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Official Game Accessory

Veiled Alliance

by Allen Varney





Veiled Alliance

A DARK SUN™ Sourcebook

by Allen Varney

TSR, Inc.
POB 756
Lake Geneva
WI 53147
U.S.A.



TSR Ltd.
120 Church End
Cherry Hinton
Cambridge, CB1 3LB
United Kingdom

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Credits

Designed by Allen Varney
Edited by Doug Stewart
Project Coordination by Timothy B. Brown
Cartography by Diesel
Typesetting by Tracey Zamagne
Graphic Production by Sarah Feggstad
Cover Art by Brom
Interior Art by Tom Baxa
Special Thanks to Warren Spector, Rick Swan, Don Webb

Introduction

In my seventh year my family visited the elven marketplace, amid Tyr's slave warrens. Through a mob of haughty merchants and greedy tradesmen I saw a squad of King Kalak's soldiers moving from booth to booth. People crowded into the bazaar as tight as kanks in harness, yet they gave the patrol plenty of room.

A soldier spotted a thin old woman in Raamian silks. He cried out and the leader, a big mul, grabbed her. He demanded, "Where is he? What's the contact word?"

The crowd around me fell silent. I could feel their tension and their hostility to the patrol. "One of these days. . ." one man whispered. A companion hushed him.

The woman spoke, in what I took for a foreign language. Her words echoed strangely. The air in the marketplace, still and charged with energy, as a calm before a storm. Then she hobbled away. The soldiers stood stock-still, but they trembled. I noticed a plant seller's booth behind the patrol; the green plants trembled in the same way.

The old woman spoke again as she walked, muttering, yet every word carried perfectly. Waves of air rippled about her, the way the air waves on the horizon. The blur vanished in the crowd.

I saw a heavy fist rise into view, then another, then vanish again. She cried out. Others attacked her. A round me, people shouted, urging them on. "Witch!" they chanted. "Kill the witch!" By the time the soldiers woke, the crowd had finished her off, and worse. The mage's death did not satisfy the mob; her body suffered much more. When the mul leader shouted, "We'll take her and burn her!" they cheered.

For the only time in my life I saw a crowd cheer Kalak's guards. For the first time I saw wizard's magic. For the first time I understood its peril.

About This Supplement

Magic has left the world of Athas a deadly desert. Its people blame all magicians for its ruin, defilers

and preservers alike-and not only blame, but despise them. For protection from nearly universal hatred, the good wizards of Athas and their allies have formed secret societies, collectively known as the Veiled Alliance.

This sourcebook describes the Alliance in a DARK SUN™ campaign: its secrets, notable members, activities, and its role in adventures. Individual entries describe the seven city-states' Alliances in detail, and they also give further information about the city-states themselves, adding to that in the DARK SUN™ boxed campaign set. This background helps flesh out any adventure set in a city-state, even scenarios that don't involve the Veiled Alliance.

You need the AD&D® rule books, the boxed campaign set, and The Complete Psionics Handbook to use this supplement. The Dragon Kings hardcover rules supplement should prove useful as well.

Everything that follows is for the DM's eyes only! **Players should stop reading here!**

Key Concepts

In reading this book, keep the following ideas in mind. They help in understanding the Alliance's purpose, both on the world of Athas and in role-playing adventures.

1. Each city-state holds a different Alliance.

The seven do not belong to one united group, they do not cooperate, and they share no leaders. Members of one Alliance do not automatically become members of another. At best, the different groups respect each other, and may offer courtesy assistance to a foreign member who arrives in town.

For that matter, an individual Alliance usually numbers its members in the dozens. Because many of its members command powerful magic, an Alliance can marshal far greater power than its size may indicate.



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2. The Alliance does not hold lofty ideals.

The organization primarily exists to help its preserver members to survive. Individual Alliances in the Tyr Region fight the sorcerer-kings and destroy defilers, but only to survive. Alliance members have their own goals, but rarely espouse causes to better the Athasian condition. Like most people on Athas, its wizards find brute survival challenging enough without creating new goals and potential new enemies.

3. The Alliance offers an excellent premise for any city-based Athasian campaign.

Though not in itself heroic, the Alliance's goals often match those of heroic player characters.

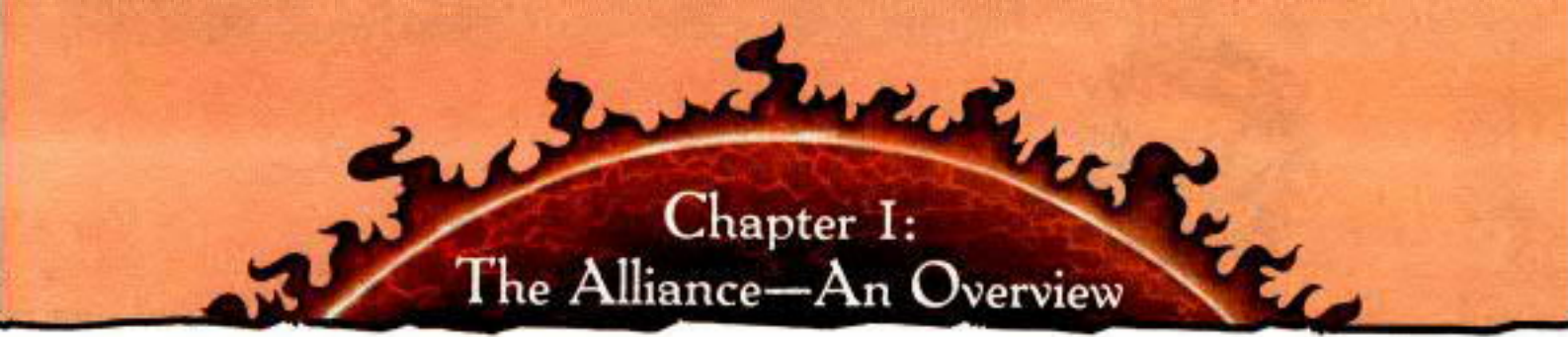
The society fights evil defilers, templars, and sorcerer-kings. It sends members on quests for spell

