantage (**Core Rulebook**, page 150), the specific magic you gain depends on your character's Nation or religion. A character can never have more than one type of Sorcery, even if she is eligible for multiple: you must choose.

The Sorceries are split as follows:

Art of the Second Prophet is available for Heroes from Anatol Ayh or who practice al-Dīn.

Chozeh is available to Heroes from Sarmion or who practice the Yachidi faith.

Khahesh-ahura is available to Heroes from Persis or who practice the Ahurayasna faith.

Mithaq Alqadim is available to Heroes from the Tribes of the 8th Sea.

Nawaru is available to Heroes from Ashur only, and you must have the Hatapu or Climber of the Green Mountain Background.

1 Point Advantages

THE OLD TRADITIONS

You know the old rites of hospitality and can request them from another when you need food, water, shelter, medical aid or something similar. The other character offers you this aid so long as she does not believe it places her in danger, and so long as you make assurances to do the same for others.

This Advantage has no effect against a Villain or his direct underlings, or characters who have some reason to already dislike or distrust you.

WELL READ

You have spent an unusual amount of time amongst books, scrolls, tablets and other records of history (fictional or otherwise). You always know where to find information about a particular historical subject. You know which texts to consult (even rare or one-of-a-kind texts), and which libraries have them. If no such text exists (because it has never been written) then you know the location of the next best thing (such as a renowned expert on the subject).

2 Point Advantages

AMBUSCADE

You have a gift for taking your enemy by surprise. When acting as a General during Mass Combat, you always count as if you have surprise over your opposition. If the opposing General has this Advantage as well, you both receive the surprise penalty.

AMAB ALMADAA KNACK

You must have the "Rhyme and Verse" Advantage. Spend a Hero Point when you have fewer Raises than your opponent during the first Bayt of a poetry duel. You can reassign the Skills that you have chosen between your three Bayts.

COVER NAME (1 IF ASHURITE) KNACK

Spend a Hero Point to employ a cover identity until the end of the Scene. Choose any non-National Background for your cover identity. While operating as your cover name, once per Round during a Dramatic Sequence, you can change your Approach to any Skill from your cover identity's Background. A Hero can only have one cover identity at a time; if you purchase this Advantage again, you invent a new cover name and lose your old one.

DELAY THE INEVITABLE (1 IF PERSIC) KNACK

Spend a Hero Point during an Action or Dramatic Sequence and select any Consequence with a Time Limit. You delay that Time Limit by as many Raises as you spend. However, that Consequence can no longer be overcome or reduced by anyone spending Raises.

DESPERATE DEFLECTION

When you suffer Wounds, you may immediately spend a Raise to activate this Advantage. You suffer no Wounds. However, the next time this Round you suffer Wounds, the number of Wounds you take doubles and cannot be reduced in any way.

KWA DAMU

You must have the "Rhyme and Verse" Advantage. If you gain 5 Raises more than your opponent in one Bayt during a poetry duel, you win. You have mastered the art of pressuring your opponent into staggering submission. She is left without words or even a chance to rebuke your verse.

RHYME AND VERSE

You are a *Kavi*, a poetry duelist. See the poetry dueling section (see **Kavita in the** the **Games Amidst the Moon and Stars** section) for more information.

The first time you purchase this Advantage, you choose to learn the Damu, Chamsin, Griot or Hakawati Style.

The second time you purchase this Advantage, choose to learn the Goftār-e nik, Masquerade or Khol Style.

The third time you purchase this Advantage, choose any Skill you possess and gain a Bonus Die when you use that Skill during a Kavita.

The fourth (and each subsequent) time you purchase this Advantage, you choose to learn any Kavita Style you wish.

SKIRMISHER KNACK

When you engage in Mass Combat as a Solo, enemy units lose dice equal to your Ranks in Wits or Finesse (whichever is higher) on all rolls directed against you.

TRIAGE (1 IF SARMION) KNACK

Spend a Hero Point to identify a poison or disease, determine a character's injuries (and how to best treat them) or save someone from an immediate medical threat (such as someone choking, has a collapsed lung, etc.).

3 Point Advantages

EXPERIENCED COMMANDER

Units you lead are better than average. Whenever you begin Mass Combat attached to a unit, you may select a single Edge. The unit gains the benefit of that Edge with no Hero Point cost. Selecting a second Edge costs one Hero Point and grows exponentially from there.

HEEDLESS ASSAULT KNACK

When you inflict Wounds to another character, spend a Hero Point. The Wounds you inflict cannot be reduced in any way. For the rest of the Round, you may not spend Raises to reduce Wounds that you or any other character takes.

MULTI-TASKER (2 IF TRIBE OF THE 8TH SEA)

When you spend a Raise on your Action to activate an Opportunity, you may spend a Hero Point to reduce a Consequence as if you had spent a single Raise to do so.

OSDA (2 IF ANATOLI)

You have earned the title of Osda within Anatol Ayh. Your peers regard you as kind, well-spoken and honorable. You can recite classic Anatoli poetry, you know all the protocols and traditions of Anatoli hospitality and you are held in high esteem amongst those who honor the ideals of the Osda. Such persons freely offer you food or drink, shelter or similar hospitality. In addition, you gain 2 Bonus Dice for any social Risks against characters who respect the Way of Anatol Ayh and its traditions of the Osda.

SUPPORT LINES

When determining who goes first in Mass Combat, you may add a number equal to your Wits as if you have rolled that many additional Raises. This does not change the number of Raises you can spend.

4 Point Advantages

NEVER SAY DIE

While you are attached to a unit during Mass Combat, your unit always rolls as its full Strength. For example, if your unit had suffered 7 Hits, you still roll as if your unit were Strength 10 rather than 3.

RALLY TO ME KNACK

While acting as a General on your unit's Action, you may spend a Hero Point to rally your troops with a war cry, a stirring speech or some similar act of inspiration. A unit of your choice recovers Strength equal to your Panache.

5 Point Advantages

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS (3 IF ASHURITE) KNACK

Spend a Hero Point to meditate on a trial to come, an ordeal that you know you will soon face or a Villain that you intend to soon confront. If the danger is present in the current Scene (such as if you are standing face to face with the Villain in question), you cannot activate this Advantage. Until the end of the game session, whenever you spend a Hero Point to gain Bonus Dice or to give another player character Bonus Dice in a Risk directly related to the threat you have contemplated, you can choose a second character in the same Scene to gain the same benefit from the Hero Point you spent. You cannot grant yourself additional Bonus Dice with this effect. A Hero may only activate this Advantage once per game session.

MY SOUL STILL SHINES (3 IF PERSIC) KNACK

Choose a Trait. If you roll zero Raises during a Risk using that Trait, you may spend a Hero Point. You suffer one Dramatic Wound, but you immediately gain a number of Raises equal to that Trait. A Hero may only activate this Advantage once per game session.

MY WEAKNESS IS YOUR STRENGTH (3 IF SARMION) KNACK

When you have 3 Dramatic Wounds, spend a Hero Point before a Risk. Your 10s no longer explode, but all other Heroes' 10s do explode. This lasts until the end of the Scene, or until you choose to end the effect at no cost.

REMEMBER MY NAME (3 IF ANATOLI) KNACK

Spend a Hero Point to activate this Advantage before you roll dice in a Risk against a character that you have encountered before. Remind him of what happened last time you met (if the interaction went in your favor) or tell him specifically how this time will be different (if it didn't). You gain 5 Bonus Dice on all Risks against that character. This lasts until the end of the Scene.

STEP WHERE I STEP (3 IF TRIBE OF THE 8TH SEA) KNACK

Spend a Hero Point when you spend a Raise to take an Action involving movement, navigating a dangerous environment, avoiding a trap, leaping a chasm or some similar threat. Another Hero of your choice comes with you, avoiding any threats as if she had spent a Raise.

Step 6: Arcana

For your Hero, you choose a Virtue and Hubris from the **Core Rulebook** (page 156). They do not need to be from the same card.

You may only activate your Virtue once per session.

You may only activate your Hero's Hubris once per session. Activating your Hubris gives you a Hero Point. The Game Master can offer a Hero Point to activate a Hero's Hubris, but the player may refuse. If he accepts, he gains the Hero Point and must act in accordance with his Hubris.

Step 7: Stories

While Heroes work together to tell a larger story, every Hero has her own story to tell. Your Hero is no different. The promise you made to your father on his deathbed. The man whose wrongful testimony sent you to prison for all those years. The woman whose love you have sworn to recapture. Stories are more than the things you tell everyone you will accomplish one day. Stories are also the road you walk to get there.

More information on Stories can be found in the **Core Rulebook** (page 159).

Step 8: Details

Finally, let us fill out the blank spots on your Hero Sheet: Reputation, Secret Societies, Wealth and Wounds.

Your Hero's **Reputation**, **Wealth** and **Wounds** are all identical to those of a Théan and work the same way. For more information, see the **Core Rulebook** (page 163).

Your Hero can join a **Secret Society** as well. All of the Societies from Théah are open to you, and this book presents two new ones: **Angel's Hand** and **Alnniqabat Lilnnusr**.

Angel's Hand

An order of warriors and scholars who devote themselves to defeating demons and those who serve them, hoping to keep an ancient cataclysm from repeating itself.

Alnniqabat Lilnnusr

A highly secretive group whose primary goal is turning the bloody Assassins of Ashur back to their once-noble path, devoted to preserving life rather than taking it.

Secret Societies

Alnniqabat Lilnnusr

In the year 1388 AV, a team of Assassins was dispatched to respond to Anatoli aggression. For generations, the stories of the Assassins had managed to keep the military powerhouse out, but Empress Seyma had grown tired of capitulating.

Daggers in her pillow did not dissuade her. When she grew sick from Assassin poison, this only strengthened her resolve. "My Janissaries are as loyal, brave and deadly as any Assassin. And if this organization of soft cowards who rely on threats wishes us to believe otherwise, let them prove it upon the field of battle."

Mahmoud, the leader of the dispatched team, concocted a plan. With the blessing of the Guardian, he decided to show the world the brutality Assassins were capable of. He ordered his team to murder the empress' young children by drowning them in oil and leaving the bodies to be discovered in the royal chambers. This, he argued, would show the empress that the Assassins could gain access to anyone, anywhere.

Atef, one of the members of this team, objected. To murder innocent children for the threats of their mother was wickedness. Mahmoud was unswayed, and the Guardian refused to meet with Atef.

So Atef did the only thing that he believed he could—he protected the royal children of Anatol Ayh against his brothers. When the Assassins moved to strike, they did not find two sleeping children, but Atef pleading with them to abandon this bloody task. The Guardian must have surely gone insane if he permitted this to happen, he reasoned. Atef defended the prince and princess of Anatol Ayh with his life, but he refused to kill his brothers and sisters. He left them bloodied, wounded, unconscious—but alive. Only Mahmoud managed to best him, and to Mahmoud's surprise, Atef used his dying breath to again beg his leader—his brother—for mercy on behalf of these children.

Mahmoud was convinced. In the face of such nobility and purity of the soul, he found himself unable to finish the task. He spent the remainder of the night extracting his wounded team from the Anatoli palace, including Atef's body. When the others awoke, he told them what had taken place,

and all pledged to honor the sacrifice of their righteous brother.

These were the first members of Alnniqabat Lilnnusr—the Guild of the Eagle. The Guild, perhaps the most truly secret society across all of Terra, were in essence traitors to their own. They required themselves to keep the Assassins pure, to make certain that their cause was righteous and above all to police their Brothers and Sisters—and that included their honored leader, the Guardian of the First Garden.

The Guild keeps the Assassins honest. Sometimes this means letting an Assassin proceed unchallenged, if the guilty target deserves the fate rapidly descending upon him. Sometimes this means foiling an assassination plot by tipping off a target, causing a distraction or commotion that makes the assassination impossible to complete, or confronting the Assassin directly and convincing her to abandon the kill.

And sometimes this requires the greatest of sacrifices—taking the target's place, putting yourself in the path of an Assassin's knife in order to spare a life that should not yet end.

In the decades that followed the failed assassination of Empress Seyma's children, Atef's fears of the Guardian's madness were shown to be true. However, in recent years the Guardian changed, as if waking from a long sleep to see the corruption of his once righteous organization. Now, he works with the Guild to restore the Assassin's honor.

Members of Alnniqabat Lilnnusr, often Assassins who have previously committed great crimes, have been redeemed by other Eagles, but in the past decade the Guild has recruited non-Assassins as well. Currently, the Guild's main political agenda is cleaning up the order of the Assassins itself—with the Guardian's past initiatives, many members of the order itself had become little more than mercenaries, using their skills and contacts to become hired murderers. The Guild of the Eagle relentlessly hunts these men and women. When caught, these rogue Assassins *always* receive a chance at redemption. A person is more, and better, than the worst thing he has ever done.

Favor with Alnniqabat Lilnnusr

A Hero who belongs to Alnniqabat Lilnnusr can earn Favor in the following ways:

- Capturing a rogue Assassin is worth 5 Favor. The Guild treats a captured rogue Assassin as a victim rather than an enemy—he has been brainwashed, turned to a dark purpose, but this is not necessarily his fault. The Guild works to rehabilitate such an individual, hoping to awaken him to the horrors he has committed and return him to a more righteous path of action.
- Taking the place of an intended victim is worth 8 Favor. A member of the Guild who cannot stop a murder plot in any other way sometimes opts to place herself in the path of the knife, as Atef did. The Guild considers this exceptionally honorable, but not to be done lightly. Such an agent is seen as having a death wish—one can only dodge blades for so long before she suffers a cut.

A Hero who belongs to Alnniqabat Lilnnusr can call upon them for aid in the following ways:

- Gaining an audience with a particular Assassin costs 4 Favor. Typically an agent does not need to know the Assassin's name to accomplish this—an area of operation or an assassination target is enough. Such an Assassin often protects his identity during this meeting by refusing to be directly seen (by hiding, for example). Any attempt to persuade the Assassin to go along with a course of action (such as to delay his strike or trade information) gains 2 Bonus Dice during this meeting.
- Visiting the First Garden costs 8 Favor. The agent can also meet the Guardian and request information or advice from him. Many say, however, that the Guardian tells you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear.

Angel's Hand

In the sands of the 8th Sea, a swath of scorched black desert wafts heat from its surface all day and cools only slightly at night. The Black Desert lies deep within the 8th Sea, where only the Tribes know how to survive, to find water and shelter from the unrelenting sun. And deep within this wretched place, hidden to even the Tribes, lies an oasis and palace.

The Black Desert is nearly impassable during the day due to the heat reflecting from the black sand. Only at night can someone attempt to travel to the center. There, amongst a verdant oasis and still black sands, rests the ruins of Irem. Centuries ago a battle between ahuras and daevas left the city in rubble. The people of Irem fled into the desert and watched their city collapse and the sand scorch to a black powder. All that stands today are the remnants of a Grand Palace. Sun shines onto the broken stained glass windows and reflects through the holes in its beautiful domes.

When it looked as though the daevas were about to defeat the ahuras, a few brave men and women ran back into the city to defend Good and aid the fight against Evil. The combined forces of humankind and ahuras turned the tide and won the day. The city lay in ruin but most of the people survived. These survivors dedicated themselves to fighting for Good and restoring power to Zenea, the god of the Ahurayasna religion. They considered themselves aṣavans fighting against the dragvants and outsiders knew them as Angel's Hand.

Angel's Hand has extended beyond just the ancestors of Irem. Members of Angel's Hand come from all nations of the Crescent Empire and from all levels of society. Most members follow Ahurayasna, yet do not look down upon the Dīnists or other creeds as long as they work for the greater good. The Angel's Hand watches a prospective member carefully for a period of time before approaching him for recruitment. If the prospective member passes the vetting process, they take him to the ruins of Irem and, in a secret ceremony, "awoken to the worlds beyond," he receives three gifts.

The first is a new name within the Angel's Hand. This given name is that of bird—birds flocking around ahuras are believed to be extensions of their will.

The second gift is a piece of jewelry with a shard of stained glass woven within. This can be a necklace, a ring, a bracelet or another type of jewelry. The stained glass reminds the wearer of the ruin of Irem and helps guide her back toward the city.

The third is a ritualistic scar with black sand. A member cuts a design into her flesh, rubs it with the black sand and then seals the scar with a hot iron press. This carries the reminder that the battle against Evil is not painless. As she advances through the ranks, the new member receives more scars until the final ritual marking on her face, displaying to all her allegiance in the war against the dragvants and their daeva masters.

Angel's Hand is a structured meritocracy with a heavy emphasis on experience. The members of Angel's Hand debrief frequently, discussing the activities of the agents of Evil as well as their own actions. Yasnavan beliefs forbid agents from lying to another one of the faithful, so these reports do not contain boasts or fallacies.

When members of the Angel's Hand meet, they clasp wrists and touch foreheads in a silent prayer. They recognize their battle against Evil can not be accomplished alone and willingly accept aid from other members as long as it does not distract them from their own mission.

This unity and devotion requires constant vigilance. The veneration of the Five Ahuras and the local spirits that inhabit the 8th Sea has waned. This disturbs the Angel's Hand as it seems the dragvants and daevas grow more powerful by the day. Angel's Hand wants to prevent what had happened to Irem from happening elsewhere.

Favor with Angel's Hand

Angel's Hand devotes themselves to holding back the tide of Evil and the daevas. They undertake missions quelling schemes of dragvants everywhere. In doing so, they return power to the ahuras and local spirits that help humanity.

A Hero who belongs to Angel's Hand can earn Favor in the following ways:

- Going on a Quest for Angel's Hand. This means lending assistance to another Angel's Hand already ensconced in the battle against the dragvants. Evil schemes are everywhere and help is always needed. The amount of Favor gained is equal to the amount of Steps in the Story.
- Defeating a daeva is worth 10 Favor. Angel's Hand members feel that daevas, and other spirits, are corrupters par none. It is their duty and responsibility to vanquish these deceivers from this world.

A Hero who belongs to the Angel's Hand can call upon them for aid in the following ways:

- Requesting the aid of another Angel's Hand in your own battle against Evil costs a number of Favor Points equal to the Steps in the Story focusing on this mission. The assistance can be in the form of Wealth, mundane favors or use of a Brute Squad equal to twice the amount of Favor Points.
- An audience with an ahura costs 10 Favor. The member may return to Irem and spend an evening in private conversation with an actual angel. The ahura answers questions honestly and may grant special abilities to the member for the length of her Story.

Art of the Second Prophet

Al-Musawwir, the Divine Artist, calls on all to create Wonders. These Wonders represent his masterpiece, Terra. Each Wonder is unique, beautiful and imperfect—just like Terra. The Second Prophet had many Wonders himself, most notably his staff. He carved an epic about Terra onto the staff, using it to absorb magic and also, though rarely, reflecting it back as if he had cast it himself.

The Second Prophet once said, "Those that find wonder in His art will be the guardians of it." Because of that quote, all that practice this Sorcery and create a Wonder are called *alharis* (plural *alhuris*), meaning "guardian" or "sentry."

A Wonder can be a necklace holding a rare gemstone that has the colors of a spring morning shimmering through it, a book telling of the adventures that took place on Terra's vast surface or a statuette depicting a dancer made from the clay of a far away land. Each of these Wonders reflects the stories and treasures Terra holds. Each can take you down a path and strengthen your bond to Terra.

How It Works

The first time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, create your Wonder. Your Wonder is an object unique to your character: a dagger made of a pearlescent metal with a sunset engraved on the blade, a belt made of leather with a poem burnt into it or a carved stone from an active volcano. Most create their own Wonders out of particularly beautiful or meaningful materials, though some are inherited or objects of sentimental value that remind the alharis of her personal faith and devotion to al-Musawwir. No matter what your Wonder is, it should be unique and represent your view of Terra and its people.

Once you have created your Wonder, choose two Miracles that you can perform. A Miracle, a power you have gained due to your observance of Terra's beauty, demonstrates your connection to al-Musawwir.

Next, choose a Path and take the first Step. Note that once you choose your Path you cannot choose another, until you finish your Path. Each time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, you continue one Step further down your Path.

Once you finish a Path, when you purchase Sorcery again, you create a new Wonder (which grants you two more Miracles and a new Path).

Miracles

Miracles are powers that do not require you to carry your Wonder. These Miracles can show people that al-Musawwir watches and protects them. Each Wonder only ever grants you two Miracles. All Miracles require a Hero Point to activate.

Beckon

Activate this Miracle to have your Wonder fly to your hand. Your Wonder avoids obstacles and does not harm anyone or anything. If held, it pulls the thing holding it until breaking its grasp and cannot lift anything off the ground to any distance that could

harm it. If your Wonder is trapped (by magic or any other means), this spell does not work. Your Wonder, depending on the distance away from you, reaches you this Scene or next. It must be a great distance away, for example several days of travel by foot, to not reach you this Scene. It flies at an impressive speed and gently lands in your hand or next to you.

Effigy

Activate this Miracle to create a clay effigy of an animal that can fit in the palm of your hand. Your effigy is indistinguishable from a real animal of its type. Your creation lasts until the end of the Scene and then turns back to clay. While your effigy is active, you can see through its eyes and give it simple mental commands such as telling it where to go, which way to look, etc. You must have a ball of clay, mud or similar material to activate this Miracle.

Flourish

Activate this Miracle to heal or grow a plant. This can make vines grow up a wall to provide a ladder or a tree to tilt and grow across a canyon (as long as it lies within the tree's natural capability to grow to a size sufficient enough to cross the canyon). This does not create vegetation and only works on existing plant life.

Purify

Activate to make water clean and healthy to drink for one Scene. You can choose to activate this Wonder on a source of water (such as a natural spring or lake) or on a drinking vessel (a waterskin or cup). The source or vessel cleans any liquid that passes through of any impurities and makes it drinkable with no side effects.

Radiate

Activate this Miracle to provide illumination around you or your Wonder for one Scene. The illumination is as bright as an oil lamp, and you can dim or brighten it as you wish until the end of the Scene.

Rain

Activate this Miracle to manipulate rain for one Scene. You can make it rain as little or as much as you want, creating a gentle spring rain or a torrential downpour that will be remembered for years. After the Scene, the weather returns to normal.

Restore

Activate this Miracle to permanently cure a target's blindness, muteness, deafness, paralysis or any similar malady. Until the end of the Scene, you suffer the target's malady instead—if you cure a person's blindness, for example, you are blind until the end of the Scene.

Paths

Your Path determines the way in which you demonstrate your own faith. Your Path tells others the teachings of al-Musawwir, and his Prophets, that you place above the rest. Each Path has three Steps that teaches you new wisdom and, through wisdom, grants you power. All Paths require you to carry your Wonder to use each ability. Unless specified, all powers granted by a Path require you to spend a Hero Point to activate.

Path of the Devout

The Path of the Devout shows you how to protect yourself and others against Sorcery. The Second Prophet often stopped magic used against him, and this Path teaches you just that.

The first Step in the Path of the Devout teaches you to find magic. Knowing where to look can help you stop any Sorcery not used for the good of Terra. Your Wonder gains the ability to detect Sorcery and other supernatural powers. Every Wonder taken down this Path reacts differently to magic; some glow or hum near Sorcery, others become light as a feather or are drawn to sources of magic like a magnet.

Detect: Your Wonder reacts to recently used Sorcery in the area. If Sorcery was activated within the last 24 hours in the area, you can pinpoint exactly where the Sorcery was used as well as what type of Sorcery it was (Porte, Hexenwerk, Chozeh, a Syrneth artifact, etc.) but not who or how. Your Wonder has no reaction to your own Sorcery. This power does not require activation—a Hero with this power often stumbles upon a whiff of magic when she had no suspicions and was not specifically looking for it.

With the second Step, your Wonder gains the ability to Absorb magic used near you. This Path shows you that Sorcery can be used for Villainous means. Your purpose within this Path is to make sure it is not used in such a way.

Absorb: Activate this power immediately when another character activates Sorcery or a similar effect—your Wonder absorbs the power and negates the effect. You must activate this power before any effects from the Sorcery are known. You can only activate this power once per Scene.

The last Step in the Path of the Devout shows you that there is always a correct way to use magic. The best way to teach anyone how to use magic is a demonstration. Your Wonder now allows you to cast a spell lingering in it.

Rebound: Activate this power on your Action any time in a Scene after you have Absorbed a Sorcerous effect from another character. You activate the power instead. You may choose new targets for the power if it requires targets.

Path of the Humble

The Path of the Humble shows you that there are many things more important than you, and that is wonderful. Keeping your composure even in a frightening situation can lead to al-Musawwir opening your Path.

The first Step in the Path of the Humble, your Wonder creates a calming aura. You can direct it at someone and calm him so you can reasonably discuss what bothers him.

Pacify: Activate this power to cause another character to become calm and tranquil. If threatened or attacked, she reacts normally, and she knows you have used a magical effect to alter her mood. The character remains calm until the end of the Scene, or until attacked or threatened. If you use this ability during an Action Sequence, the affected character is under Pressure not to attack, and this Pressure automatically reapplies at the start of every Round.

Sometimes words can get in the way of true understanding. The second Step allows your Wonder to project your thoughts to your friends without you having to verbalize them. As each Wonder is different, this can happen in many different ways. For example, it could be a whisper that only your companions can hear, it could be an angelic voice that speaks just behind you or your allies just know what you want to say.

Project: Activate this power to speak mentally to another willing character in the same Scene as you. A shared language is not necessary to communicate, but approximate human-level intelligence is (you cannot use this power to speak to a squirrel, for example).

Step three teaches you that al-Musawwir guides you and allows you to take your Path wherever that Path takes you. Through your Wonder, you can unlock doors that stood in your way.

Unlock: Activate this power to unlock all any door, lock, latch, window or anything similar with a touch of your Wonder. This power lasts until the end of the Scene.

Path of the Just

The Path of the Just teaches you that every life deserves a fair chance. With your abilities, you can protect those that need protection and feed those that need food, making sure everyone has a fair, fighting chance to enjoy al-Musawwir's creation.

The First Step in the Path of the Just teaches you a lesson that all people deserve to eat. Sustenance is essential to life and al-Musawwir gave life to all people. Your Wonder provides you the ability to stretch out your rations and feed a whole village.

Nourish: Activate this power to feed any number of people in the Scene for one meal. You need a small amount of food to activate this power—at least enough to feed one person normally. Activating this power consumes all of the food you currently possess.

Step two is all about protection. Protecting those who cannot protect themselves forms the core of the Path of the Just. Your Wonder allows you to give your strength to others or even strengthens you.

Protect: Activate this power and choose another character in the Scene. The next time that character takes Wounds, reduce the Wounds he takes by a number equal to your Resolve.

The third Step is a complicated lesson. Violence is not always the answer, but sometimes it is inevitable. Being able to control that violence and point it in a direction that will not hurt those who cannot protect themselves is essential to following this Path. Your Wonder can pull the attention of any person to you and away from others.

Absolve: Activate this power and choose another character in the Scene. For the rest of the Round, if that character takes an Action that does not attempt to cause Wounds to you, she takes 1 Wound.

Path of the Merciful

The Path of the Merciful shows you how to heal the wounded. Caring for the suffering is your gift as an alharis. Taking this Path shows you that al-Musawwir watches and cares for you.

The Merciful shall help the weak. That is the first Step to following this Path. Using your Wonder, you can heal broken bones and other injuries.

Mend: Activate this power once per Scene to heal 1 Dramatic Wound on any character you can touch.

The second Step in the Path of the Merciful shows you that al-Musawwir protects you even in your time of pain. Punishing those that cause you pain. Your Wonder allows Him to channel His protection to you.

Penance: After you activate this power, the next time you receive Wounds, you deal Wounds back to your attacker equal to the Wounds you received. You can only use this power once per Round.

In the last Step, your Wonder allows you to give the greatest gift al-Musawwir has ever given, life. Even if someone is struck down, she can get back up and continue showing the Mercy al-Musawwir has shown her.

Revive: Activate this power and take 1 Dramatic Wound to bring another character back to life. You heal all of her Wounds except 1 Dramatic Wound. Both the Dramatic Wounds, the one you take and the one she keeps, cannot be healed by any effect, even magical, and you also lose the ability to Revive again. The Dramatic Wounds manifest in the form of a noticeable scar. Both you and your target have the same exact scar. Your target must have died within the Scene you activate Revive.

Path of the Pariah

You may be an outcast, but it is your duty while taking the Path of the Pariah to show doubters that Terra is beautiful and full of wonder.

The first Step in the Path of the Pariah is the ability to hover. Your Wonder gives you this ability to teach you that even the smallest of gifts can be helpful.

Float: Activate this power to hover just above the ground for the rest of the Scene. This prevents footsteps from appearing in the ground, and prevents any effect that your weight has on the environment (such as breaking a weak bridge), as you do not put any pressure on the surface you float over. This does not protect you from the dangers of your environment, however—if you Float over fire you still get burned, or if you float over the ocean, a wave can still drown you. You can navigate your surroundings as if you were walking normally.

At the second Step, your Wonder provides you with the ability to move any obstacle, clearing your way to continue down your Path.

Push: Activate this power to move an object or character away from you, well out of arm's reach. This cannot damage or hurt the object or person. You cannot lift them off of the ground or push them off a cliff. It only moves the object or character away from you, and stops if something blocks their backward progress. If you use this power against a character, he can still move, just not toward you—he can walk in a circle around you, for example, but cannot approach any closer. The effect of this power immediately ends if you move toward the object or character.

With the last Step of the Path of the Pariah, your Wonder can protect you and your friends while you rest. After you are well rested, you can continue down any Path ahead of you.

Sanctuary: Activate this power to create a safe zone to rest in. Overnight, you and your allies can sleep in peace without being disturbed. This provides a soundproof zone that protects from animals and anyone that might be hunting you. Any attempts to locate you while Sanctuary is active automatically fail, unless aided by supernatural means. If you are being tracked by such an effect, the costs to activate it (both for Raises and for Hero or Danger Points) double. Once anyone wakes up within the zone, the power ends.

Path of the Righteous

The Path of the Righteous shows you which way to go. It also shows you how to get there the fastest way possible and gives you the tools you need.

On the first Step in the Path of the Righteous, your Wonder guides you, shows you, exactly which way to go. It is up to you to find where you go but you will know that you are headed in the right direction.

Guidance: Activate this power to know which direction you should go for a Scene to reach a particular destination. Tell the Game Master what you want to find ("I want to find a source of clean water," "I want

to know which direction the thieves went" or "I want to go to Iskandar" are all appropriate). The Game Master tells you the direction to your destination directly, "as the crow flies," but does not tell you how far your destination is or what other obstacles might be in your path.

The second Step provides you with the means to get where you are going faster. Your Wonder gives you the speed to arrive at your destination as quickly as possible, giving you a quicker stride.

Hasten: Activate this power to move faster than normal. In short distances, anyone who wishes to match your speed must pay 2 Raises to do so (either because she is running away from you, or you are running away from her). If traveling a long distance, you reduce the time needed to reach your destination by half.

The last Step teaches you to create something out of nothing. Your Wonder summons a weapon or tool for you to use. It can be made from sand or air or light; each Wonder is different. It helps you do the task that you need to do.

Create: Activate this power to summon a simple tool or weapon (such as a hammer or sword) for one Scene. The object functions exactly like the tool or weapon and is warm to the touch. If used to strike a target, the item deals 1 additional Wound. It only works in your hands; if another character picks up the object, it disappears.

Path of the True

The Path of the True teaches you the lessons of words. It teaches you to communicate with animals and also to make sure someone tells the truth.

The First Step down this Path teaches you to locate exactly what you were looking for. Your Wonder points you in the right direction and pulls you or floats to that location.

Locate: Activate this power to find what you are looking for (such as a lurking thief or a hidden safe). What you seek must be in the immediate, searchable area.

The Second Step in the Path of the True is learning to ride any animal. Your Wonder allows you to communicate with an animal. Through this communication, the animal assists you in getting where you need to go.

Steed: Activate this power and choose a non-aggressive animal large enough to support your weight. That animal allows you to ride it for one Scene, following your simple commands without complaint such as which direction to go, how fast to walk or run, to stay quiet, etc. While mounted on this animal, you receive 1 free Raise with any Ride Risk. If the animal is threatened or endangered for any reason, the power ends and it forces you to dismount and then runs away.

The last Step is of Honesty, showing you that the truth is always the best way to communicate. Your Wonder allows you to guarantee that the truth is spoken when needed.

Unburden: Activate this power to prevent one character from lying until the end of the Scene. The character speaks honestly, to the best of her ability and knowledge, so her information is not necessarily accurate.

Chozeh

The stories say that in the desert, Elohah came to Abram and Saraya and taught them the way of peace and guardianship. And during these conversations, Elohah promised Abram and Saraya that as long as they kept their promises to Him, He would also keep promises with them. The twelve promises Elohah made form the foundation of Chozeh, the sorcery practiced in Sarmion. These promises are passed down through a poem that is, according to tradition, Elohah's own words as recorded by Saraya in the desert.

All are my people and wondrous to me.

To my people, to preserve their peace,

I grant the strength of stars that they may hold tight to what is good.

I grant the swiftness of wind that they may act quickly in my name.

I grant the endurance of mountains that they may suffer a thousand blows and not falter.

All are my people and bare before me.

To my people, to increase their joy,

I grant clarity of the senses that they may know the world in all its splendor.

I grant clarity of mind that they may untangle the knowledge they already hold.

I grant clarity of the heart that they may know themselves as I know them.

All are my people and safe within me.

To my people, to guard their rest,

I grant direction that they may not wander without purpose.

I grant refuge that they may find safety wherever they go.

I grant health that disease and rot may not steal what I have given.

All are my people and all are with me.

Since the time of King Solomon, no copy of Elohah's promises is complete. King Solomon perceived the dangers the final three promises (not listed above) posed and ordered the knowledge forbidden to all except those worthy of carrying the responsibility. Even King Solomon, however, was not capable of purging the final lines from everyone's memories and so some families have passed the full poem down to their children, allowing those powers to surface sporadically throughout history.

Based on stories and past events, the final promises granted the abilities to actively look into the future, give life to the inanimate and bind gods and other beings who are not of Elohah.

When someone decides to learn Chozeh, he first spends time in prayer or contemplation. Only with true understanding may someone access the power of the promises. The practitioner then can call upon one of the three sets of promises—the Marvels, Revelations or Protections. A practitioner inscribes the promise, distilled to a single word in Dibre, on an amulet or on his body. He can then activate those amulets and written words later to access the powers promised by Elohah.

How It Works

The twelve promises are divided into four stanzas: Marvels, Revelations, Protections and Lost. With the exception of the Lost promises, each stanza title comes from the poem Saraya recorded.

When learning Chozeh, you devote yourself to understanding one of the first three stanzas. Once you have chosen a stanza, you meditate upon its meaning and perform an act of charity based on the promise for someone else without using magic. These actions reinforce the purpose and importance of each promise, ensuring a deep understanding that guards you against misuse. When you take Sorcery during Hero creation, these actions are in your past. If you take additional Sorcery later in the game, however, these actions form your Story.

For example, if you decide to learn the Marvels, you could:

- Run a message long-distance for someone
- Help a village build a bridge

If you decide to learn the Revelations, you could:

- Help someone organize her own thinking
- Convince someone of his worth

If you decide to learn the Protections, you could:

- Give hospitality to a stranger
- Go out of your way to guide someone who is lost

The first time you purchase this Sorcery, you learn two Amulets and one Script. Your Amulets must be from the same stanza, and you can only learn a Script if you already know the Amulet. Each time after the first, you learn one Amulet and one Script, or one Tattoo. To learn a Tattoo, you must already know the Script.

Once you know all the Amulets and Scripts from a stanza, you may begin learning a new stanza. You do not need to learn the Tattoos and can learn them anytime.