components, magical items, and the like. It makes rescues, springs prisoners from captivity, and interrupts dangerous ceremonies. Who does it enlist to do all this? That's right: the player characters.

Any good or neutral character, not just a preserver, can join an Alliance. These organizations need everyone who can help them. They treat non-wizard "auxiliary" members well, though not as well as preservers. Also, most Alliance missions require stealth, and small groups—about the size of a group of player characters.

Note a less obvious advantage for the overworked DM: the Alliance operates in strict secrecy. Not even its members know all its operations. If you have no plot-related reason for the heroes to embark on an adventure, don't wait. The Alliance offers every excuse to keep its reasons mysterious!





Chapter I: The Alliance—An Overview

No all-encompassing Veiled Alliance exists. Rather, a different Alliance holds power in each city-state. All serve much the same functions, but each operates in a unique, strongly independent style. This text calls these Alliances “chapters,” but remember that the individual chapters obey no central, over-arching authority.

Though independent, the chapters recognize one another and maintain friendly, if guarded, relations. They share a common system of recognition signals, so that refugees from one city may safely contact another city’s chapter, and certain customs and principles, such as a reliance on secrecy and on *requital*, the notorious prohibition against resignation from the Alliance. Most important, all Alliances obey the Five Aims.

Scope and Motive

The Veiled Alliance exists to protect preservers from physical, mental, and magical attacks by all enemies: sorcerer-kings, templars, defilers, the general citizenry, and even the dragon. Preservers automatically earn its protection, but not all automatically acquire membership. A wizard must earn affiliation. Other characters may join under certain circumstances. These “auxiliary” members also gain protection. Defilers cannot join the Alliance. **Only good or neutral characters may join.**

The organizations undertake many varied activities, yet all serve this relatively narrow purpose. If anything threatens a preserver or preserving magic, the Alliance vows solemn opposition. Conversely, the organizations (as opposed to individual members) care nothing about threats to others. No Alliance takes official action to free ordinary slaves, for example, nor to provide disaster relief, nor to battle monsters.

Vigorous Alliance chapters exist in all seven city-states. Minor Alliances, or sometimes single contacts, also exist in the village of Altaruk and a few

other scattered villages and oases. These typically take orders from the nearest city-state chapter. No known Alliance chapters exist in the Crescent Forest, on the islands of the Sea of Silt, nor in other remote areas.

Size: No one but its leader knows a chapter’s size—the result of the need for secrecy common to all underground movements. No member knows many others, lest the member be captured and betray vital secrets under interrogation.

An effective chapter generally must include at least a few dozen members, and in large cities membership could reach over 100. The actual size should remain unspecified in the campaign. Wizards comprise about half the membership; auxiliaries, supporting members from other classes, make up the other half. Chapter 2, “Inside The Alliance,” discusses auxiliaries in detail.

Beginning Wizards rank between 1st- and 4th-levels. A quarter or more of the membership range from 5th- to as high as 8th-level. Wizards above 8th-level generally help lead the organization, or serve as elite agents or envoys who set their own agendas. Similar figures apply to the auxiliary groups of fighters, rogues, psionicists, and priests.

Activity: Only the leader, if anyone, knows all of a chapter’s activities. No other member ever sees much of the whole. Alliance members work in a fog (or, more appropriately, a sandstorm), seeing a few others now and then; perhaps a shadowy figure or two in the distance, and nothing beyond.

Occasional reports passed through a chapter may help explain strange occurrences in the city-state, but these usually come after the fact. Spectacular incidents surprise everyone except those directly involved in planning and execution. This fog makes adventures in the Alliance mysterious affairs. Small events can have great effects, and the characters seldom know what their missions will achieve until they’ve succeeded.



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Goals and Doctrines

All Alliances have vowed allegiance to a set of five goals, or “Aims.” Only members know the Five Aims, ranked here in order of priority.

The Chief Aim: Protect the Alliance

In the past this goal often meant “maintain secrecy.” To date, the Alliance has survived only by stealth, and acting only covertly. Powerful defilers and agents of the sorcerer-kings constantly search for Alliance members, hoping to track them to the chapter headquarters. Preventing discovery has led to many harsh measures -principally requital, the fabled “resign and die” policy.

As the winds of change sweep over Athas, Alliance chapters debate the meaning of the Chief Aim. Now that Tyr’s sorcerer-king has fallen and more may follow, some believe secrecy no longer serves the organization. In Tyr particularly, a few vocal members support “Divulgence”—public dis-

closure of the Alliance’s existence and activities.

They would accompany Divulgence with public education about the differences between preservers and defilers. Then, at last, the long breach between the preservers and the populace would begin to heal.