To use this power in game, first you must create the Amulet, Script or Tattoo. Then you must activate it.

Creating Amulets and Scripts

An Amulet is a small pendant you create, usually from clay or wood, inscribed with the keyword of your promise. The Amulet crumbles or turns to ash after you use it.

A Script is created by writing the keyword from the promise on your skin with ink, ash, blood, mud—whatever you have on hand. Once you use the Script, the word disappears.

Others cannot destroy your Amulets or Scripts.

You begin each Scene with one Amulet or Script for each instance of the Sorcery Advantage you have purchased. You do not need to determine which Amulets or Scripts you have ready—in effect, this simply allows you to activate your Sorcery once for each time you have purchased the Advantage. Once you run out of Amulets or Scripts in a given scene, you can create more. On your turn, spend a Hero Point to create an Amulet or Script. You may create any Amulet or Script that you know, but you determine which one you create now.

An Amulet or Script loses its power after 24 hours.

Creating Tattoos

A Tattoo gives ready access to the promises, but carries a social cost as some religious groups believe tattoos are taboo, especially when the tattoo alters more than the skin.

Creating a Tattoo is a more involved process. First, you must find someone who can give you the Tattoo on your arm or leg. As long as the word is present, the design can be as ornate or basic as you desire. Once the Tattoo is complete, you must activate it for the first time through prayer, song or simply will. This first activation binds the Tattoo to your being. As you are changing yourself on a fundamental level, this first activation causes a Dramatic Wound.

Activating Amulets and Scripts

When you activate an Amulet or Script, you repeat the keyword and the phrase "this is my promise" in any language.

Outside of an Action or Dramatic Scene, you can activate an Amulet or Script freely. If the effect is enduring, such as the Yad script, it lasts until a Scene begins.

Within an Action or Dramatic Sequence, activating an Amulet or Script costs only a Raise. An Amulet has an immediate or short-term effect. Scripts are typically more powerful and, if their effect is enduring, last for the full Scene.

Activating Tattoos

Activating a Tattoo is similar to an Amulet or Script. You repeat the keyword and the phrase "this is my promise." Activating a Tattoo costs a Hero Point.

When you activate a Tattoo, you may use either the Amulet or Script effect of that word. When a Tattoo is active, using other Amulets or Scripts costs two Wounds instead of a Raise.

Using a Tattoo requires much of your focus. You can only use one Tattoo at a time.

The Dual Promise

Chozeh is more than a promise made by Elohah to Sarmion. It is also a promise of each practitioner to Elohah and his community. This dual commitment powers the magic.

Chozeh practitioners must make and uphold the following promises:

- Promote Peace. Chozeh was not given to perpetuate conflict, but to end it.
- Help Others. Chozeh strengthens a few so that they may strengthen the whole.
- Self-Defense. Chozeh does not require sacrifice, but instead survival.

If a practitioner uses a word to break one or more of these promises, his connection to that word likewise breaks. He can continue using Amulets, Scripts or Tattoos with that word, but each activation costs a point of Corruption.

People may be surprised to find non-Yachidi Sarmion wielding the powers of Chozeh, but to the people of Sarmion this is not strange. Sarmion, as a united Nation, understands that true knowledge of the divine comes from working with one's brethren and learning from them. Finally, the power of Chozeh was granted by Elohah to protect the people of Sarmion, whether they be Yachidi, Dīnist or any other faith.

The Marvels

Koach

Koach is the promise of strength. The strength to pull open locked doors and hold back attackers. The strength to raise up homes and raze prisons.

Amulet: When you activate a Koach Amulet, strength rushes through you. For the rest of the Round, you do not have to pay the cost for Improvisation for any Action that uses Brawn.

Script: When you activate a Koach Script, your muscles and joints strengthen. Add two Bonus Dice to any Brawn Risk for the rest of the Scene. If Brawn is already part of your Approach, you may immediately roll the 2 additional dice and add the result to your Raises.

Mahir

Mahir is the promise of swiftness. The speed to act before the terrible can happen, to race forward and pull someone from the brink. The speed to carry messages across the land, spreading communication and community.

Amulet: When you activate a Mahir Amulet, energy fizzles through your limbs. You take one Action immediately without spending a Raise, even if it is not your turn. If this Action costs multiple Raises (due to Improvisation, for example), you must pay the additional Raises when you perform the Action.

Script: When you activate a Mahir Script, the world slows around you. You gain add two Bonus Dice to any Finesse Risk for the rest of the Scene. If Finesse is already part of your Approach, you may immediately roll the 2 additional dice and add the result to your Raises.

Amidah

Amidah is the promise of endurance. The power to withstand the mighty river, destructive wind or unending heat. The ability to endure attack after attack and remain standing.

Amulet: When you activate an Amidah Amulet, it wraps you in a protective light. The Amulet prevents the next 3 Wounds (Dramatic or normal) you take.

Script: When you activate an Amidah Script, your skin hardens and your tolerance for pain increases. You take 1 less Wound (minimum 1 Wound) each time you take Wounds for the rest of the Scene.

The Revelations

Yad

Yad is the promise of clear senses. Each of the five senses grows strong and distinct. This is the power to take the world in more vibrantly and richly than ever before and the power to shut it all out entirely.

Amulet: When you activate a Yad Amulet, one of your five senses sharpens until you can perceive far distances or notice differences previously imperceptible. Choose one of your senses to enhance far beyond human capacity. This effect lasts one Scene.

Script: When you activate a Yad Script, your senses fall under your control. You fade out all distractions, gaining focus. This focus allows you to block out Fear and Pressure for the rest of the Scene.

Daath

Daath is the promise of a clear mind. Everyone has more knowledge and memories curled up in his head than he can reliably access and use. This clarity organizes all thought, bringing all of your mental resources under control.

Amulet: When you activate a Daath Amulet, your mind clears and thoughts untangle. Ask three yes or no questions to the Game Master. These questions should concern knowledge your character has or arguably would have. This is not divination. You must ask all three questions at once.

Script: When you activate a Daath Script, your mind sharpens and you realize all of the information you have unknowingly absorbed. Ask the Game Master questions about the current Scene up to your Ranks in Notice. You may save a question to ask later in the Scene.

Lebab

Lebab is the promise of a clear heart. Doubt, uncertainty and self-hatred distort the inner self and obscure purpose. A clear heart, though, is flush with peace. The inner mirror calms and you can see yourself as you are: flawed, yes, but also wonderful.

Amulet: When you activate a Lebab Amulet, you can sense the hearts of those around you. Choose another character in the same Scene. Until the end of the Scene, whenever that character lies or purposefully misleads you, you know it. You don't know the truth or her real motives, but you know she is not being honest.

Script: When you activate a Lebab Script, inner peace settles within you as all self-doubts fade; you know who you are. This clarity of purpose strengthens your ability to take action. All 9s now count as 10s. This effect lasts for the rest of the Scene.

The Protections

Nivut

Nivut is the promise of direction. When lost or uncertain, Nivut reveals the next step. All who wander can find their way.

Amulet: When you activate a Nivut Amulet, your gaze is drawn toward something you can use. You create a free Opportunity and can immediately take one Action by spending only one Raise.

Script: When you activate a Nivut Script, the correct path forward grows clear. Ask the Game Master for directions on how to get to a location. As long as you continue in the correct direction, the Script on your body glows gently. If you move away from the path, the script dims and grows warm with warning. If you willingly leave the path (to investigate something that catches your attention, to find food or to achieve some other objective, even if the distraction lasts only for a few minutes), the effect ends.

Chasah

Chasah is the promise of refuge. The point of calm within the maelstrom, an open seat at a stranger's table, a secret spot none can find. It is both safety and a promise of protection for others.

Amulet: When you activate a Chasah Amulet, anything you have wrapped in the Amulet becomes hidden until the sun reaches its zenith. The object is invisible, imperceptible and impossible to find. If someone searching for the hidden object, however, suspects it has been hidden in the Amulet (because he has been told about your ability to do so, for example) or has supernatural aid, the object still takes 2 Raises to find.

Script: When you activate a Chasah Script, no knots, locks or bars can keep you finding a safe place. You slip free of cuffs and open prison doors. For this Scene, you cannot be locked up.

Rapha

Rapha is the promise of health. This is the power to purify and heal, removing pollution and pain from the world.

Amulet: When you activate a Rapha Amulet and touch it to food or drink, it removes all poisons and impurities. The Amulet can only cleanse one item.

Script: When you activate a Rapha Script, words of healing bubble from your lips. Sing, chant or pray over someone in need of healing. That person removes 4 Wounds.

Calling on the Lost Promises

The Lost Promises are not entirely lost; scholarly orders exist to study them. The keywords have been passed down through families and spread through rumors. The full text, however, is highly disputed. If you want to use these promises, you need the full text so that you can understand the promises' purpose. You must go on a quest to find the genuine missing lines.

This quest is a six-Step Story. Two Steps get you an additional Sorcery advantage. The other four Steps discover lines of the stanza, one Step per line. Once you have completed this quest, you can use the Lost Promises. Be sure to guard your findings. The Lost Promises are powerful and once you have recreated the missing stanza, others might be able to do the same.

Do not engage this quest until you have completed at least one known stanza.

The Lost Promises are the following:

Nivua

Nivua is the power of prophecy. Those who use Nivua do not wait for Elohah's dreams of what is to come, but choose instead to rip through the veil between Is and Will Be to discover what the future holds.

Shlita

Shlita is the power of dominion. Those who use Shlita can bind powerful spirits, even gods, to this plane, trapping them in clay and stone.

Chai

Chai is the power of life. Those who use Chai can breathe life into inanimate objects and direct those objects according to the user's will. Sarmion scholars used this power recently to devastating effect in protecting the Nation from the most recent Numanari invasion.

Khahesh-ahura

Yasnavan texts speak of righteous angels, the ahura, engaging in wars with evil demons, the daeva, on a celestial scale. This conflict, known as the Eternal Struggle, has been going on since the dawn of time, with the victor claiming dominion of the world of Terra. While these may just be stories, some individuals give credence to these tales.

These sorcerers use Khahesh-ahura, literally "on the wings of the angels," and can channel the divine spirit of the 12 primary ahura, the first angels, in amazing displays of power. These individuals manifest glorious wings of fire, shadow, steel and a number of other fantastic examples to take actions well beyond the abilities of the common person. A Khahesh-ahura user can be stronger or smarter, heal from wounds more quickly, use divine words to briefly force his will onto others and even fly overhead as if he was one of the very angels who empower his sorcery.

While the first Khahesh-ahura user used her abilities to overthrow a tyrant, in modern times the goals of each individual sorcerer may not be so honorable. Once you can summon wings, the power is yours entirely, as the ahura are not known to follow up with Khahesh-ahura users. Some of the greatest Heroes and most terrible Villains in Persic history were empowered with Khahesh-ahura.

How It Works

Each and every user of Khahesh-ahura has been imbued with the legacy of one of the primary ahura, the archangels of Ahurayasna legend. When you acquire the Sorcery Advantage for the first time, you select one of the ahura. You carry on the Legacy of that being. There can be any number of beings empowered by a single ahura. An ahura may empower a hundred Khahesh-ahura users in a generation, or none.

The first time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, select two Legacies. These Legacies must be either the Common or Rare Legacy associated with your ahura. Each subsequent time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, you select two new Legacies. You may never select a Rare Legacy granted by another ahura, however. For example, if you select to be empowered by Nazanin, the Angel of Time, you may select any Common Legacy or Nazanin's Rare Legacy. You cannot select any other Rare Legacy.

You must spend a Hero Point each time you activate a Legacy, and each Legacy may only be activated once per Scene. When this happens, your wings automatically materialize. Because of this, Khahesh-ahura is one of the least subtle magics in the known world. It is impossible to channel your angelic legacy without making it known to everyone around you. Additionally, at any point, you may materialize your wings without spending a Hero Point. This has no mechanical benefit and merely displays your sorcerous nature to those around you.

The art of Khahesh-ahura has been passed down over the course of centuries in Persis, and anyone who knows how to manifest wings can teach one of her peers to do the same. So long as you have Yasnavan blood somewhere in your lineage, you have the potential to master the Sorcery locked away inside of you, waiting to be unleashed. However, a potential Khahesh-ahura user cannot be trained to summon a specific aspect. Instead, the first time a new Sorcerer summons her wings, she is empowered by the ahura who most closely identifies with the mortal. It is common to have a student receive her power from a different ahura than her teacher.

The Ahura

There are twelve primary ahura in total. Each primary ahura embodies one angelic aspect. As a user of Khahesh-ahura, you are granted a fraction of their power, which you can channel to perform incredible feats.

Arsalan, Angel of Animals and Judgment

Arsalan, the Angel of Animals and Judgment, is the twin brother of Zharfa. Arsalan is responsible for the life, health and growth of animals (including mortals). It was only through Arsalan's skills that Vafa healed after suffering the grievous wound when protecting their brother. It is said that any wound, no matter how dire, can be cured by a simple touch from this ahura. Many who recover from incredible injuries are said to have been "Touched by Arsalan."

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Arsalan are granted the wings of beasts. While these may be reminiscent of the bird wings often associated with angels, they may also be the wings of other animals such as bats or dragonflies.

THE THIRTEENTH AHURA

Most scholars agree that there are only twelve primary ahura. However, some insist that there is a thirteenth sibling, Hediyeh, the Lost Angel. How or why her family cast her out is hotly debated amongst those who subscribe to this theory, but no one is certain she truly exists. This question is exacerbated by stories of those who seem to possess Khahesh-ahura powers, but are able to perform those feats without manifesting wings. Those who believe that there is a lost ahura empowering mortals refer to those Khahesh-ahura users as Wingless.

Dawna, Angel of Victory

Dawna, the Angel of Victory, is the eldest of all the ahura. All of her brothers and sisters look up to her and follow her lead, for as long as she gives the command, victory is assured. Dawna was the first ahura who empowered a mortal with Khahesh-ahura, allowing Ziba the Beloved to rise up and overthrow the tyrant Aždahâ, who had been empowered by the daeva Namirha.

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Dawna are granted glorious, radiant wings. These wings appear as pure energy bursting out of the back of the Khahesh-ahura user, and can be blinding to look upon.

Farzaneh, Angel of Vengeance

Farzaneh, the Angel of Vengeance, was the second born ahura. At the beginning of creation, Farzaneh did not heed the warnings of her sister, Dawna, and sought to destroy a powerful daeva on her own. The daeva proved to be stronger than Farzaneh, and tore the flesh from her wings before sending her back to her home, a tattered image of her former self. Rather than giving into despair, Farzaneh seized ahold of the rage within her and channeled that into a new purpose: revenge.

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Farzaneh are granted wings of bone. Interestingly, these Sorcerers are the only ones who report pain, which is severe, when activating their Legacy powers, as the wings burst forth from their flesh.

Nazanin, Angel of Time

Nazanin, the Angel of Time, is the ahura with the fewest legends. What is known of Nazanin is that the foes too powerful to be slain are imprisoned somewhere, and that Nazanin stands watch over those beings. Hers is a station of solitude, as she may never leave her post. Her only interactions with her family are when they come to her prison.

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Nazanin are granted wings of ice. These wings are bitter cold to the touch, and still water nearby freezes over when these wings unleash.

Omideh, Angel of Hope

Omideh, the Angel of Hope, is the youngest of the ahura. No matter the darkness surrounding them or how dire the circumstance, Omideh provides a beacon for all of her siblings. It is told that even steadfast Dawna turns to her youngest sister in the most difficult of times.

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Omideh are granted floral wings. These wings may take the form of tree branches, flower petals or vines draping down the Sorcerer's back.

Parshand, Angel of War

Parshand, the Angel of War, is the greatest soldier amongst the ahura. Wading into battle with a flaming sword crafted by his brother Salar, Parshand knows no equal in skill of arms. Parshand is the only ahura who has engaged in every battle of the Eternal Struggle, and few stories are told of this angel which do not involve some amount of violence.

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Parshand are granted wings of lightning, which arcs off the back of the Sorcerer, seeking to be grounded on surfaces around her.

Salar, Angel of Metal and Rulership

Salar, the Angel of Metal and Rulership, the smith of the ahura, brings the crown and mace. Every weapon and piece of armor used by his brothers and sisters was crafted at his forge. Salar is the ahura least likely to involve himself in the Eternal Struggle. In years past he taught humanity obedience to a chosen leader, but since then has kept to himself. While his brothers and sisters may love him, none could say they are close to Salar.

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Salar are granted iron wings. These wings appear as though created by the greatest smith in existence and are free of any imperfection.

Shamisa, Angel of Light and Truth

Shamisa, the Angel of Light and Truth, is credited with having never spoken a lie or a half-truth since the dawn of time. According to legend, early on in the Eternal Struggle, a daeva had taken the form of his sister Omideh in an attempt to destroy the ahura from the inside. Shamisa, the only member of his family to see through the daeva's lies, incinerated the imposter with his righteous flame.

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Shamisa are granted wings of flame. These wings may be pure fire, flowing lava or more traditional feathery wings wreathed in flame.

Shayesteh, Angel of Honor

Shayesteh, the Angel of Honor, is known for being the quietest of all the ahura. Shayesteh is the embodiment of fair play, and when challenged to a duel to the death by a powerful daeva, refused to act until her enemy had struck first. The ahura brushed off the daeva's attack and slew her foe in a single blow.

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Shayesteh are granted wings of shadow. While it may not appear as though the Sorcerer has grown wings at all, her nature is clear when looking at her shadow.

Utabar, Angel of Wisdom

Utabar, the Angel of Wisdom, is the most tranquil of the ahura. While many of his brothers and sisters rush off to action at the slightest provocation, Utabar stays back and attempts to collect information about the situation. This does not mean he is a pacifist, however. Once Utabar has learned as much as he can, he is swift to unleash his fury if he deems it warranted.

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Utabar are granted liquid wings. These may take the form of more classical wings made of water, but others may spout small waterfalls from their back, falling to the ground.

THE DIEVAI?

While ahura lore makes reference to engaging the daeva in the Eternal Struggle, little is actually known of those demons. That the word daeva of Persic lore and dievai of Sarmatian culture, the otherworldly beings who empower Sanderis sorcerers, appear similar is not lost on scholars. While no concrete proof exists that the Sarmatian dievai are the eternal enemies of the ahura, some certainly believe that is the case.

Vafa, Angel of Earth and Piety

Vafa, the Angel of Earth and Piety, is the only ahura to have fought in nearly as many conflicts as Parshand. However, while his brother focuses on smiting their foes, Vafa is dedicated to the protection of his family. Vafa is most famously told to have placed his body in the way of a spear aimed at piercing the heart of Parshand and carries the scar of that injury to this day. The wound did not faze him, however, and in the next battle he returned alongside his brothers and sisters, keeping them safe from harm.

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Vafa are granted earthen wings. These may take the form of stone, crystal or sand, and it is said that many of these Khahesh-ahura users can use their wings as makeshift shields in combat.

Zharfa, Angel of Death

Zharfa, the Angel of Death, is the twin brother of Arsalan. Rather than being malevolent, Zharfa takes up his responsibilities with a somber attitude. Zharfa is responsible for ensuring the souls of mortals reach the afterlife, and it is a duty he takes seriously. Mortals suffering a near death experience often report seeing a man with a gentle, yet sad, face sitting next to them. This man appears completely normal, but has dark feathered wings sprouting from his back. Such mortals report Zharfa holding their hands and, just as they came back to life, they heard him whispering, "It is not yet your time."

Khahesh-ahura users empowered by Zharfa are granted the wings of beasts, but rather than being vibrant like those empowered by Arsalan, these wings are dying and rotted.

Common Legacies

There are a total of 22 Legacies, although only 10 Common and a single Rare are available to a given Khahesh-ahura user. A Khahesh-ahura Sorcerer is able to select any Common Legacy, but can only select the Rare Legacy related to his ahura.

These are the aspects that all ahura share and any empowered by their grace may channel.

Awareness

Activate this Legacy to ask the Game Master the specific location of a person, place or thing. The Game Master must answer honestly and should be generous. For example, if you are trying to find the Rajah's secret library, she should tell you that "it is on the third floor of the palace attached to his bedroom" rather than simply "in the palace".

Brilliance

Activate this Legacy before rolling a Wits Risk. Select a single die from your pool and set that die aside. You are considered to have rolled a 10 on that die when making Raises. If your 10s explode, your free Brilliance 10 explodes as well.

Celerity

Activate this Legacy before rolling a Finesse Risk. Select a single die from your pool and set that die aside. You are considered to have rolled a 10 on that die when making Raises. If your 10s explode, your free Celerity 10 explodes as well.

Command

Activate this Legacy to give a one-word command to another character. For example, "sit," "jump" or "yell." The character completes this command to the best of her ability with her next Action. Obviously suicidal or impossible commands are ignored; if you tell someone at a ledge to "jump," he would likely jump up and down rather than over the edge. A character targeted by Command may spend a Hero Point to ignore this compulsion.

Discipline
Activate this Legacy before rolling a Resolve Risk. Select a single die from your pool and set that die aside. You are considered to have rolled a 10 on that die when making Raises. If your 10s explode, your free Discipline 10 explodes as well.

Flight
Activate this Legacy. For the remainder of the Scene, your wings empower you with true flight.

Majesty
Activate this Legacy before rolling a Panache Risk. Select a single die from your pool and set that die aside. You are considered to have rolled a 10 on that die when making Raises. If your 10s explode, your free Majesty 10 explodes as well.

Potency
Activate this Legacy before rolling a Brawn Risk. Select a single die from your pool and set that die aside. You are considered to have rolled a 10 on that die when making Raises. If your 10s explode, your free Potency 10 explodes as well.

Regeneration
Activate this Legacy to heal all Wounds you have suffered. This Legacy has no effect on Dramatic Wounds.

Smite
Activate this Legacy when you place your hands on a creature (or character) with at least one Monstrous Quality. You cause a number of Wounds to that creature equal to your Resolve plus your Panache.

Rare Legacies
A Khahesh-ahura user may only select a single Rare Legacy, determined by the ahura empowering her wings. The ahuras grant you the ability to channel a portion of their unique aspect.

Arsalan
Activate this Legacy and lay your hands upon a character. If that character has been dealt at least one Dramatic Wound, heal two Dramatic Wounds from that character and you receive one Dramatic Wound.

Dawna
Activate this Legacy when you count more Raises than every adversary in a Scene. You and each ally in the current Scene gain one additional Raise.

Farzaneh
Activate this Legacy after you are dealt Wounds. Deal Wounds to the character who inflicted those Wounds upon you equal to the number of Wounds dealt plus your Wits.

Nazanin
Activate this Legacy and select another character. Until the end of the Scene, that character cannot move from his current position unless placed in immediate mortal danger (such as if his surroundings burst into flames) or physically moved by some other force (such as another character picking him up and carrying him).

Omideh
Activate this Legacy to ignore the effects of Fear on yourself and your allies. Each character affected by this Legacy receives 2 Bonus Dice on all Risks while the Fear effect lasts.

Parshand
Activate this Legacy to create a weapon out of thin air. This weapon is clearly mystical; you may create a flaming sword but not a mundane steel blade. You may not create a complex weapon (such as a firearm) through this Legacy. The first time each Round in which you strike an enemy with this weapon, it ignores any form of supernatural damage reduction (i.e. Monstrous Qualities, other Sorceries, etc.) and the Wounds inflicted cannot be prevented in any way (such as by using Dueling Maneuvers or spending Raises). This Legacy lasts until the end of the Scene or until the item leaves your hands, whichever comes first.

Salar
Activate this Legacy to create a metal hand-held item. This item may be unique; for example, you could create a key to unlock a specific door. The created item lasts until the end of the Scene when it dissipates into the air.

Shamisa

Activate this Legacy when you ask another character a question. That character must answer the question truthfully to the best of her ability. You can tell if that character's information is incorrect, but you don't know what the truth is. For example, if you ask a character where a specific treasure is and she believes it is in the hands of the sultan, she tells you, "The sultan has it." However, if that treasure was recently stolen by a thief, you know that the sultan does not have the treasure but don't know who does.

Shayesteh

Activate this Legacy after making Raises during a Risk. Select one character who has more Raises than you. That enemy loses Raises until you both have the same amount.

Utabar

Activate this Legacy to ask the Game Master about a specific course of action you plan to take within the next hour. The Game Master must inform you that the outcome will be good, bad, good and bad, or neutral. This ability does not take into account any potential circumstances that may change the outcome of the intended course of action.

Vafa

Activate this Legacy when an ally would be dealt Wounds. The chosen ally receives no Wounds, and you instead take Wounds equal to the amount dealt minus your Wits.

Zharfa

Activate this Legacy and lay your hands upon a character. If you have received at least one Dramatic Wound, you heal one Dramatic Wound to cause one Dramatic Wound to that character.

Mithaq Alqadim

Most say that the greatest asset for survival in a harsh, unforgiving place is self-sufficiency. The ability to take care of yourself, without the aid of others, is certainly not to be underestimated. This iron will, the drive to do whatever it takes to live no matter what the cost, allows people to survive in such dire circumstances.

Take care of yourself first, even when it means you must doom others to suffering or death. In a place as harsh and unforgiving as the 8th Sea, only the strongest and the most ruthless survive.

The people of the 8th Sea know this to be false. The best—the *only*—way to survive is through caring, community and service to one another. You share food and water, you invite others to your fire, you shelter and protect those around you and you trust them to do the same.

This is the secret of the potent and unique magic of the Tribes of the 8th Sea, *Mithaq Alqadim* (ancient covenant). Only in trusting others can we all survive, and in this trust there is power.

The *khadam*, those who practice Mithaq Alqadim (singular *khadim*), originally learned their craft through communion with beings of power in the 8th Sea and the rest of the Crescent Empire, the jinn. Through this communion, the first of the khadam discovered how to bind a part of their souls into objects called *thiqa*, literally "trust." Turning over this object to another person creates a bond between the khadim and the bearer of the thiqa that allows both to survive when they would otherwise surely perish.

Through the creation of a thiqa, the khadim separates himself just enough from the mortal world to access his magic. This leaves him vulnerable, however—if a khadim's token falls into untrustworthy hands, his power can be turned to wickedness and pain. The bond between a khadim and the one who holds his thiqa does not run both ways. The holder of the thiqa in many ways is the true wielder of the khadim's power, and that is why a khadim must be careful in whom he places his trust. The storytellers of the Tribes recite many tales of foolish khadam who trusted the wrong people and were thus enslaved by them. After all, you can only be betrayed by those you trust.

THIQA AS TREASURE

Many young khadam might be tempted to create some fantastic object to serve as their thiqa. A sword with a golden hilt encrusted with jewels, a ring set with a beautiful and clear diamond or some similar object. These are the sorts of khadam who most often find themselves in trouble—after all, such an object is quite attractive to a thief and draws the eye of even a casual observer.

More discerning khadam tend to choose objects that would be ignored. A bracelet made of simple leather, a sturdy but ordinary hat or a waterskin are all objects unlikely to be questioned or to earn a second glance. They are unlikely to be stolen, and thus are easier for the khadim to keep track of and keep hidden.

How It Works

The first time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, decide what your thiqa is. A thiqa is always a small item that can be held in one hand such as an old coin, a hat, a necklace or a lamp. In addition, you pick two *Khidma* (literally meaning service) that you know. Each additional time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, you learn an additional Khidma.

Thiqa

Granting your thiqa to another character gives him the following abilities:

- A character who carries your thiqa can spend your Hero Points as if they were her own (such as activating Advantages or her own Sorcery).
- A character who carries your thiqa can summon you to his side effortlessly. In a Sequence, this requires a Raise. Out of a Sequence, this does not require any resource to be spent.
- A character who carries your thiqa can require you to spend an additional Raise in order to take any Action she does not approve of.
- A character who carries your thiqa can spend a Hero Point to escalate the effect of a Khidma you activate from Minor to Major.

Khidma

Each Khidma has two effects—a Minor and a Major. You can always activate the Minor effect of any Khidma that you know by spending a Hero Point and, if used during an Action or Dramatic Sequence, a Raise.

Activating the Major effect of a Khidma requires you to give your thiqa to another character, and for him to pay part of the cost of your magic—a second Hero Point.

A character who carries your thiqa is under **no obligation** to agree to pay such a cost—he can do so, or not, as he sees fit. In addition, he can increase the effect of your Khidma from Minor to Major even if you do not want him to.

Agonize

The knowledge of how to separate one's own soul gives insight into the mortal condition. Although fully severing an unwilling individual's soul is nearly impossible, it is not difficult to…tug on it a bit. Having one's soul pulled feels unpleasant to say the least.

Minor: Activate this Khidma and choose another character in the Scene. The next time that character takes an Action this Round, she must either spend an extra Raise for that Action, suffer 3 Wounds or lose 1 Raise without taking an Action, her choice.

Major: Activate this Khidma and the bearer of your thiqa escalates the effect of your Agonize. The bearer of your thiqa can either choose a second character to afflict with Agonize, or can increase the power of your Agonize. If he chooses to increase the power of your Agonize, the character you select must overcome the effects of Agonize two separate times on her next Action. She can choose to overcome Agonize in different ways if she wishes—by paying 3 total Raises to perform that Action, or suffering 6 Wounds, or paying 2 total Raises and suffering 3 Wounds.

Binding Words

A remnant of the ancient rites and study of the jinn of the 8th Sea, this Khidma teaches the khadim and her allies to always seek understanding of their opposition. Through understanding, agreements can be made. Through agreements, death of any involved parties might be avoided.

Minor: Activate this Khidma to grant the ability to communicate with a Monster, spirit, ghost, jinn or similar creature to all characters in the Scene. This communication varies from creature to creature—it may simply allow the Monster to understand your ordinary speech (and vice versa), or it may forge a mental link that transmits primal emotions and desires that transcend language. This Khidma does not guarantee your safety or compel creatures to any action or inaction, it only allows you to communicate with them. This effect lasts until the end of the Scene.

Major: Activate this Khidma to compel a Monster, spirit, ghost, jinn or similar creature to obey your will. You name a single, explicit task for the creature to complete, and the creature cannot refuse you. In order to take any Action that does not further your command, the creature must spend an additional Raise. In order to take any Action directly in opposition to your command, the creature must spend a Danger Point. Note that the creature is entirely aware of the compulsion that you have placed it under, and almost certainly will not take kindly to being enslaved.

Harmony of Intent

This Khidma teaches the khadim to align his spirit with those of his allies, which makes teamwork and coordination much easier and more intuitive. Allies of a khadim who have experienced the magic of this Khidma find it difficult to describe the spiritual closeness felt between the pair, as if their minds are in perfect harmony with one another.

Minor: Activate this Khidma during a Sequence to allow one other character in the same Scene to ignore the costs for Improvisation for any Action that uses your Approach. This effect lasts until the end of the Round.

Major: Activate this Khidma after you and the bearer of your thiqa roll dice for a Risk. If you both use either the same Skill or the same Trait in your Approach, you can share dice from your pool in order to create Raises. You can only take dice from the bearer of your thiqa with her consent—if she wishes to take your dice, she does not need your consent.

Khadim's Gift

While perhaps not so potent as granting any wish a heart desires, a khadim does have the undeniable knack to deliver to his ally's hands precisely she needs at that very moment.

Minor: Activate this Khidma to activate an Opportunity for another character in the same Scene as you. You can activate this Khidma anytime, even in response to the Opportunity's creation, but you must spend a Raise to do so (even if it is not your Action).

Major: Activate this Khidma to immediately create a new Opportunity, or to activate an existing Opportunity for another character in the same Scene as you.

Shared Suffering

The bond between a khadim and the holder of her thiqa allows injuries to be transferred so that the khadim can protect her ally from harm. Physical wounds and pain alike are transferred in this way.

Minor: Activate this Khidma when another character in the same Scene as you suffers Wounds. Reduce the amount of Wounds he takes by half, rounded down. You take as many Wounds as you prevent in this way.

Major: Activate this Khidma when the bearer of your thiqa suffers Wounds. He takes no Wounds. You take half as many Wounds, rounded down, as he would have taken.

Synergetic Assault

The khadim's dedication to the survival of others gives her unique insight in how to move and strike, creating openings and opportunities for her allies that would not otherwise exist. The khadim does this by peering only a few moments into the future.

Minor: Activate this Khidma when you cause Wounds to another character. Choose another character in the same Scene. That character can immediately take an Action by spending a Raise.

Major: Activate this Khidma when you or the bearer of your thiqa causes Wounds to another character. The next time you or the bearer of your thiqa causes Wounds to that character, those Wounds cannot be prevented.

The Messenger

The khadim places himself in danger so that his allies need not. This Khidma allows him to communicate with his fellows, even while they remain at a safe distance. Thus, only one life is endangered, while all minds can still contribute to keeping that one life safe.

Minor: Activate this Khidma and, for the rest of the Scene, you and the bearer of your thiqa can communicate telepathically across any distance.

Major: Activate this Khidma and, for the rest of the Scene, you and the bearer of your thiqa share all of your senses with one another. Anything that one of you sees, hears, touches, feels or tastes, the other senses as well.

Nawaru

In Ashur, it is said only an Assassin truly knows death. Only she may kill, only she may wear the collar and only she may possess the strange ability called Nawaru to manipulate light.

Those few in the greater empire and beyond that have heard of the Assassins' magic think it odd that a cold-blooded murderer should be able to use light magic to her advantage. They scoff at tales of rooms plunged into darkness with a gesture, shining weapons fashioned of pure light that leave no trace, perfect illusions that only shatter when touched. It does sound unbelievable—but then so does Ashur itself.

The Assassins claim that the power to control light only comes from death. They believe their repeated lives have given them wisdom beyond mortal years, and their repeated deaths have given them access to a higher plane of existence, a plane "beyond." It is said for each knot on her collar—each life lived and died—an Assassin can acquire a Nawaru ability, called *turru*. Such magic is rarely called a gift, as each turru has been hard-won through a painful death that must be recalled and relived. Indeed, no Sorcerer who has tried to learn Nawaru without an Assassin's collar has succeeded, or survived the effort.

How It Works

When the Guardian of the First Garden ties a collar on an Assassin, he is imbued with the power to not only manipulate light, but to touch another plane—a plane beyond life—with his consciousness. As well as a death, each knot on his collar represents a potential turru, a power the Assassin (or the Hatapu bearing an Assassin's collar) may access. He does not learn each turru so much as remembers them; remembers the life that gave him wisdom and the death that took him to the plane beyond that time. As such, each Assassin "learns" his turru in a different order, and few young Assassins find they share the same powers.

When you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, you choose one Minor and one Major turru from those listed. On the fourth time you acquire Sorcery, you may choose one Minor, one Major and one of the three Advanced turrus: *Brilliant Illumination*, *Form of Splendor* or *Wrath of the Heavens*.

When you choose each turru, make a few notes about what allowed you to learn it: the life you lived and the death you experienced. Did imprisonment and death in a dark pit teach you to summon light? Was it a life spent in silent contemplation that allowed you to calm another's mind with a touch? Details are not necessary, only enough to remind you that there is always a price for power.

Using a turru costs a Hero Point. Minor and Major turrus can be used once per Scene, while Advanced turrus can be used once per Episode.

Minor Turrus

Brilliant Blind

Activate this turru to throw a flash of light into the air that only blinds those you have determined to be enemies. All blinded enemies roll 2 fewer dice for any Risks they take. The blindness lasts for a number for Rounds equal to the number of Sorcery Advantages you have.

Cloak of Unseen Resplendence

Activate this turru to bend light around yourself and to make yourself invisible to mortal eyes. Contact with your environment or other people gives you away, but you still remain unseen until you release the spell or are rendered unconscious. Attacking another character or taking Wounds ends this effect immediately, but speaking, touching others or picking up objects does not. This turru is a favorite among Assassins for both its ability to remain hidden and to frighten others.