The Second Aim: Protect Preservers

The Veiled Alliance began with the need to protect good wizards from the wrath of a society that does not understand them. Despite the changes that beset Athas today, citizens still revile all wizards, including preservers. The Second Aim remains vital. The Alliance devotes itself to guarding preservers and their magic, even wizards who claim no membership in the organization.

The most common methods of Alliance protection for preservers include:

- **Safe Harbor.** Every chapter maintains numerous hideaways around its city-state. A member in





immediate danger may shelter there for an hour, a day, or a month.

- **Transport.** A wizard or auxiliary who cannot find long-term safety must leave the city-state for good. The Alliance arranges safe, one-way transportation, usually non-magical to avoid detection.

- **Transplants.** When receiving a wizard from elsewhere, an Alliance chapter can create a new, secure, and permanent identity for the refugee. This includes a name, home, position, and fraudulent records of birth, tax payments, and so on. They may use illusion or *polymorph* spells to expedite the security of the transplant. The Alliance generally executes this difficult task only for important and powerful wizards, and seldom if ever for auxiliaries.

- **Recruitment.** Chapter members who discover a novice with native magical ability but no training can try to recruit the novice for the Alliance. This delicate operation involves a long probation period, while senior members investigate the recruit for any evidence of deception.

- **Instruction.** A wizard who demonstrates a need for a particular spell or magical item may contact the Alliance. They may refer the wizard to an instructor.

- **Rescue.** Enemies who capture a preserver seldom execute the wizard outright. They usually confine and interrogate the prisoner first. During this period, before the inevitable execution, the Alliance may try to rescue the wizard. They first try to subvert a guard or extricate the prisoner through stealth. If this fails, an open assault on the jail cell may follow. This desperate stroke, involving grave danger to the cloak of secrecy, occurs only to rescue an extraordinarily important prisoner.

The Third Aim: Protect Auxiliaries

“Auxiliaries” are non-wizard members of the Alliance. These supporting fighters, priests, psionists, and (occasionally) rogues and druids, human

and nonhuman, lend their special skills to Alliance missions. The founders knew that they must offer protection to auxiliaries in order to ensure loyalty and preserve needed skills for future missions.

The motive behind the Third Aim betrays an underlying cynicism, but in practice the Alliance respects its auxiliaries, and some achieve very high status.

The Fourth Aim: Oppose Defilers

To some, defilers embody the worst imaginable evil. To them, defiling magic does not just destroy, it offends the universe. But most oppose defilers for practical reasons.

Active defilers call undue attention to magicians—hostile attention. Defiling magic ruins the land for future spell-casting, let alone anything else. Defilers compete with preservers for valuable spell components and magical treasures. Some chapters crusade to destroy defilers for ideological reasons.

Chapters almost always avoid direct confrontation with powerful defilers. The Alliance usually attacks defilers indirectly:

- **Whispering Campaigns.** The people of Athas hate all magicians alike. Some Alliance members covertly circulate rumors that expose defilers, hoping to provoke mob justice. To other members this tactic itself seems evil. The practice raises controversy.

- **Theft.** In contrast, no one in the Alliance disputes the practice of stealing a defiler’s spell-books and magical items. The Alliance always prefers stealthy burglary to direct confrontation with the owner.

The chapter leaders claim magical items (usually with a cut for the burglar). They only debate whether to destroy stolen spell-books. Preservers cannot use defiler’s spells as written, but (rarely) they can adapt the spells. The leadership sometimes keeps



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defiling spells in its library. The rationale: “Know your enemy.”

- **Vandalism.** When you can’t steal, destroy. Known defilers in secure lairs may find their entrances booby-trapped, food spoiled, and sleep impaired by sudden noises outside. A harassed defiler may rashly expose magical ability publicly, or at least decide to move elsewhere. (Note that Alliance vandalism never destroys living plants or animals.)

- **Subversion.** If a member discovers a novice defiler, the local chapter often covertly contacts the beginner. The wisest preservers remove the young defiler to the wilderness and discuss the proper ways of magic, hoping to convert the defiler to the study of preserving magic.

The next step varies among chapters. Some organizations demand the defiler’s conversion on the spot, and permanently disable or eliminate any who refuse. Others, more humane (or more naive, according to viewpoint) return the defiler safe and sound, hoping the defiler will voluntarily take the new path and join the Alliance. “Members by choice do better than members by compulsion,” they say.

Both approaches have imperfect records of success. Most chapters decide methods case by case. A chapter never tries to subvert an obviously experienced defiler (above 5th-level), for they assume the student has irrevocably taken the path of the defiler. (A converted defiler must start over at 1st-level.)

- **Ambush.** Alliance leaders of neutral alignment may actually lure powerful defilers to a prearranged location, then pounce in surprise. The leaders reserve this desperate method for immediate and extremely dangerous defiler threats. On the other hand, chapters led by lawful good characters tend to prefer the . . .

- **Duel.** Every decade or so a lawful Alliance leader becomes so concerned with some particular defiler that the leader actually challenges the defiler to a wizard’s duel. The participants in these single

contests always fight to the death. A defiler who refuses the challenge becomes fair game for ambush and other tactics.

Duelists fight fairly—on the Alliance side, at any rate. The challenged party wins about a third of the time. A victorious defiler may leave the scene unhindered, and the Alliance makes no official reprisal. As a practical matter, the defiler may soon vacate the city-state anyway as unofficial retaliation becomes a constant nuisance.