Cover of Darkness

Activate this turru to draw all light into yourself—in a room, or if outside, a small area centered on you. Candles are extinguished, fires snuffed and even the sun itself dims. The darkness lasts until you release the light, you leave the area, or the end of the Scene.

Glowing Gate

Activate this turru to step between beams of light, transporting yourself anywhere within line of sight. Paradoxically, this power works best when there is some shadow to differentiate patches of light; high noon in a shadeless square has few options.

Guardian's Peace

Activate this turru to give another person a sense of calm, simply by touching him. An Assassin often uses this magic to give her victims peace so their deaths are less traumatic.

Heaven's Flame

Activate this turru to summon a flame that gives off light and heat like an ordinary fire, but is inextinguishable as long as you remain in the area. When you leave the area, the fire goes out if you choose, or continues to burn for a number of Rounds equal to the number of Sorcery Advantages you have.

Light in the Shadows

Activate this turru to summon ambient light enough to brighten your room, or if outside, your immediate area. The light cannot be extinguished until you choose, or until the end of the Scene.

Spark of Intuition

Activate this turru to ask the powers beyond a simple question to help you get clarity on a situation. Am I on the right track? Should we follow that ship? Does the Baron need to die? You receive a definite answer through a sign, a sense of certainty or some other omen. If the outcome of your question is debatable or uncertain, the powers guide you according to their own agenda or desires, but if there is a definitive answer, then you receive the truth.

Major Turrus

Blazing Purge

This turru allows you to set an area no more than 10 feet in diameter alight with holy flame, cleansing any taint or disease from the vicinity. Monsters take 4 Wounds immediately, and 1 Wound for each Action they take in the area thereafter. Any blight, disease or uncleanliness in the area is rendered harmless while the effect remains. This effect lasts until the end of the Scene.

Blessing of Bright Tranquility

Activate this turru to calm a large group of people or a crowd, centered on you. Rioters become simply irritated and angry; anxious and fearful groups become calm. The effect lasts as long as you remain with the crowd. If you leave, the effect persists for a number of Rounds equal to your Panache.

Dawning Revelation

Activate this turru to call on the powers beyond to reveal a major piece of necessary information to aid you in your current situation. However, one must take care—the conception the powers have of necessary (and when it is necessary) may not be the same as yours. What you get will always be useful, just not necessarily as expected...

Glittering Mirage

Activate this turru to create perfect illusions of anything you are familiar with, including copies of yourself. Illusions only disperse on physical interaction or your order, and you can maintain a number of illusions at once equal to your Wits.

Guardian's Dart

Point at a target at range and this turru sends a fine, concentrated beam of light to destroy it. If aimed at a character, he takes Wounds equal to your Finesse; if aimed at a handheld or particularly fragile object, it is immediately destroyed. A larger object (such as wagon, statue or building) is partially destroyed and unusable or unsafe.

Radiant Retribution

This turru creates a small bomb of light energy that can be thrown or planted. This bomb deals 2 Wounds, with another number of Wounds equal to your Brawn, and causes the destruction of most objects made of wood, stone or weaker materials within a 10-foot radius. It can be activated immediately, or delayed a number of Actions equal to the number of Sorcery Advantages you have.

Stutter Step

Activate this turru to move faster than mortal understanding, as fast as light. This allows you to evade one attack—anything thrown, shot or slashed at you—as if you were never there. You take no Wounds.

Veil of Brilliance

Activate this turru to protect yourself and your fellows. You create a veil of shimmering light that can be used as a 20-foot wide and high wall or a 10-foot diameter sphere to shield a large group from attacks. The veil can absorb a total number of Wounds equal to your Resolve, plus an additional Wound for each instance of the Sorcery Advantage you have purchased.

Advanced Turrus

Brilliant Illumination

This turru takes your consciousness to the plane beyond, giving you the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of your place in the world. Have a discussion with the Game Master about what you want to know, what you want to do and how your actions might affect your future and the world at large. This discussion should give you an understanding of your actions and of your possible options for next steps and future plans.

Form of Splendor

This turru turns your body into a form of pure white light. Any poisons or illnesses in your body are immediately purged, and you do not take Wounds. While in this form, you can choose whether or not to harm those you touch—if you choose to harm, your touch causes 2 Wounds per Raise you spend, but once the decision is made it cannot be changed until you end this power. This form lasts until the end of the Round.

Wrath of the Heavens

Use this rarely seen turru to call the wrath of beyond down upon your enemies. When activated, a column of light flashes from the skies to obliterate everything within a 50-foot radius, centered on your target. Nothing is left within the diameter of the column of light but smoking earth afterward...so use with care.

A game in the Crescent Empire differs than in other regions, because unlike other regions the empire consists of many Nations under one banner. This unity carries with it unique underlying subtleties that everyone within the empire knows and understands—the bonds of family, the importance of respect and the art of conflict.

A citizen of the empire knows, despite national differences, the empire comes before those foreign. She grows up believing respect is due all citizens, despite their upbringing, and it is her duty to protect the weakest of them all. Finally, she understands there can be malice behind a smile and sees how honor walks hand in hand with justice.

The Alwarithlı way, combined with Safiye's seizure of the throne, form what life is like in the empire today. When reading through this book and running a Crescent Empire game, a few themes—the new face of the empire, the idea of family and mysticism—will keep coming up. Use these themes to help anchor your game and give your players the "Crescent Empire feel," even if they have only been in the region for a short time.

A New Empire

One of the largest struggles at this moment is the shift between Istani's rule and the new empire under Safiye's rule. Their father was Heroic, but beholden to traditional ways. Istani, a Villainous ruler who sought to subjugate his people, created a theocratic dictatorship, his non-magical paradise. Safiye broke down everything her brother put in place and then some. Like many great empresses of old, when Safiye took power, she pushed the Alwarithlı into the future, creating social change for the betterment of all citizens.

This change has not been met well by all members of society. For example, although the Anatoli nobility have embraced the abolition of social classes better than the Persic people, some are unhappy with the perceived loss of station. Likewise, some commoners have used the coming of Safiye to break through barriers, to reach for new heights, yet others fear change and what it means for their old life.

As a Game Master, you are in charge of representing the duality of this new empire. Show the conflicts between the wealthy and the poor. Confront the players with Persic magic user discrimination and introduce them to the insurrectionists fighting against the corrupt regime. Allow your players to see how the Alwarithlı have embraced the changes, how they have grown and how the people have supported one another coming out of a dark period in their history.

Each nation faces different challenges in dealing with the new Empire of the Crescent Moon.

- In Anatol Ayh, the struggle is between traditionalist nobles loyal to the old Emperor Istani, who enjoyed his rule because of the power it afforded them, versus the rest of the population who respect Safiye's reform.
- A youth movement in Ashur tries to push the country into the modern era, build a real governing body and adopt Alwarithlı traditions from universal laws right down to the use of paper. This youth movement opposes the older generation who believe things are fine the way they are and mistrust the empire.
- Persis struggles much as Anatol Ayh, but the struggle is exacerbated by insurrectionist groups who all have ideological differences. Where a disagreement in Anatol Ayh about the empress' reform may result in a duel, in Persis it may result in a riot.
- In Sarmion, the populace, nobles and commoners alike, are happy with Safiye's reforms. However, the government struggles to find the Nation's missing tribes and to rebuild after the latest Numanari Invasion. Persis has long been at ideological odds with Sarmion, these differences coming to a head in respect to the reforms.
- The 8th Sea has always stood slightly apart from the rest of the Alwarithlı nations. Although the Tribes apply Safiye's reforms, they do so with a grain of salt, holding to their traditions above all else. The reforms do very little to change tribal life as it has been for centuries.

Family

Family is the single most important thing to a person the empire. While some may argue that this is faith, a citizen can only truly know al-Musawwir through respect and love for his family. Most puzzling to foreigners, the term family can be loosely thrown around to encompass nearly any citizen in the Crescent Empire.

Internal, familial squabbles may happen—between people, towns or even countries, but when push comes to shove, the empire works as a whole, like a family, to beat back anyone who tries to defeat them. This united power makes the Empire of the Crescent Moon so terrifying and intimidating to the Nations of Théah.

This ability to work as a concerted whole, while still waging war on and feuding with one another, perplexes anyone not of the empire. To the Alwarithlı, a simple saying encompasses this attitude—"Five fingers, one fist." And while this saying refers to the military prowess of the empire, it extends to social aspects as well. An example of this is Shah Jalil's adoption of Safiye's social reform abolishing the class system in Persis. The shah's hate for Safiye is etched into his very soul, but he also understands the ebb and flow of imperial politics. He saw that the imperial system made more sense, was better for his people and adopted it. A man as insecure and hungry for control as Jalil would only do this for the betterment of his country, the strengthening of the family.

When you set a game in the empire, emphasize the importance Alwarithlı citizens place in this unity of family. Show the pride they feel in the empire, even when they are part of a faction working to bring it down or take it over. If you set a game outside the empire, depict the power and influence it wields. The empire has no plans to take back the part of Numa it once occupied, but what if it does? With all five Nations working together, what could stop it? These questions often occupy the minds of the empire's neighbors.

The Nations show pride in the Crescent Empire in different ways:

- The Anatoli are proud of their sultana. They show this by caring deeply for the other Nations around them, as an older sibling would to a younger. Many of the other Nations understand this, but can also feel offended by the air of arrogance the Anatoli have, which is not always unwarranted.
- Ashurites stand alone and while they feel like distant relatives of their imperial neighbours, they are happy not to be real members of the empire.
- Perhaps the oddest nationality to add to this list, Persic people have always chafed against the empire—either wanting to rule it or be free of it. However, most citizens possess a strange duality in their wishes. While

they crave independence, they also have an abiding loyalty to others in the region. Persic citizens easily reconcile the fact that while they may wish freedom from their neighbors, in the end they are still family and blood respects blood.

- The people of Sarmion care deeply for their neighbors. Many show this empathy by traveling to other lands to learn, heal and teach. The Nation has fended off multiple attacks by the Numanari, with and without the other Nations' help, and for that they have earned a respected place in Alwarithlı culture.
- Unlike all the other nationalities of the empire, the Tribes of the 8th Sea have the easiest time treating the other Nations like family. It is not about respect earned, honor bestowed or begrudging ties. Family, loyalty to one another, is a constant. It is unbreakable, immortal, simple.

Mysticism

Most people in the Crescent Empire are religious. Citizens come from all different religions: al-Dīn, Yachidi, Ahurayasna, Anasheed, Orthodox, even Vaticine; and unlike Théah, these religions interweave and depend on one another. Ashur's infrastructure would collapse without the Elohim Orthodox and the country would quickly be invaded without the Anasheed Assassins. While Ahurayasna was once the state religion of Persis, Dīnist and Yasnavan families have married, had children and then married the other faiths a thousand times over. Yachidi prayers are written above Dīnist graves and Vaticine priests are welcomed guests at Dīnist services.

Combined with religious belief, each Alwarithlı citizen has a mixture of mystical superstitions and folklore. The jinn, angels and daeva are all very real creatures in the empire, imbued with god-like power, and depending on the religion you follow, are gods themselves. In order to go about her daily life, a citizen knows she must appease the spirits, be wary of them and protect against them. With each of these mystical creatures, there is always a tinge of the unknown, of otherworldly power mortals can never truly grasp.

Part of the fun of playing a game set in the Crescent Empire is bringing these enigmatic creatures to life. They allow for the odd, strange and terrifying to happen in someone's life. A jinn could curse a Hero's family. An angel could call a Hero to protect the virtue he represents. A daeva could be summoned to punish a Villain's enemies. Every mundane political drama you set in the empire should always be bathed in mysticism.

Because of the role spirits play in Alwarithlı culture, people in the empire, unlike in Théah, are more likely to listen to that "crazy old man" who says he can talk to the Creator. Sure, he may not have a direct line to al-Musawwir, but that does not mean a jinn is not whispering in his ear. The spiritual nature of the Crescent people combined with their beliefs of hospitality and kindness means there is always a chance for something amazing to happen—something mysterious, strangely uncanny and all together beautiful.

There are a few levels of mystical occurrences in the Empire of the Crescent Moon:

- At the highest level there are jinn, ahuras and spirits. While we have given some of them stats in the book, these creatures should always have a feeling of the unknown. Where the common ginnaya may be listed as a creature, there is always a greater, more mysterious one to find.
- Then there are creatures such as the lamassu, a rare but real phenomena in the empire. Rukk harass costal towns and merfolk work with the people of Sarmion to overthrow invaders. Tales are often true in the empire; magic lives.
- Finally, there are the folk superstitions each Nation has, such as the Feast of Sacrifice the Tribes in the 8th Sea hold for Gōčihr. These superstitions should carry weight; not all of them are real, but one time out of ten they are.

To Be at Odds

The Crescent Empire provides you with ample opportunities to stage a game of courtly intrigue, social maneuvers and political games. To create a game where it is all about who you know, the favors you can do for them and veiling your threats in a masterful enough way that no one gets offended. It is a chance for social and honorable Heroes to shine and more brutish-minded Heroes to be tested. However, amidst the epic story you tell, there should always be the chance for epic action. It is **7th Sea** after all.

Drama

Part of the fun of playing in the Crescent Empire are the social nuances of everyday Alwarithlı life. The play between the casual joking way a tribeswoman of al-Jamal greets her best friend compared to the cordial, courteous way she greets her most bitter enemy. In the empire, context is everything and context creates drama.

Encourage your players to learn the lingo and customs of their Heroes' Nations. Reward the characters who pay attention to the social rules and play the judicial system to make their Heroic deeds work. As a Game Master, you can assist your players in this by doing the same yourself.

For example, you could portray the Anatoli empress acting in a dishonorable way, yelling at someone in court. Then your players could explore how to socially maneuver through the politics of the court to see what ails her, to see if they can help. Or you could have your players break up a religious dispute in Ashur, brokering an *arahu* (see the **Ashur** chapter, **Culture and Customs**) for a year and a day for the two parties to come to an understanding. In Persis, your players can go undercover between the different rebel groups, learn the secret drops they leave around the city and navigate as a spy, never being sure who to trust.

When speaking as an important NPC, straighten your back, look players in the eye and command the room with your tone. Play a Villain kind, courteous, helpful—gather all the dirt on the Heroes to set up their eventual downfall. Then, once the players catch onto him, introduce the same type of character, but make her an ally. Explore the boundaries of propriety, find the joy in it, the laughs, the startling seriousness.

Play with your players' expectations of what is meant to happen when they meet someone. Everyone in the empire behavior is strict and honorable, right? What happens when they meet the drunken, belligerent general leading his troops to war the next day? Who is this man and what are the subtle tells he has? What conveys his respect for the Heroes despite his stumbling, inebriated appearance?

There are many powerful ways to add suspense into your game, but most importantly, remember to keep things fun. The empire is vastly different than Théah and it may take some getting used to for your players. Don't penalize someone in character for something she does not know out of character. Make sure to include light-hearted scenes woven through the tense ones and provide ample room for laughs.

Conflict

Conflict in the empire is multifaceted, based on who you are, the reputation of your name and how much you can pull off without the authorities noticing. Most Alwarithlı prefer to settle conflicts on an interpersonal level, dealing with an issue they have with the person rather than getting anyone "official" involved. This comes from a deep respect most Alwarithlı have for one another and for others.

When running a game in the empire, players should feel this respect permeate all conflicts they engage in. They should feel the subtle art behind each conflict, whether against a Villain, thug or Hero. How is respect given? Does a Hero challenge someone to a duel so that secretly the person is bolstered in the eyes of her peers? Does a Villain manipulate a conflict so that a Hero must reject the Villain's hospitality, showing the Villain's disdain for the Hero?

In general a few good rules of thumb for honor in the Crescent Empire are as follows:

- It is not about how much money you have; it is about how good your name is and your deeds.
- You are nothing without your peers, strength lies in numbers and if you do good deeds other people support you.
- In lieu of someone obviously having more honor than another, people often support the one more wealthy—under the idea that

this person must have performed enough good deeds for his position and influence.
- People are not afraid to call others on bad behavior and dishonorable deeds.

A smart Villain tries to use the cultural boundaries of social decorum to her advantage, catching a Hero out and making him look bad in front of others. She hides behind the law, manipulates others and provokes conflict at the worst times in order to draw out her enemies. A Crescent Villain knows how to game the system and willingly plays the long game to ensure she triumphs in the end.

Most Alwarithlı Villains do not understand that the Crescent political and social system is based around the concept that the weakest people in society should be protected. The governmental structure was devised so that every level of society is kept in check, beholden to another level. Likewise, there is no bond greater than the care one citizen feels for another. A Crescent Hero understands this perfectly. She knows the monsters that can be created by it, but she also understands how to take them down. While a Villain might enrage a Hero enough to draw her into a vicious public fight, a Hero knows her best friend's fifth cousin is the bey of the area, and he will understand the Villain needed to be taught a lesson in humility.

Action

Amidst the social pressure and political drama of the Crescent Empire, it can seem hard to create an action-packed chronicle, but that is far from the truth. Swashbuckling in the empire is all about accepted risks. A Crescent Hero, like all Heroes, knows that what matters most is good triumphing over evil, and he willingly goes that extra length to ensure that happens. If that means the Sarmion Hero has to chase a mercenary over the rooftops of Salemoria, so be it. In fact, this type of chase, which may be commonplace in the swamps of Eisen, gains an additional facet in the empire. Sure, she chased down the mercenary and won. Now she faces an even more difficult feat convincing the kaffeehouse owner not to tell a local bey what he saw.

Despite their restrictive judicial system, citizens of the empire, mostly, want the right thing to happen. They want Villains to be imprisoned and Heroes to win the day. So while a local guard may lock up a Hero for his actions, the guard may also take a very long lunch break to visit her sister, and if the Hero she locked up happens to escape at that time…well she really could not have done her job any differently, could she? When running a game set in the empire, remember that people willingly do a bit of hand-waving for someone honorable and just.