The Fifth Aim: Undermine the Sorcerer-kings

The Alliance also opposes the sorcerer-kings for practical reasons. Only the monarchs possess the strength and will to eradicate a chapter. The kings and their templars initiated the war, but every chapter stands ready to continue it. This Aim, in principle, calls for the overthrow of the kings. In practice this amounts to constant small-scale harassment.

This war remains undeclared. Most Alliance chapters have avoided open attacks against a king’s interests which could fatally endanger the veil of secrecy. They have acted entirely covertly-to date. Now some chapters debate open warfare as the counterpart to “Divulgence.”

The Alliance’s most common methods of fighting sorcerer-kings include:

- **Propaganda.** Efficient rumor mills circulate news (usually even true news) of slave uprisings, betrayed templars, and covert resistance. Naturally, no one who hears these rumors ever learns their source.

- **Sabotage.** Food consignments mysteriously spoil, weapon carts en route from the armory to the palace throw wheels and collapse, or swords and arrows break. The roof of a templar headquarters collapses, apparently from faulty construction. Ail of this keeps the Alliance’s agents busy.

- **Betrayal.** “The enemy of my enemy is my



friend.” Members sometimes learn information that could damage a sorcerer-king if revealed; for instance, army deployments in hostile territory. The Alliance anonymously passes this information to an audience that can use it best, often a rival sorcerer-king’s agents.

In most cases the Veiled Alliance has found it too dangerous to infiltrate or try to subvert a king’s orces. Most chapters rely not on spies but on close observation or reports from sympathetic allies. The exceptions, the Draj and Raam chapters, use a risky but productive strategy of large-scale infiltration.

The Aims in Practice

Sometimes chapters honor an Aim more in the breach than in the observance. This happens most often with conflicts between the Chief and Third Aims, when attempts to rescue a member would violate secrecy.

In practice, an individual member often attempts such a rescue, especially when he regards the victim as a valued comrade. The senior leaders seldom encourage such rash action, but they usually ignore the violation—as long as the rescue succeeds!

They handle other conflicts less easily. A chapter’s leader usually resolves them, deciding (for instance) whether a particularly bold sabotage attempt merits the risk, or whether to send valued, high-level preservers to invade a powerful defiler’s home.

Other Goals

The Alliances share obedience to the Five Aims. Individual chapters sometimes have additional goals, unique to their situations.

Structure and Communications

Chapter organizations vary slightly, but leaders always keep them deeply secret. The rank and file gain only sketchy information about the methods of operation. Anyone caught and interrogated can’t

endanger much of the organization. Therefore, PCs in Alliance adventures discover few details of the organization, and those only through close contact with the Alliance.

Organization

Like other revolutionary groups, the Alliance uses a “cell” structure to ensure that no member outside the core leadership knows much about the organization, and cannot betray much under interrogation.

Hierarchy: Outside the central leadership, or Council, the membership falls into small groups, or cells. A cell typically holds three to six members, occasionally more—in other words, one group of player characters.

The cells are linked to the central leadership and each other by lines of communication. Cells pass messages back and forth through a long chain of cells in a bucket-brigade fashion.

The leadership ranks cells according to how far from the Council they are along the chain. These do not represent military rank, power, or seniority, merely location. First-rank cells link directly to the central leadership. Second-rank cells link to first-rank, and so on. The link structure resembles a three-sided pyramid, with the Council at the apex, three first-rank cells just below it, and the rest arranged in ranks down the sides (See diagram).

Notice that each cell in the second rank connects directly to one of higher rank, two of the same rank, and (in large chapters) three of lower rank. Each subordinate cell thus becomes the apex of its own little pyramid. All these links represent one member in a cell, who knows one contact in an adjacent cell.

With three first-rank cells, and three more ranked just beneath each one, the number of cells in a rank multiplies quickly: 3, 9, 27 By the third rank, the Alliance has 39 cells. No chapter has yet needed a fourth rank.



higher rank. This lets messages filter down to all members within a few days.

The Council can readjust meeting times to reverse the flow, in cases when information-gathering becomes vital. They can also call emergency meetings, but the time of transmission seldom falls to less than a day—the price of secrecy.

Leaders: In general, each chapter follows one primary leader and a small number of lieutenants. Three lieutenants each take charge of one branch of the cell pyramid; each lieutenant can initiate an operation along that branch on his or her own authority. They reveal themselves to lower ranks only by code names, such as “Silk Wurm” or “Guthay.”

Other lieutenants work as special envoys or elite advisors. Strictly speaking, they have no authority to initiate operations. In practical terms, these powerful mavericks don’t pay much attention to rules. If they see an immediate need, they may ferret out a particular cell and take command. They send the cell members on the operation, then vanish mysteriously.

Council leaders often come from the highest ranks of society, and each commands enormous power. Every junior member soon learns to heed the Council’s infrequent pronouncements closely. The Council sends orders down all the branches of the pyramid.

However, for the most important matters the organization reserves a secret and powerful instrument.

Cathexis

Several Alliance practices arouse controversy. How can an organization that keeps its membership secret ever have open discussions and debate? Psionic and magical communication can take care of some conflict. But what about disputes that involve the entire society? The solution: *Cathexis*.

In most chapters Cathexis marks a rare and mo-

mentous event. It simultaneously links the active membership of an entire city-state. Though vast, time-consuming, and dangerous, the psionic undertaking produces rewards. In under a minute of shared telepathic contact, dozens of wizards and auxiliaries can voice their opinions and reach consensus.

Each participant, located anywhere in the city, feels a psionic contact. The willing participant’s physical surroundings seem to vanish with an immediate shift to an imaginary psychic space. Each perceives the space differently, but always in neutral or comfortable terms. Other individuals in the Cathexis appear to the observer as unrecognizable points of color, and they communicate soundlessly, guaranteeing anonymity. Leaders appear as especially bright or large spheres of varying colors.

Then the leaders jointly propose the issue of debate. Each speaker in Cathexis may present or absorb an opinion with the speed of thought. Debate can proceed hotly and heavily for several exchanges, then closed, voted on, and Cathexis cancelled. When the participants return to physical awareness, only a minute or so has passed!

The great virtues of Cathexis entail great cost. Only teams of high-level psionics may execute one, and then only after elaborate preparation. The process physically drains the executors and has sometimes killed them. Therefore, leaders usually reserve its use for emergencies. In a given chapter Cathexis has seldom occurred more than once in a decade.

Gaming the Cathexis: A character may use any telepathic psionic ability normally in Cathexis. At the DM’s discretion, some metapsionic abilities may also work in Cathexis. Other classes of psionic ability, physical abilities, and magic do not work in Cathexis.

For telepathic abilities, treat all targets as though within sight. A character must “move” psychically



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next to another character to use powers that require touch. This works like movement in the Ethereal Plane. All observers can see the motion, but they cannot see telepathic powers in use.

Conduct telepathic combat normally, as though time passes at its regular rate. Attacks and defenses work normally; attackers must establish contact when usually required. Touch contacts require a physical attack roll. For convenience, assume that Cathexis lasts only long enough for a participant to conduct one psionic combat.

When Cathexis ends, so do all psionic contacts made through it. Permanent effects such as mindwipe remain afterward, but ongoing, constantly maintained effects such as domination end immediately. Optionally, all hit-point damage and other physical losses accumulated in combat may hit the physical body all at once, possibly requiring a Constitution ability check or System Shock roll (DM's discretion) to remain conscious.

If someone in the "real" world attacks a partici-

pant's body, physically or psionically, the participant instantly drops out of Cathexis and can defend normally. The DM can allow surprise bonuses to the attacker as appropriate.

DUNGEON MASTER™ Note: A Cathexis requires at least three to six days to prepare, several psionics of 10th-level or higher, and (optionally) empowered receptacles or other sources of PSPs, such as lesser psionics.

In game terms, Cathexis tremendously expands the telepathic disciplines of mindlink, send thoughts, and ESP, in conjunction with variants of the metapsionic devotions magnify, psychic drain, and receptacle. Each psionicist in the group must have all these as prerequisites. Each psionicist may link up to five other minds, and each fully charged receptacle adds five more minds to the total. The operation lasts one minute and drains all PSPs available. Optionally, injured, ill, or frail psionicists must make a system shock roll after Cathexis ends.

The Cathexis effect works better as a storytelling





mechanism than as an explicit game device. It dramatizes the great power of the Veiled Alliance and the issues that confront the organization. To that end, atmosphere should take precedence over rules mechanics.

Watching the Troops

The cell structure prevents a chapter's leadership from knowing its membership. Some leaders who find this unacceptable use a spell called *watchful eyes*.

A wizard or priest casts a *watchful eye* spell on a collection of small items: feathers, coins, daggers, or anything portable. For the duration of the spell (a matter of a few days) all spellcasters who attended the casting may "tune in" any of the objects and sense anything in their vicinity as though present themselves at the scene. The spellcasters cannot cast magic or use psionic abilities through the *eyes*.

The eyes in use: The three Alliance lieutenants each take a third of the enchanted objects. The leaders pass the eyes to the first-rank cells with the command, "Divide these evenly among your members at the next meeting and have them pass the items down the chain. Have every cell repeat the process."

The eyes gradually filter out through the Alliance structure. The Council's spellcasters follow their progress, noting the carriers at every step and the faces of those who attend each meeting. Beyond the second rank the *eyes* become so diffused that the casters look in only sporadically. After the spell lapses, a new command filters down the line: "Destroy the objects."

Watchful Eyes (Enchantment, Greater Divination) (7th-level Wizard, 6th-level Priest spell)

Range: Special

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 12 hours per level

Casting Time: 1 round per object (min. 1 hour)

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

The spellcaster must choose easily sortable objects to enchant, and must make them identical (within reasonable limits). The objects together undergo an elaborate "curing" process that somewhat resembles the metapsionic method of empowering an item. This takes the spellcaster at least one hour per day for one month. If the spellcaster skips a day the process must start again from scratch.

Each spell enchants up to 100 identical items. The spellcaster must touch each item during casting. If the spellcaster has more than 100 items, he or she may cast *watchful eyes* consecutively, so long as the curing process continues daily.

Any number of spellcasters may attend. When the caster finishes with the final item, the spell activates for all items at once. The items appear unchanged but now *detect* as magical for the duration of the spell.

Thereafter, those who attended all the castings may select and tune in on any enchanted item up to 100 miles away, as described above. This takes 1d6 rounds. (Note: the clairsentient effect works normally, independent of circumstances: for instance, it works even if the item is concealed. The DM may assign negative modifiers for extreme range, presence of interfering magic, etc.)