Finally, the Alwarithlı are helpful, social folks. Whereas a fight breaking out in a square in Montaigne may cause people to close their shops early for the day and shut their windows, a fight breaking out in an Anatoli souq means everyone gets involved. Neighbors pull their friend's children out of the way, grandfathers heckle the person who instigated the fight, able-bodied youths make sure to help where they can. Woe to the young pickpocket who gets caught, because he will surely have his ears thoroughly boxed and his parents informed of his misdeeds, before he makes the short 15-minute parade to the local guard's office.

Mass Combat

When diplomacy fails between Nations, war is born. Some disagreements can be settled by a duel, others may be with a bribe, but war is an eventuality. Combat on a mass scale can support any number of soldiers, ranging from small skirmishes to engagements in which entire armies of Nations clash. If you have ever had the need to lead an army in your game, then these rules allow you to do so.

How It Works

Before beginning a Mass Combat encounter, the scope of the battle must be determined and each army involved in the battle must select their General.

Scope of Battle

Not all battles are sprawling, massive engagements involving the entire militaries of multiple countries. In fact, most battles are fought on a much smaller scale. Two 50-sword raiding parties encountering each other in a small town fight as a Mass Combat just the same as if hundreds or even thousands of combatants fought on each side.

Battles fall into one of four categories:

- Small Scale: Each Strength 10 unit is made up of 10 soldiers (effectively, 1 Strength = 1 soldier).
- Medium Scale: Each Strength 10 unit is made up of 100 soldiers (effectively, 1 Strength = 10 soldiers).
- Large Scale: Each Strength 10 unit is made up of 1,000 soldiers (effectively, 1 Strength = 100 soldiers).
- Massive Scale: Each Strength 10 unit is made up of 10,000 soldiers (effectively, 1 Strength = 1,000 soldiers).

If an encounter involves enough soldiers to make Massive Scale too unwieldy, you can increase the scale of battle by a factor of ten. Do this as many times as needed to make the number of units involved in combat manageable.

The side with the smaller troop numbers determines the scale of battle. For example, if one side of a conflict fields 500 soldiers against an opponent numbering

A DIFFERENT TAKE ON ACTION

"Why isn't Mass Combat an Action Sequence?"

The system detailed here is meant to capture a different perspective on war and battles—specifically, a very top-down tactical and strategic approach. Because the role of a General or tactical leader can potentially be so distant from the "in the trenches" soldiers, it might be awkward to run a large-scale battle as an Action Sequence if one Hero wants to engage in combat while another wants to handle the overall strategic elements.

This system focuses more on being a General directing an army as opposed to one of the soldiers in that army. While a Hero can still participate in the battle by attaching himself to a unit or by going into the field as a "Solo," the focus here is on the battle as a whole, not the individual skirmishes that break out.

If you want to focus more on "boots on the ground" action, you should use the rules for Action Sequences from the **Core Rulebook**. If you want to instead emphasize the tactics and strategy at a high-level perspective, use the Mass Combat rules presented here.

2,000, then run the battle on a Medium Scale as the smaller force fields soldiers in the hundreds. The army with 500 soldiers fields five Strength 10 units, and their opponent fields twenty Strength 10 units.

Select your General

Next, each involved army selects a single Hero (or Villain) to act as the General of the army. The General is the overall leader of each side and determines many of the choices made in the conflict. The General determines how many actions her army takes in a given Round, provides orders to the units to have them act in battle and is responsible for winning the day.

Other Heroes who are not the General still participate in the battle, and at any time a General may elect to step down. If this occurs, another Hero or character in the army needs to step up to lead. Without a General to coordinate the actions of the army, the more organized opposition will quickly overrun their side. Even an unseasoned General makes quick work of an army without a leader.

To Battle!

At the beginning of each Round of Mass Combat, the General of each involved army makes a Risk to determine the number of Raises she can take. Most often the General rolls Wits or Panache+Warfare, depending on whether her leadership tends towards the inspirational or tactical, although other options are available at the Game Master's discretion.

Each General has access to a number of different Strategies, which can be used during battle. To order a given Strategy, spend a Raise on your Action. A General may order one, and only one, Strategy on her Action. If the General elects to take any other form of action besides ordering a Strategy, she may spend multiple Raises as normal.

Additionally, each General may not order the same Strategy on consecutive actions. For example, you may not perform Clash, and then order Clash again on your next Action. You can order the same Strategy more than once in a given Round, but a different Strategy must be ordered between each repeated Strategy.

Lastly, a General may only order a given unit to act once each Round, unless all other units have already been given an order. For example, if a General rolled 5 Raises and only has four units in her army, she has to order each unit to perform a Strategy once before taking her final Action, in which any of the units in her army could use the final Raise to receive another order.

Clash

Arguably the most common Strategy taken in Mass Combat, Clash involves a unit hurling themselves into battle to defeat their enemies. When you order Clash, the unit selected rolls dice equal to their Strength and deals Hits equal to the number of Raises rolled.

Combined Arms

Many units in an army function better as a team, and Combined Arms embodies this fact by opening fire on an enemy unit to soften them before an allied unit slams into them with a charge. When you order Combined Arms, deal one Hit and your unit rolls dice equal to its Strength. If the target is Hit again this Round, they suffer additional Hits equal to the number of Raises rolled.

Fall Back

Use this Strategy on your Action to prevent a number of Hits equal to the number of Raises rolled. However, you must order this Strategy immediately following the Action that caused the Hits.

Flank

An attack often used to finish off an enemy, Flank is one of the most potentially devastating orders which can be given. When you order Flank, the unit rolls dice equal to its Strength and the General spends all remaining Raises. Deal a number of Hits equal to the amount of Raises rolled by the unit plus the amount of Raises you spend.

Ready...Aim...Fire!

Whether the unit is armed with longbows, crossbows, pistols or muskets, the Ready…Aim…Fire! Strategy not only damages an enemy unit but to also dissuades them from attacking back. When you order Ready…Aim…Fire!, deal one Hit and your unit rolls dice equal to their Strength. The next time the target deals Hits this Round, they deal one less for each Raise rolled.

Other Heroes

While an army has only one General, a number of other roles need to be filled. Any Hero who does not act as General may select the following:

Attached to a Unit

While the General issues commands to the army as a whole, each unit has its own built-in command structure. A Hero may, at the beginning of the battle, elect to lead a unit. When this occurs, the Hero can improve the unit's overall capabilities: any time the unit rolls its Strength, the attached Hero makes the roll, adding in a single relevant Skill to the die pool. For example, if a Strength 10 unit with an attached Hero takes the Clash Strategy, that Hero rolls a base die pool of 10 for the unit's Strength and one of his Skills: likely Weaponry, but another Skill such as Warfare could be used instead if he focuses on commanding from behind rather than leading the charge.

While a Hero is attached to a unit, he receives no Wounds from an enemy Strategy unless the opposing unit specifically targets the Hero. Even if a Hero is a member of a Strength 1 unit who receives 2 or more Hits, the last remaining Strength of the unit is removed but the Hero does not receive any excess Wounds.

Additionally, a unit under command of a Hero does not automatically follow an order given by the General. When the General provides an order to the unit, the attached Hero has the final say on what Strategy the unit takes. For example, if a General gives a unit with an attached Hero the Ready…Aim…Fire! Strategy in order to reduce incoming damage, the Hero of the unit elects what the unit does. If this happens, the General loses the Raise she spent. While it may be the strategically superior move to follow orders, a Hero may be more likely to instead Clash a different opposing unit if he sees his rival leading that squad of soldiers. Heroes leading units, however, are bound by the same rules as the General. If the last Strategy ordered by this General had been Clash, then the Hero cannot select that Strategy either.

Solo

At any time, a Hero may leave a unit by spending a Hero Point to become a Solo member of the battle. If this occurs, the Hero rolls a die pool to create Raises, but removes any Raises in excess of the General who currently has the highest number. If a Hero rolled seven Raises, but the General with the highest remaining number of Raises has three, that Hero must give up four of his Raises to go down to three and then takes his Actions accordingly. If a Hero wishes to re-join a unit, he spends a Hero Point before the start of the Round and follows the mechanics under "Attached to a Unit."

SURPRISE ATTACKS

While some battles may be fought on even terms between the sides, a General almost always prefers to have the element of surprise. If a General surprises his enemy, be it through a night raid that goes undetected or a clever ambush, he gains an advantage over his enemies. When rolling to determine Raises on the first Round of a battle, a surprised enemy rolls 2 fewer dice. This penalty only applies to the first Round.

A Hero may also start the battle as a Solo. As a Solo, the Hero is not subject to taking Actions as dictated by the General and rolls her own die pool alongside each General to make Raises. Acting as a Solo gives many benefits, but also comes with risk. Being a Solo allows a Hero to take more of an active role in the battle, as she takes Actions alongside her General. However, a Hero acting as a Solo is at much higher risk. With no unit to provide support, an opposing General could focus multiple units on the Solo in order to remove her from the battle. Note: When taking Actions as a Solo, a Hero takes Wounds and deals Hits in the same scale as the other units. For example, she deals damage to a unit's Strength (not to the number of soldiers) as if facing a normal Brute Squad.

Morale

Death is an inevitability of battle. And while some soldiers may become jaded over time, seeing your comrades in arms be cut down beside you can have an impact on anyone. Even the staunchest soldier can turn and flee when the regiment around her crumbles.

If a unit takes more than half of their Strength in Hits in a single Action, test for Morale. For example, a Strength 10 unit has to roll for Morale if they receive five Hits from a single enemy Strategy. Always round up when determining whether or not a unit should roll for Morale. If a Strength 9 unit receives 4 Hits from an enemy Strategy, they do not have to roll for Morale; only when they take 5 Hits in a single Action do they have to test Morale.

To test Morale, roll the Strength of the unit. If a Hero is attached to the unit, she rolls a relevant Skill as well (usually Warfare or Convince, but another Skill is acceptable with the Game Master's permission). If they make a single Raise, the unit remains available on the field of battle. If failed, the remaining members of the unit flee in terror. The unit is removed from the battle. If any Hero is attached to the unit, she may elect to become a Solo, by spending a Hero Point, rather than flee with her unit.

The Underdog Bonus

Not all battles are equal. In fact, a savvy General always does his best to have a numerical advantage over his enemies. When one side of a battle vastly outnumbers the other, the General leading the smaller army gains access to the Underdog Bonus.

To be considered the underdog, your army must be outnumbered two to one or more. If two armies meet, one counting 1,000 soldiers and the other counting 1,500, it is not an enviable position for the smaller army, but the Underdog Bonus does not take effect. However, if the army of 1,000 soldiers comes up against an enemy counting 2,000 or more soldiers, then they are considered the underdog.

An underdog General may once per battle announce he is using the Underdog Bonus. This may be done before rolling to determine Raises for the Round, or during an Action when ordering a unit to use a Strategy. For this roll, 10s explode. Additionally, the underdog General may match dice to make totals of 15, rather than 10. For each 15 reached, the underdog General counts 2 Raises.

Edges

Not all units are created equal. Some units, veterans of many battles, come equipped with specialized weaponry or are highly trained in a specific area. These benefits and more are represented in game through Edges.

Not all units have an Edge, and some units may have more than one. Edges are determined before the first Round of Mass Combat. The General of each side purchases Edges by spending Hero Points. Purchasing a single Edge for a unit costs one Hero Point; the cost of purchasing a second Edge for the same unit costs 3 Hero Points; purchasing a third Edge costs 6 Hero points, and so on. (To buy the first two Edges all at once, for example, requires 4 Hero Points.) Each time an Edge is purchased for an army, the cost of the subsequent Edge must be paid again plus a number of Hero Points equal to the new number of Edges. For example, a fourth Edge would cost 10 Hero Points, 6 from the third Edge and 4 for the new Edge.

There is no limit to the number of units in a battle that have an Edge. If a General commands five

VILLAINOUS GENERALS

Most often in Mass Combat, a Villain opposes a Heroic General. In this case, the Villain may purchase Edges for units under his command using Danger Points in the same manner as a Heroic General uses Hero Points. The cost remains the same, including growing exponentially as he purchases multiple Edges for the same unit.

units and has 5 Hero Points to spend, then she may purchase a single Edge for each unit of her army.

Additionally, if a Hero begins the battle attached to a unit, he may spend Hero Points to give that specific unit Edges as if he were the General. This is spent at the same rate as the General. If a unit has an attached Hero, then the General may not purchase Edges for that unit.

Finally, Game Masters may reward Edges to players who have taken time in-game to gather army forces. For example, a Sarmion Chavra Warriors Edge may be awarded to Heroes who helped to protect Princess Batya's family while she was in Anatol Ayh.

Army Growth

The rules laid out here support armies in one-time combat, but in a campaign in which the same army fights in battles over time, units within the army have the ability to become more powerful. These units can gain access to the advantage of Edges without having Heroes invest Hero Points into their capabilities.

If you are playing with army growth rules, at the end of each battle, the victor determines which units qualify for growth. Any unit surviving the battle with 5 or more total Strength has the ability to qualify for growth. It is assumed that the unit trains their new recruits enough so when the unit sets out onto the field at Strength 10 in the next Mass Combat, the entire unit benefits from the Edge.

A unit gaining experience through army growth acquires permanent Edges at the same rate you purchase through Hero Points. After the first Mass Combat, they gain access to one permanent Edge, taken from the list below. Then after they survive another three Mass Combat battles, they gain access to a second permanent Edge. A unit may continue to grow exponentially through an unlimited number of battles gaining a third Edge when surviving another six battles, a fourth Edge when surviving another ten battles, and so on. (For example, in order to start as a green unit with zero Edges to become a unit with three Edges, they have to survive a total of ten battles.)

BATTLES	EDGES
1	1
3	2
6	3
10	4
15	5
21	6

Assassin (Ashurite Only)

During the first Round in which you surprised the enemy, 10s explode during all Strategies this unit receives.

Camel Cavalry (8th Sea Only)

If the General spends a Hero Point, the Camel Cavalry's 10s explode as long as they fight alongside at least one other unit with this Edge.

Castillian Black Powder

When a unit with this Edge is ordered to take the Ready…Aim…Fire! Strategy, their 10s explode.

Cavalry

When a unit with this Edge is ordered to take the Clash Strategy, their 10s explode.

Chavra Warriors (Sarmion Only)

The first time in a battle a unit with this Edge takes Hits, it takes two less (minimum 1).

Duelist

Increase all Hits inflicted by this unit by 1.

Elephant Cavalry (Persis Only)

When a unit with this Edge is ordered to take the Clash Strategy, the targeted unit must immediately make a Morale test.

Elite

A unit with this Edge can take a free Action before all other units in the army have gone.

Guardian
When a Hero attached to a unit with this Edge is dealt Wounds, the unit may take the Hits instead.

Intimidating
When a unit with this Edge causes an opposing unit to test for Morale, the test automatically fails.

Janissaries (Anatol Ayh only)
This unit ignores tests for Morale and fights to the death unless ordered by their General to retreat.

Medics
At the end of the Round, a unit with this Edge recovers Strength equal to half the number of casualties taken.

Shield Wall
Reduce all Hits dealt to a unit with this Edge by 1 (minimum 1).

Skirmishers
When a unit with this Edge is ordered to take the Flank Strategy, their 10s explode.

Support Squad
When a unit with this Edge is ordered to take the Combined Arms Strategy, their 10s explode.

Unbreakable
A unit with this Edge never has to test for Morale and never flees the battle due to taking casualties.

Wary
When a unit with this Edge is ordered to take the Fall Back Strategy, their 10s explode.

Sample Battle

The players, leading an army of Persic rebels against the Persic National Army, have begun a sneak attack on the larger force. Commanding 1,000 soldiers, they hope that with the element of surprise, they will be able to gain enough of an advantage to defeat the 2,000-head Imperial army before them.

The players, having the smaller army, determine the scale of the battle. With 1,000 soldiers on their side, the battle is fought on a Medium Scale. With this in mind, the players' army counts 10 units, and the enemy army counts 20. And, because the Heroes are outnumbered two to one, they have the Underdog Bonus.

To begin, the players must select a General to lead them. They unanimously choose Yasmin Abbasi to lead their forces, as she served in the National Army as a younger woman and is not only familiar with their tactics, but has led soldiers in battle before. One of the other Heroes, Omid Rahbar, elects to lead a unit and Farad Sassani chooses to engage in the battle as a Solo. The Heroes are opposed by Xerxes Mohsin, whom they know resides in the camp below them and leads the National Army.

Before the battle begins, the Heroes have the opportunity to purchase Edges for their army by spending Hero Points. As this is the first battle of the campaign, there has not yet been an opportunity for any units to experience growth and have no permanent Edges. Omid spends a single Hero Point to purchase the Guardian Edge for his unit in order to provide protection in case enemy units target him specifically. Yasmin has three Hero Points, and elects to spend all three to greatly empower one unit with the Cavalry and Intimidating Edges. She hopes to be able to overwhelm enemy units quickly to gain an early advantage.

At the start of the battle, each General rolls to determine Raises for the Round, along with Farad who acts as a Solo. Yasmin elects to use the Underdog Advantage now, while she has the element of surprise, and rolls her Wits+Warfare. Xerxes rolls his Panache+Warfare, with a two-die penalty due to being surprised, and Farad rolls his Brawn+Weaponry; he is a Duelist and hopes to harry enemy forces

alongside his fellow soldiers.

With the Underdog Bonus, Yasmin counts 8 Raises. Xerxes counts 6, and Farad counts 5. With that, the battle begins!

Yasmin has the most Raises, so she gets to take the first Action of the battle. She spends a Raise to order her unit with the Cavalry and Intimidating Edge to take the Clash Strategy. She rolls well, inflicting 6 Hits on the first opposing unit. As the unit lost more than half of its Strength in a single Action, a Morale check is triggered, and because the unit inflicting the Hits has the Intimidating Edge, the check automatically fails. With that, the remaining soldiers flee the battle, and one entire enemy unit has been destroyed.