The *watchful eye* carriers only become aware of this magical sensing if they would ordinarily *detect magic* used in their presence. *Detect scrying* identifies the item, but nothing can trace the clairsentience back to its source.



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This spell requires one other material component: a conventional magical scrying device, such as a *crystal ball*, which is not expended in the process.

Alliance leaders find the *watchful eyes* enchantment expensive and time-consuming, but effective. They guard its secret closely, and most other spellcasters have never heard of it. Some monarchs know of the spell, but not the procedure. They would pay a fortune for it.

How did these few sorcerer-kings learn of the *watchful eyes* spell? The answer lies in the greatest danger facing the Alliance today.

Subversion and Threat

Scholars of nature (such as exist on Athas) have studied a tiny insect they call the “myrmeleon,” commonly known as the *antlion*.

“Excavating a conical hole in the desert sand,” writes Davester of Tyr, “the creature burrows out of sight at the base, then waits, sometimes for days. Ants and crawling mites stumble over the rim of the hole. The quarry-tumble downward, where the sly myrmeleon leaps from the sand and pounces, fixing the victim in fearsome mandibles.

“The entire squalid drama takes place within a round no larger than a gladiator’s helm. Yet nothing in the desert’s larger predations so conjures in me true fear as that vision of pitiless patience, that silent unblinking alertness for a single mistake, mingled with a rending, bloodthirsty ferocity at the kill.”

This account may have helped name the newest menace to the Veiled Alliance: the Myrmeleons, agents of the sorcerer-kings who have finally infiltrated the chapters. After generations of security many now fear a strike from within.

Awareness of this new threat grew slowly. First, a few missions went dangerously awry. Soldiers arrived with no warning, or searchers found no trea-

sure where sources had reported great amounts. This led to the destruction of entire cells.

Then a *watchful eye* scan of the Tyr membership showed a young wizard named Rathoras visiting a high-ranking templar shortly after King Kalak’s death. A Council wizard recited this account to an eidetic psionist:

Rathoras: I have more news, my lord.

Templar: Of those magicians? Stand up, idiot! Our beloved Tithian’s latest edict commands that no one kneel to us anymore. Fft! What news?

Rathoras: I sabotaged their raid on the old library as you ordered. The guards found them all, but. . .

Templar: But they all died in the battle, yes, I heard. We do still keep tabs on things, though without Kalak’s blessing, only the strong survive. Great Dragon, I sent you to find their headquarters and you bring me “news” three days old! You haven’t found their stronghold yet, have you?

Rathoras: Well. . .

Templar: Well, indeed.

Rathoras: We. . . uh. . . my lord, the magicians’ Council sent things to everyone in my cell. Feathers. Templar: Feathers.

Rathoras: This is one of them. They said to carry it with me. It holds a virtue of some sort, but I fathom it not.

Templar: Bring it over here. I will have a look at it myself, through my glass. This has a virtue of its own, you know. . . Gad, it’s scrying us!

Rathoras: Oh, no! My lord, I never—No! Please—

Templar: You idiot! I’ll crush you like I crush this—

Rathoras did not return to later cell meetings. But the Alliance knows now that enemies, even defilers, can circumvent all its security and corrupt its ranks.

The Alliance has responded with still greater secrecy and caution. The world grows yet more hostile, but their commitment to their mission never wavers.

Chapter 2: Inside the Alliance

Each city's Alliance operates, communicates, and administers justice as uniquely as the whorls of a fingerprint. This section discusses their similarities.

How to Find the Alliance Do They Really Wear Veils?

The short answer: "No."

The short answer requires qualification. Many people in all seven city-states wear full or partial veils. Veils keep the omnipresent desert dust and grit out of the eyes and nostrils. If a member happens to wear a veil, the wizard looks no different than half the people on the street. Some chapters do wear veils during rare, secret ceremonies, but not in public.

Contacting the Veiled Alliance would be simple if all members had to go about veiled. Defilers and sorcerer-kings alike would applaud this policy, but "Veiled" in this sense means "secret." Secret societies don't get far by imposing dress codes.

Likely Contact Sites

In most city-states the Alliances instruct members to watch for and protect preservers, following the dictates of the Second Aim. Because Alliance members function at all levels of society between sorcerering and (usually) slave farmers, they cover their territory well. Furthermore, the search for exotic spell components may send them far afield into the surrounding territory.

In game terms, this means that PCs may find an Alliance member in nearly every public domain. Taverns and marketplaces work well, but many other sites fulfill the same story function with novelty and flair. The pampered house-slave may belong to the Alliance and meet the heroes in an estate courtyard. Auxiliaries work in guild halls, thieves' warrens, and taxidermist shops. . . even in guard barracks! In Raam and Draj, the royal palace itself harbors Alliance members!

Recognition Signs

The unified system of recognition signals that works in all cities gives the Alliance a double-edged sword. Travelling members need set signals to gain Alliance recognition and help in new cities, but established signals open the chapters to infiltration. Frequent change seems unworkable, so the chapters agreed to live with the situation and redouble their vigilance. During the campaign, infiltration may prompt them to reconsider this decision. But for now, these remain the standard signs:

- **General recognition:** The first speaker in casual conversation uses the password phrase "My father is a templar." The listener responds with "My mother is a gardener." The first answers, "You come of good stock."

In the silent recognition signal, a member holds the two middle fingers of one hand together, separating the first and little fingers from them slightly. Other members respond in the same way, or (more often) acknowledge the gesture with a meaningful stare or nod.

On Athas, usually only merchants and the nobility shake hands. In an Alliance handshake, each person applies slight pressure first with the thumb then with the little finger. This works only for humanoid races, of course; elves rarely shake hands.

- **General warning:** This is useful when the speaker is being coerced into luring other Alliance members into a trap. To indicate danger, use a simple rub of the right eyebrow, three fast coughs, or some version of "it smells strange here."

"I seek contact": Rub the left hand across the bottom of the face, as though imitating a veil. In conversation, ask to find a merchant who sells fresh fruit, "but *not too* sour." Variants include meat (*not too* dry), pottery (*not too* expensive), etc.

"Need help quickly!": Clear the throat three times rapidly, look up, and conspicuously straighten the shoulders as if stretching. Help seldom arrives



Inside the Alliance

immediately, as members exercise extreme caution in a crisis.

"This place is unsafe": Draw a long breath through pursed lips, then exhale through clenched teeth, or observe that "it's getting hotter here."

Contact Procedures

When an Alliance member meets someone who purports to belong, wishes to join, or is seeking assistance, the member exercises caution. The member agrees to little at the first encounter and arranges a follow-up meeting within a few hours (if the situation permits).

Then, by regular or emergency channels, the member calls in several others, usually the rest of that member's cell. One, the "spotter," can detect lies either magically or psionically. The spotter accompanies the member at the next meeting. Other members offer back-up, hiding inconspicuously with weapons ready or surveying the scene clairvoyantly.

Joining

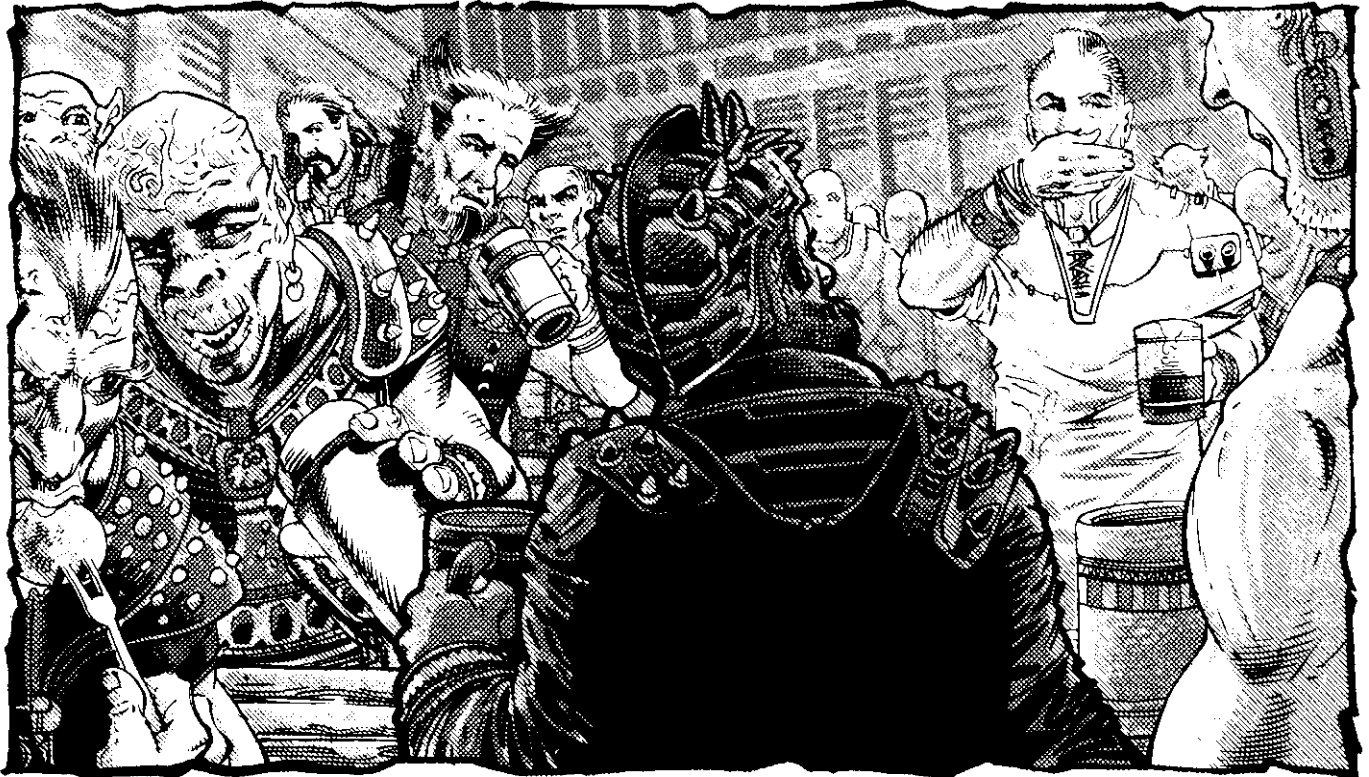
Short-Term Assistance

Most preservers belong to the Alliance. If a member identifies a non-member preserver, the member teaches the signs for "I seek contact" and "Need help," without mentioning the Alliance. "The signs are presented as a general, "If you're in trouble, try these."