Yasmin, the only character with 7 Raises, gets to take the next Action. Her first unit cannot act again until all of her remaining units have acted, and because she ordered the Clash Strategy for her last Action, she must provide a different order. Yasmin orders another unit to use the Combined Arms Strategy on the next opposing unit, making it more susceptible to further attacks. She inflicts one Hit on that unit, and rolls 3 Raises. The next time that unit receives Hits this Round, it takes 3 additional Hits.

Both Yasmin and Xerxes count 6 Raises, and Villains go first. Recovering from his surprise, Xerxes orders one of his units to Clash the unit which singlehandedly destroyed an entire unit of his soldiers. The unit rolls, but only gets 2 Raises and inflicts 2 Hits on the unit.

Yasmin gets to take the next Action, and uses her Raise to order the unit led by Omid to use the Clash strategy on the enemy unit, receiving additional Hits due to Combined Arms. Omid rolls the unit's Strength of 10 alongside his Weaponry of 4 Ranks, as he leads from the front, and makes 4 Raises. The unit receives 4 Hits, which is increased with the bonus from Combined Arms to 7 Hits. The unit started at Strength 9, and is reduced to Strength 2 after this attack. Xerxes, afraid of losing another unit to Morale so quickly, spends another Raise to issue the Fall Back Strategy and rolls the unit's Strength from before these Hits. He counts 3 Raises, and reduces the Hits dealt by three. Because of this, the unit only takes 4 Hits, dropping it to Strength 5. This is not enough to trigger a Morale check, and action passes.

Yasmin and Farad both have 5 Raises, and the players decide to allow Farad to take his action first. Farad spends a Raise to use the Slash Maneuver on the damaged enemy unit, dealing 3 Hits. As this is more than half of the unit's remaining Strength, they now must make a Morale check. Xerxes rolls the units remaining Strength of 2, which the unit fails. This unit also flees from battle.

Yasmin, still holding 5 Raises, goes next. As she used her previous Action to order the Clash Strategy, she cannot order that again. Instead, she orders one of her unused units to take the Ready...Aim...Fire! Strategy in order to reduce the effectiveness of one of Xerxes' fresh units. Yasmin rolls the unit's Strength of 10 and makes 3 Raises. One Hit is dealt to that unit, and the next time they inflict Hits they inflict 3 fewer.

With all three acting characters at 4 Raises, Xerxes goes next. Seeing the threat of Farad, he orders a unit to attempt to take down the lone Duelist. He orders a unit to take the Clash Strategy and reveals that they have the Cavalry Edge! Because of this, their 10s explode when given this order, and after rolling the unit's Strength of 10, he counts 6 Raises to deal 6 Wounds! Farad takes the Wounds, including his first Dramatic Wound of the battle, and prepares to retaliate.

The Heroes have already defeated two entire enemy units without losing any full units of their own, and both Yasmin and Farad have the ability to take Actions before Xerxes can give another Order, but their army is still outnumbered by a wide margin. It will take considerable skill, along with a substantial amount of luck, to win this battle.

Kavita

Words cut deeper than the keenest sword. In the Crescent Empire, the loss of honor is greater than the loss of life, and familial descendents must carry the burden of lost honor. Therefore, Kavita, poetry dueling, is one of the deadliest arts a person can learn.

Kavita is initiated when two opponents' animosity for each other runs so deep, a physical duel is not enough to satisfy them. The two stand a few steps apart and must create a poem together before a judge and audience. These Kavitas are three Bayts (verses) in length and only moments pass between each. The winner gains prestige and honor, the loser carries the shame of defeat. The penalty can also include the loss of reputation and status or indentured servitude.

Prior to the start of the Kavita, the duelists agree upon the stakes and then decide on the topic. There are three acceptable themes for Kavita in civilized company: *mutaḳārib* (moo-tah-kah-REEB; Heroic), *ramal* (religious/didactic) and *hazadj* (romantic).

Mutaḳārib deals with Heroic tales and deeds. Epic tales of Heroes from even outside the Crescent Empire are often used. The subject can be the poet himself dealing in braggadocio and self-promotion.

Ramal deals with religious parables as well as educational topics. The Great Poet Damu favored this theme and many poems contain fragments of his original poetry as well as lines from the *Last Testament of the Second Prophet*. If the poet chooses herself as the subject, she tells tales of self-discovery and her relationship to al-Musawwir or the natural world.

Hazadj deals with romance and love. Parables of sacrifice, betrayal and duty guide the words of hazadj Kavitas. Proper etiquette dictates that these poems should be chaste and with pure love, although bawdy tales causing the audience to gasp with shock can still be effective. If the subject is the poet himself, the poet lays bare his scars of love for all to see, but in the end love triumphs over all.

Etiquette

The great Persic poet Damu developed today's etiquette and protocols nearly a century ago. As a teacher to many bright students, he despised seeing promising pupils resort to violence to resolve poetic disputes. At that time, Kavitas were not limited to three Bayts and many went on for days. Damu realized this had become a challenge of the body and not just the mind. To encourage his students to hone their wordplay to a razor's sharpness, he declared that Kavitas may not last longer than one sunset at most and three Bayts at the very least.

Different styles developed over the century, and *Kavi* (competitive poetry duelists) generally fall into one school or another. The schools are informal; some Kavi share the school of their Nation, though through Dīnist pilgrimages the styles have traveled the entirety of the Crescent Empire and beyond.

Nobles and rich merchants with the penchant for the dramatic may be patrons of Kavi. A patron may request the Kavi he supports to stand in his stead. The stakes are then paid by the patron and not the Kavi.

Foreign Shores

Skalds of Vestenmennavenjar practice Kavita. Ragnar Odinsson's raiders visited the Crescent Empire before settling in Montaigne and brought with them the rules of Kavita to Théah. Famous skalds hold a respected status in the empire, despite the obvious cultural differences. Alwarithlı are even known to give in to "casual" Kavitas, popular in Vestenmennavenjar, for the honor of dueling with a master skald Kavi.

Vodacce poets have attempted to recreate this art within their own borders. A famous (or rather, infamous) incident at the Royal Court of Iskandar has sullied the reputation of Vodacce in the Crescent Empire. A particularly ambitious poet, Piero Taglieri, began too quickly and tripped over his own words, repeating lines and being unable to create a comprehensible Bayt.

A Crescent poet often accuses her opponents of "eating Vodacce pasta" during a Kavita, of basically making disgusting and rude noises and otherwise not saying anything of import. The saying mocks Taglieri and a Vodacce's terrible eating etiquette, showing just how long-lasting the effects of a Kavita can be.

Taboo

It is taboo to participate in a Kavita on Dīnist holy ground. Public squares not far from Dīnist mosques usually have a small stage set (even if it is simply two pieces of elevated stone) so the Kavi can be seen and heard by those in the crowd.

Drawing weapons once a Kavita finishes is a vile act only taken by Villains. The loser is expected to accept his loss and begin remediation immediately. The victor can choose to refuse the spoils without dishonor to the loser or the victor.

How It Works

Once two opponents have agreed to a Kavita, they must pick a judge, or panel of up to six judges if the two cannot agree. Often judges are well-respected members of society such as beys, muftis, grandparents and the like. The judges decide the location of the duel and officiate all aspects of the duel.

Poems are judged as a whole piece, but a judge can slightly impact the outcome of a Bayt by awarding a Bonus Die to her favored poet, or a poet who has suitably impressed her. This may not appear to be fair but it reflects the confidence that can be gained from an approving nod, a subtle wink or the applause of the audience.

The challenged party picks the type of poem from the three acceptable styles: mutaḳārib, ramal and hazadj.

Wager

Before a Kavita begins, each Kavi makes his wager in Hero Points. A Hero can wager any amount of Hero Points up to his Reputation. A Hero with no Reputation can always wager at least 1 Hero Point. If a Villain participates in a Kavita, she wagers Danger Points instead. Both participants are expected to wager the same amount—the recipient of the challenge sets the wager.

Stakes can be as simple as public humiliation, to indentured servitude, to being forced to bear your opponent's name. Tradition states indentured servitude for losing a Kavita not exceed one year. The stakes should be proportionate to the wager—a lesser wager means lesser stakes.

If a young, upstart Kavi challenges a renowned poet, she can safely expect to be laughed at and denied (she cannot meet the wager the poet would likely demand). If the upstart can goad the Kavi into challenging *her*, however, she gets to establish the wager.

Friendly rivalries exist and informal challenges are plenty. This allows a poet the opportunity to hone his craft. As a swordsman practices with his blade, a Kavi works to sharpen his tongue. In this case, he sets no stakes and loses no reputation at the end of the duel.

The Duel

Within the structure of Kavita, the length is always limited. Three Bayts (verses) is the standard length, although intense or long-standing rivalries sometimes demand a more epic finale. All Kavita must finish before the sun sets.

Each Kavi decides for herself which Trait to use for the Kavita, and which Skills to showcase in each Bayt, and no Skill may be used more than once. Each Kavi describes the Bayt in turn and the Kavi then gather dice: Trait+Skill+Reputation.

Whichever Kavi has the most Raises wins that Bayt, gains Bonus Dice for a later Bayt and makes headway

SPIT HOT FIRE!

Players should provide the verses of their poems and Game Masters are encouraged to reward their creativity. Amaze the other players at the table. Flourishes and fancy wordsmithing will help you delve deep into the scene and provide a satisfying experience. Don't worry if you are not as eloquent as the Kavi you play. Give it a shot, you may find that you have more talent than you knew!

GMs are encouraged to reward a Bonus Die to players who make an effort to spout poetry like a true Kavi, as outlined in the **Flair** section (page 176) of the **Core Rulebook**.

toward a victory. In the event of a tie, the Kavita proceeds to the next Bayt with no bonuses awarded.

If a Kavi at any time is unable to gain any Raises for any Bayts, he is knocked out; he cannot properly articulate his words and loses regardless of his performance in previous rounds. This is the worst possible way to lose a Kavita, viewed by many as more dire than being forced into indentured servitude.

In the event of an overall tie, the Kavita moves to sudden death. The Kavi rely on talent alone and roll a Trait and a Skill of their choice (but remember, no Skill can be used twice in a Kavita, and this rule holds true). Villainous Kavi lose 1 die each Round during sudden death. If they tie during a sudden death Bayt, both Kavi must spin another verse. This continues until one gains a victory over the other, or both agree to end the Kavita in a draw.

Winning

The winner of the Kavita gains all of the Hero Points wagered (or converts them into Danger Points, if the winner is a Villain). If a Hero defeats a Villain in a Kavita, she can instead choose to undermine the Villain's Influence—each Hero Point she chooses not to take as her reward reduces the Villain's Influence by 1. In addition, the winner of a Kavita has any one of her applicable Reputations increased by 1 until the end of the game session or gains a new Reputation (at 1 Bonus Die) until the end of the game session.

The loser of the Kavita loses the Hero Points he wagered. In addition, he reduces the Bonus Dice of *all* of his Reputations by 1 until the end of the game session.

A winner is declared on the overall score of the poem created.

- The winner of the first Bayt is awarded 1 victory point and 1 Bonus Die to be used in any later Bayt; the Kavi's confidence is evident in her upcoming lines.
- The winner of the second Bayt is awarded 1 point and 1 Bonus Die on any later Bayt in the Kavita.
- The winner of the third Bayt is awarded 2 points.

The outcomes of a Kavita vary. Some have immediate consequences and momentary shame, while others have outcomes that shake through entire family lines by placing a Kavi into indentured servitude to the winner. A Hero is expected to treat his charge with honor and not abuse the agreed-upon contractual servitude.

Common Kavita penalties are (from least to most dire):

- Performance of a humiliating task—for example, a noble being a waiter at a peasant's party for an evening.
- A loss of social reputation—vendors may give you worse rates, guards less willing to turn a blind eye to your law infractions, etc.
- Indentured servitude to the victor—often seen as a lesser punishment to the following ones, as it provides the losing Kavi the chance to regain his honor
- Adding the victor's name to the end of your own with *'aqall min* before it (ak-ka-la-men, Katabic, meaning less than). For example, Mina bint Aysun losing to Sayim ibn Hadid would become Mina bint Aysun 'aqall min Sayim.
- As above and having this name carried on through your line until the end of time.

Example Kavita

Blu's character Mina is performing a Kavita with the Villain Sayim ibn Hadid. Sayim demanded a Kavita because of a perceived slight by Mina in the presence of the Court in Iskandar. The stakes: indentured servitude for one year. Mina agrees to the stakes and decides the topic of their poem will be mutaḳārib.

Blu and the Game Master gather their dice and divvy them up over 3 Bayts.

Mina has a Reputation of 3 and wants to wager 3 Hero Points. If she wins, she gains 1 additional Reputation for the session as well as 3 additional Hero Points.

The Game Master and Blu decide on Panache and Perform as the best pool for this first Bayt for Mina's approach. Mina has a 4 Panache and a 4 Perform. She gains a Bonus Die for using a unique Skill for each Bayt. For the second Bayt, Blu chooses Warfare. She has 2 Ranks in Warfare. For the third and Final Bayt, she opts for a Convince with 3 Ranks. Sayim has 8 points in Villain Strength.

Blu and the Game Master roll dice. Mina begins an epic poem about a Persic peasant Hero fighting against an unjust shah. Sayim counters with a tale of a noble quelling a Villainous rebellion. Mina has 5 Raises on 9 dice and Sayim only receives 4 Raises on his 8 dice. Blu is awarded 1 die to be used in later Bayts and a Victory point.

For the second Bayt, Blu rolls 7 dice and Sayim rolls 8. Sayim starts with the struggles of the noble against the many and his duty to the betterment of the Nation. Mina counters with a story of a treacherous noble betraying the peasant Hero to the shah. Blu only gains 3 Raises on the dice and Sayim gets 4. Sayim is awarded 1 Victory point for the second verse and 1 die for the final Bayt.

For the third Bayt, Blu rolls 8 dice plus 1 additional Bonus Die from winning the first Bayt. Sayim rolls 8 dice plus 1 additional Bonus Die for winning the second Bayt. Sayim finalizes his tale with the noble crushing the rebels and bringing enlightenment to the Nation and rolls 5 Raises on 9 dice. Mina ends her tale of the traitorous noble being a weak sycophant and how the peasant Hero prevails against the unjust shah, freeing her people from the shah's tyranny. Blu gains 6 Raises on 8 dice. Mina is awarded 2 Victory points for winning the final Bayt.

Mina triumphs with 3 Victory points to Sayim's 1, and Sayim loses a great deal of face.

Sayim accepts his fate and offers to enter into servitude for one year. Mina politely declines the winnings and accepts the raise of Reputation. Blu decides she wants to undermine Sayim's Villainous Influence instead of taking her Hero Points, reducing it by 3. Sayim seethes and Mina is the delight of the court. Sayim begins to scheme for the next time and won't underestimate Mina.

Kavita Styles

Just like the Dueling Styles in the **Core Rulebook**, a Kavi can learn different styles to aid him in a Kavita. These styles were developed by famous poets and give the duelist an extra edge in the art of verbal combat. The Rhyme and Verse Advantage can be found in the ***Making a Crescent Empire Hero*** section of this book.

Chamsin

Master Practitioner: Ruach

Ruach is one of the most notorious poets in the Crescent Empire, so much so that he never reveals his true name and wears a veil to hide his true identity. His loyalty runs deep for the people of Sarmion, yet he does not truck with fools. He trained as a Chavra and favors speed and attacks from all possible angles. His agility and battle prowess are only eclipsed by his sharp tongue. Thus Chamsin Style combines elegant yet brutal insults. Attacks come early to set their opponents backpedalling.

Style Bonus

A Chamsin practitioner gains 1 Bonus Die to be used in the first Bayt.

Damu

Master Practitioner: Ranya

Ranya is a wandering teacher-poet. She travels amongst the commonfolk and spreads the history of Persis. An unlikely Kavi, she has yet to lose a single duel. Her entourage consists of indentured servants repaying their losses while studying her within earshot. Rivals become disciples. She is strict yet caring; a soft grip holds more sand than a clenched fist.

A Damu practitioner presents ideas and themes simply, understood by all. Within the simplicity of her Bayts, she conveys profound statements with an easily understood but hard to master flow. Children's parables are often written in Damu Style.

Style Bonus

A Damu practitioner gains 1 Bonus Die in the final Bayt as the climax to his tales is hammered home.

Masquerade

Master Practitioner: Masquerade (or Raphael by his students)

Masquerade, a Montaigne poet who has traveled the world, became known for his wildly popular poetry books and the fact that he always wears a mask. His notoriety has reached such heights that the Anatoli Divan Style of poetry was re-named after him. The words he spins cause blood to rush and cheeks to blush. Wrapped in his verse, the mundane feels obscene and his beguiling metaphors are rarely what they seem. The cultured trade books of his poetry as far as the shores of Inismore and the 8th Sea. Besides being a master of the written art, Masquerade can captivate a crowd. His finely dressed appearance coupled with his enigmatic mask draw in even the most jaded audiences. Fueled by a lover from every place he has visited, the poems of his past trysts explore the darkest, deepest depths of romance, and many consider his verses modern classics.

A Kavi who has learned under Raphael wears a handmade mask, a gift from her teacher, to every duel. A Masquerade practitioner often uses flowery metaphors involving plants or animals to represent romantic themes.

Style Bonus

A Masquerade practitioner gains 1 Bonus Die during Kavitas using the hazadj (romantic) forms.

Goftār-e nik

Master Practitioner: Asahn Ekhtiarzadeh

Asahn Ekhtiarzadeh is a favored Warrior Poet in the Court of Shah Jalil in Siphon. Short in stature, Asahn's voice is large and carries on the wind. He exudes an aura of genuineness and honesty. The sincerity of his words and thoughts are legendary. His poems focus on the human condition in troubled times and doing what is right and just. Good thoughts and good words and good deeds. A Goftār-e nik practitioner takes the higher moral road in her poetry extolling the virtues of honesty, justice and positive action.

Style Bonus

A Goftār-e nik practitioner gains 1 Bonus Die during Kavitas using the ramal (religious/didactic) form.

Griot

Master Practitioner: Hamadou Mbaye

Hamadou Mbaye is a griot (traveling poet) from Ifri, a devout Dīnist on pilgrimage throughout the 8th Sea Tribes as well as Sarmion's cities. A very muscular, yet humble man, his smile is infectious, yet when insulted, his words become a storm few can weather. But just like a torrential downpour, he forgives and his smile returns.

The Griot Style grew from the pilgrimages of Ifri Dīnists traveling to the holy sites within the Crescent Empire. A Griot practitioner's specialty is a panegyric style. He heaps praise upon his opponent, but turns it equally into a cutting attack. Being pilgrims and teachers, Griot poets are exceptionally well versed in religious text and poetry.

Style Bonus

Once per Kavita, a Griot practitioner gains 1 Bonus Die when he weaves a compliment about his opponent into his Bayt.

Hakawati

Master Practitioner: Zahrah bint Marwa al-Amin

Zahrah bint Marwa al-Amin carries generations of history with her. Her family and tribe's history is always at the forefront of her thoughts. She can recall the most minute details from stories that occurred millennia ago. She teaches the people of her tribe nightly as they gather for meals. Kings and leaders of other tribes call on her expertise to help solve familial disputes. The Hakawati Style focuses on familial and tribal history, weaving tales from subplots and darting to and fro. Referencing one drama to the next, interweaving words like crafting a fine basket, a Hakawati poet takes oral history and puts it to rhyme and meter.

Style Bonus

A Hakawati practitioner gains 1 Bonus Die during the second Bayt.

Khol

Master Practitioner: Astarte Khol

Astarte Khol hails from the island of Numa. Raised as a haimon (Numanari warrior caste), she learned the ways of war growing up. Her travels took her to Iskandar where she discovered that words can be powerful weapons. Her dark, smoky blue eyes twinkle at the chance of a challenge. Drawing upon Numanari epics, Khol practitioners weave grandiose poems detailing the tales of Heroes. Those listening or reading Khol poetry feel a stirring in their emotions to travel and quest beyond the horizon.

Style Bonus

A Khol practitioner gains 1 Bonus Die during Kavitas using the mutaḳārib (heroic) form.

Dueling in the Crescent Empire

Dueling, far from illegal in the Crescent Empire, is often the preferable method of achieving one's end. Unlike their Théan counterparts, a Crescent duel is never a matter of hot-blooded youths drawing swords during a drunken brawl in the street. It is an art form, a sacred trust and nothing less than poetry in motion with repercussions extending far beyond mere physical injury.

Judicial Duels

In the imperial judicial system, punishment comes swiftly after a final verdict has been rendered, and that punishment is almost always costly. Conversely, obtaining a final verdict can take quite some time if a cunning adversary manages to acquire multiple appeals to higher courts or intrigues to set the qadi and mufti at odds.

If circumstances arise where a party to a trial cannot find satisfaction in court, a party to the case may challenge her adversary to a judicial duel. All challenges must be made formally in a court of law. The presiding qada immediately halts all proceedings, informs the challenged that the judgment of al-Musawwir has been invoked and asks the challenged to respond as al-Musawwir moves his heart. Refusals are surprisingly rare, as Alwarithlı prefer dishonor far less than economic or physical harm.

Unlike personal duels, the law requires the combatants to be on an equal footing. Judicial duels are not designed to allow one party to game the system, but to offer her a chance to appeal directly to the divine justice of al-Musawwir. As such, if the challenged is incapable of dueling or dramatically inferior in skill to that of the challenger, the court appoints a champion of equal ability to fight in his stead. Hence, judicial dueling has become a lucrative trade for former Crescent soldiers.

The severity of the underlying case determines the duel's nature. Most duels, whether civil or criminal, conclude to first blood because duels to the death are strongly discouraged and reserved solely for the most heinous offenses.

Personal Duels

The Crescent Empire has a wide array of dueling styles and techniques at its disposal and they are far from restricted to the confines of the legal system. Personal duels are commonplace and legally recognized as a way to allow a citizen to find his own justice in the eyes of al-Musawwir.

Accepting or rejecting a duel is a significant matter of honor. While the reasons for a duel are personal, the process of initiating them is not. Rules for personal duels are as strict as those of judicial duels. The challenger makes the challenge before a witness, the challenge must be accepted, the duel fought and then the victor and defeated (if possible) obtain a notarized certificate of conflict from the local qadi to immortalize the engagement.

Duels to the death are unusual, with duels to first blood being the most common, but deaths do occur. Reserved for the most heinous of slights, Kavita are strongly discouraged by the imperial legal system, but are less avoidable in personal duels. A physical duel can take one's life, but a poetry duel can destroy not only the participant, but his entire family.

Dueling Styles

Badayah

The Badayah, a small nomadic tribe found in the 8th Sea, are one of the most dangerous tribes to be found amongst the dunes. Their warriors are masters of ambush tactics, and stories say they can lie in wait beneath the sands for days until a target appears. The Badayah are also the only known teachers of the Badayah Dueling Style. Each Duelist trained in Badayah possesses a peshknife, her primary weapon, amongst her other armaments. These knives are curved with jagged blades kept razor sharp. The Wounds dealt by Badayah Duelists are exceedingly painful, and the amount of damage dealt often requires the attention of a trained doctor to be fully mended.

It is commonly said that the sign of a Badayah disagreement escalating to violence occurs upon the first drawn peshknife. The Badayah believe that a drawn peshknife cannot be sheathed without spilling blood, and these duels are often to the death. The most scarred Badayah Duelists are either the most talented or argumentative warriors amongst the tribe; often, they are both.

Style Bonus: Badayah Laceration

When you wield a light weapon (a dagger, knife, short sword or other such weapon) in one or both hands, you may perform a special Maneuver called Badayah Laceration. When you perform Badayah Laceration, you deal one Wound and leave a jagged, bleeding injury. Each time the target takes an Action this Round, she takes one additional Wound. The target may spend Raises equal to your Ranks in Weaponry to end this effect. You may perform Badayah Laceration only once per Round.

Fa'tahib

Fa'tahib has been the traditional Dueling Style of the elite within the Crescent Empire for generations. While originally intended as a true combat style, over the years Fa'tahib has evolved into a performance art. Exhibitions using Fa'tahib are common at large celebrations, where a performer uses the traditional *asaaya* (a heavy stick roughly four feet long) to demonstrate his mastery of the form through a choreographed dance set to music. This Duelist weaves his asaaya in complex patterns, never truly striking his partner.

While the dance-like Fa'tahib demonstration is traditionally performed by people with the brute strength to wield an asaaya, a new more acrobatic version has been adopted, which is just as popular. This new version of Fa'tahib is often performed simultaneously with a traditional performance, but requires the dancer to be nimble rather than strong. While the underlying message of a traditional Fa'tahib performance is "I have a weapon and I know how to use it!" the new dance says, "You're not so impressive, I can dance with a stick too!"

Style Bonus: Fa'tahib Step

When you wield a blunt weapon in each hand (typically an asaaya but sometimes a club or mace), you may perform a special Maneuver called Fa'tahib Step. This prevents one Wound, and you select a Maneuver you can perform for your next Action. If you perform that Maneuver, increase the number of Wounds dealt or prevented by an amount equal to your Ranks in Perform. A Hero may only perform Fa'tahib Step once per Round.

Mubarizdun

Mubarizdun is the style of choice for the most elite soldiers across the Crescent Empire. A relatively new style, its inception can be traced directly back to the Imperial General Sepideh. She invented the Style to be used by the most elite unit within her army, the Mubar. This unit had the honor of being the first to be declared upon the battlefield, and challenged the general of opposing armies to select his greatest warrior to face one of their number. Once selected, this soldier chose her opponent from with the ranks of the Mubar. These two soldiers then fought to the death, with the goal being to undermine the morale of the losing side. Stories say that Mubar soldiers never lost one of these duels.

While modern armies within the Crescent Empire employ soldiers trained in Mubarizdun, the strategy has fallen out of favor in recent. However, Duelists still train in the Style and use it to great effect elsewhere within the empire. Wielding swords, maces or axes in both hands, a Mubarizdun Duelist demoralizes his opponents by yelling insults peppered amongst his strikes.

Style Bonus: Mubarizdun Shock

When you wield a heavy weapon in two hands, you may perform a special Maneuver called Mubarizdun Shock. When you perform Mubarizdun Shock, deal one Wound. The next time any enemy (Villains, Brute Squads, etc.) who saw you perform Mubarizdun Shock deals Wounds this Round, she deals one less Wound for each Rank you have in Intimidate. You may perform Mubarizdun Shock only once per Round.

Yurusiyya

Because it is so difficult to raise horses within the Crescent Empire, those who care for the animals are awarded respect. Those who have mastered Yurusiyya take that respect to another level. A Yurusiyya Duelist believes that equitation is the highest calling, and he masters the equestrian arts and uses his skills to empower his abilities in combat. A Yurusiyya Duelist only rides a horse that he has a connection with, and believes that his horse is an extension of his soul.

There are no formal academies teaching Yurusiyya. A Yurusiyya master interested in finding an apprentice rides through the Crescent Empire seeking out a worthy student. Many Yurusiyya Duelists claim that their horses made the decision. As long as the one chosen by her horse displays aptitude for the Style, then the Duelist does not question her horse's choice.

Duelists that use Yurusiyya are considered some of the best cavalry in the world. While they are most commonly horseback archers, these Duelists master all forms of combat from the saddle.

Style Bonus: Yurusiyya Blitz

While wielding a bow, a Yurusiyya Duelist may use her Ranks in Aim in place of Weaponry when she performs Duelist Maneuvers. In addition, while on horseback, your Lunge Maneuver is replaced with Yurusiyya Blitz. When you perform Yurusiyya Blitz, spend all of your Raises. You deal a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Weaponry plus the Raises you spent plus your Ranks in Ride. You may split these Wounds amongst any number of targets involved in the Scene.

Appendix

Index

Ahurayasna 24, 26, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 49, 50, 55, 69, 85, 93, 101–103, 105, 106, 108, 109, 111, 112, 122, 137, 140, 144, 145, 147, 164, 165, 175–180, 188

Anatol Ayh 9, 10, 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27, 30, 48, 50, 52, 64–79, 83, 87, 93, 94, 103, 106, 111, 120, 129, 130, 139, 147, 156, 162, 166–170, 186, 187

Ashur 9, 17, 22, 23, 53, 61, 69, 75, 82–97, 103, 111, 129, 138, 143, 147, 156, 183–185, 187, 188

Assassins 9, 22, 28, 33, 53, 61, 82–89, 91, 92, 95, 111, 129, 156, 162, 163, 183–185

Castille 9, 20, 21, 47, 67, 73, 87, 120

Chavra 16, 20, 43, 44, 47, 75, 77, 101, 119, 120, 128, 130, 131, 157

Al-Dīn 10, 19–21, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30–33, 36, 38, 39, 48, 50, 52, 65–67, 69, 72, 82, 85, 101–106, 108, 109, 110, 112, 120, 122, 124, 126, 127, 133, 137, 139, 140, 142, 144, 145, 164, 166–170, 188, 198

The Anasheed 33, 39, 53, 82, 85, 87, 88, 90, 91, 97, 188

Dueling 203–205

Emperor Istani 9, 16, 17, 22, 46, 47, 55, 65, 67, 68, 75, 77, 84, 101, 104, 111, 115, 118, 119, 125, 130, 137, 139, 186

Empress Safiye 9, 16, 17, 26, 44–46, 48, 50, 64–69, 73, 75, 77, 101, 105, 106, 115, 118, 119, 129–131, 139, 144, 147, 186, 187

The Green Mountain 9, 82, 83, 85–87, 91, 95, 156

Guardian of the First Garden 9, 17, 33, 61, 82–87, 91–93, 95, 97, 129, 162, 163, 183

The Haxāmanišiya Empire 18, 19, 102, 106, 120, 138

Iskander 18, 19, 20, 22, 26, 31, 44–46, 48, 64, 65, 66, 69, 70, 71, 73, 78

Jinn 54–59, 101, 109, 122, 136, 138–141, 143, 144, 146, 150

Kavita 198–203

Khalil ibn Mustafa al-Thaji, the Second Prophet 16, 19, 20, 25, 29, 31, 32, 33, 36, 39, 65, 66, 68, 70, 83, 91, 103, 120, 166, 167

Khaṭā'ī 21, 22, 36, 103, 104, 110

King Josiah 9, 118, 119, 121, 125, 130, 132

Mehmed Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier 45, 46, 67, 77, 84

Namirha 34, 35, 102, 103, 108, 109

Numa 9, 16–19, 21, 22, 27, 30, 38, 64, 65, 69, 70, 73, 74, 83, 118–121, 126–133, 145, 147

The Orthodox Church of the Prophet 9, 17, 30, 37, 39, 40, 49, 50, 69, 84, 85, 87–90, 92–94, 97, 145, 188

Elohim Orthodoxy 39, 82, 84, 85, 87–89, 94, 96, 97, 156, 188

Persis 9, 10, 17–22, 24, 26, 27, 29, 34, 36, 37, 48, 53–55, 65, 68, 69, 72, 75, 78, 93, 94, 96, 100–115, 120, 121, 129, 137, 138, 139, 144, 146, 147, 157, 175–180, 186, 187, 188

The Pleroma 83–85, 87, 88, 90, 91, 96, 156

Princess Batya 9, 16, 22, 77, 78, 87, 118, 119, 129–131

Raqmu 17, 138, 140, 146

Saghira 17, 136, 137, 140, 143, 144

Salemoria 118, 119, 120, 123, 125–127

Sarmion 9, 10, 16, 17, 19, 20, 26, 53, 54, 69, 75, 77, 85, 87, 93, 101, 111, 115, 118–133, 138, 145, 147, 157, 171–175, 187, 188

Secret Societies 162–165

Alnniqabat Lilnnusr 162, 163

Angel's Hand 162, 164, 165

Shah Aždahâ 35, 36, 102, 103, 108, 109, 114, 115

Shah Jalil 9, 16, 22, 36, 55, 65, 68, 75, 78, 100–103, 105, 107, 108, 115, 119, 121, 187

Siphon 101–103, 106, 109, 110

Sorcery 16, 32, 41, 50, 86, 101, 102, 121, 140, 143, 144, 156, 157, 158, 159, 166–185

Art of the Second Prophet 156, 158, 166–170

Chozeh 157, 159, 171–175

Khahesh-ahura 157, 159, 175–180

Mithaq Alqadim 158, 159, 180–183

Nawaru 86, 156, 159, 183–185

Tribes of the 8th Sea 9, 10, 16, 17, 19–22, 24, 27, 30, 32, 34, 36, 37, 50, 53, 54, 60, 61, 65, 75, 87, 93, 102, 111, 119, 129, 136–151, 157, 164, 180–183, 187, 188

Quabilat al-Hisan 9, 65, 136–138, 142, 143, 147, 150, 151

Quabliat al-Jamal 9, 136–138, 142–144, 148

Quabilat al-Thi'b 9, 17, 136, 137, 139, 140, 142–144, 151

Index (cont'd)

The Vaticine Church 10, 20, 21, 22, 26, 30, 37, 39, 40, 49, 69, 73, 85, 122, 188

Vodacce 9, 20, 21, 47, 68, 72, 77, 83, 112, 120, 140, 198

Yachidism 10, 19, 20, 23, 30, 38, 41–44, 49, 50, 53, 69, 85, 119–128, 145, 157, 171–175, 188

Yesu, the First Prophet 19, 23, 31, 37–40, 82, 83, 86–88, 92, 93, 97, 122, 123

Ziba the Beloved 35, 36, 102, 103, 108, 114

Advantage List

Amab Almadaa (2 points) 159

Ambuscade (2) 159

Cover Name (2) 159

Delay the Inevitable (2) 159

Desperate Deflection (2) 159

Experienced Commander (3) 160

Heedless Assault (3) 160

I've Been Waiting for This (5) 160

Kwa Damu (2) 159

Multi-Tasker (3) 160

My Soul Still Shines (5) 161

My Weakness is Your Strength (5) 161

Never Say Die (4) 160

Osda (3) 160

Rally to Me (4) 160

Remember My Name (5) 161

Rhyme and Verse (2) 159

Skirmisher (2) 160

Step Where I Step (5) 161

Support Lines (3) 160

The Old Traditions (1) 159

Triage (2) 160

Well read (1) 159

THE CRESCENT EMPIRE
Miles
0 100 200 300 400
LEGEND
Settlements
Capital
Major
Minor
Transportation
Road
Major Road
Shipping Lane
Boundaries
National
City State
Features
River
Major River
Hill
Mountain
Marsh
Light Forest
Features
Dense Forest
Savannah
Desert
Deep Desert
Black Desert
Snow and Ice
Water Depth (ft)
0 - 500
501 - 1,500
1,501 - 3,000
3,001 - 6,000
6,001 - 9,000
9,001 - 12,000
THE SARMATIAN COMMONWEALTH
RZECZPOSPOLITA
CURONIA
CATHAY STEPPES
ANATOL AYH
ASHUR
PERSIS
QAZVIN SEA
THE IVORY KINGDOM
STRÓŻ BAY
SARMION
SAYHAD DESERT
GILEAD DESERT
Jaddah Bay
THE EIGHTH SEA
Quabilat al-Hisan
Quabilat al-Jamal
The Black Desert
MANZIL GÖČIHR DESERT
Quabilat al-Thi'b
CASPI FOREST
LARISSA BAY
Verethragna's Footprint
PERSIC GULF
HILAL VE YILDIZ'IN YOLU
(THE WAY OF THE MOON AND THE STARS)
NUMANARI APPROACH
Katab Bay
Masqad Bay
MAKAN DESERT
NAMAK DESERT
THE EIGHTH SEA
AD-DANA DESERT
CADARA PENINSULA
IFRI