This means that when an Alliance member helps a preserver, the member doesn't even know whether the rescued wizard belongs to the organization. After giving the help, the member may try recognition signals or subtle questioning to find out, perhaps with the idea of recruiting the rescued wizard. More often the member simply departs.

Recruitment

The Alliance, of course, constantly seeks new members. Secrecy makes recruitment a slow, deli-





cate matter. Make this process a deeply mysterious, atmospheric event in the campaign.

First, the recruiter drops subtle hints that “others like you live in this city.” To non-wizards (known associates of a preserver) the recruiter may say, “Others like your friend could use your help.”

If the candidate shows no interest, the attempt usually ends there. Given even tentative interest, the recruiter says, “If you wish to learn more, go about your business. For some time we will watch you. If we like what we see, we’ll contact you again,” and never mentions the Alliance by name.

Next come days of observation. A PC need never become aware of the scrutiny, and members don’t help the candidate except in grave danger. The observers look for evidence of non-evil alignment, non-defiling magic, useful skills, or simple bravery.

After an interval, a second contact leads to a formal invitation. The recruiter names the Alliance, describes its mission, outlines the local chapter’s doctrines, and stresses the policy of requital—a candidate who accepts membership and later quits becomes a fugitive marked for death.

The candidate can refuse now without prejudice. As a formal courtesy, the recruiter asks the candidate to keep the meeting secret, but this promise does not bind the non-member. The same candidate may even receive later invitations from others of different cells. If the candidate accepts the invitation, the initiation begins on the spot.

Initiation Ceremonies

All Alliance chapters begin initiation with the same first step, but thereafter each follows its own procedures. Initiation tests two criteria: first, that a candidate-wizard uses preserving magic; second, that the candidate shows intense commitment to the cause.

In the first step, called “the Green Test,” heavily-armed members of a cell take the candidate wizard

to a grassy or forested area, where entry may entail great risk (for instance, getting into the sorcererking’s gardens). They cast illusions and protect themselves from observation. Then, surrounded by vegetation, they ask the candidate to cast a spell.

If the wizard claims not to have any memorized spells, the members allow the candidate to study an elementary spellbook entry suitable for apprentices, such as a *cantrip* or *light*. If the wizard refuses to cast a spell, the members may attack or simply leave, depending on circumstances and suspicion level; in any case, the candidate fails the test.

Of course, if the candidate casts a spell and vegetation dies, the members attack the defiler.

Illusions: Now that defilers have begun infiltrating the Alliance, most members inspect Green Test candidates more alertly. They question every spell effect as a potential illusion; they may recruit psionists to check for psionic manipulation; they sometimes frisk the candidate for concealed magical items. (Remember that a magical item creates its effects without defiling damage and a user can activate many concealed items mentally or without obvious gestures.) Discovery of deceit usually leads to confrontation.

The second step: Non-wizards, and wizards who pass the Green Test, now receive a mission—a proof of their commitment, the “Test of Action.” The Alliance may ask the candidate to steal a local defiler’s powerful magical item, rescue a captive preserver, or undertake some other dangerous adventure.

When they fulfill the mission, the candidates take oaths in a solemn ceremony and become full-fledged Alliance members. Groups form their own cells; individuals may join an existing cell or start their own.

Duties

Recruits vow fulfillment of these duties:

1. Obey the Five Aims.



Inside the Alliance

2. Obey Council orders.
3. Hold regular meetings but vary locations.
4. Cautiously seek new members.
5. Never resign, and enforce requital on those who do.

Some chapters may require additional duties.

The Alliance imposes no code of behavior beyond the Five Aims, nor does it restrict movement. Members may come and go freely from the city-state.

When an entire cell leaves a city, simple etiquette calls for a farewell message, delivered by the usual channels, to the Council. They usually find out soon anyway, and a polite message, followed perhaps by magical or psionic communication with a Council lieutenant, forestalls any suspicion of an unannounced resignation.

If a group of Alliance PCs depart a city without this courtesy, they may find an unwelcome surprise when they return!

Meetings

Most cells meet every five to seven days and meeting times vary around the clock. A group of adventurers, as a single cell, automatically fulfills the duty to "hold regular meetings."

Circumstances: Meeting dates may move in response to changing situations. For instance, a sorcerer-king's crackdown on Alliance activity may delay cell meetings. By contrast, in a crisis the Council could accelerate the meeting schedule to daily or even more often. In campaign terms, adjust meeting times freely to suit a story's needs.

Activities: Meetings usually serve just to inform the cell that all its members still survive. That done, they may pass on messages from higher or lower in the hierarchy. Then members discuss problems or discoveries or simply gossip.

Locations: At the end of every meeting, members determine a new site for the next meeting. The locations never repeat more often than once every few





months. Inconspicuous, open sites work best to avoid both scrutiny and ambush. Typical locations include private homes, back rooms of taverns, shop attics, or prominent features outside the city.

Most player character groups don't worry about this, because they're usually together anyway. When the characters need to declare a formal site, let the players suggest locations.

Passwords: Along with the next meeting site, each meeting ends with a choice of password. Members must give the password at the next meeting. This helps detect helps shapeshifters and other impostors. Passwords are often obscure magical terms like "Cathexis." Let the players suggest suitable passwords for their characters.

Emergency meetings: Each cell member knows where and how to reach the other members of the cell. In an emergency a member rushes to another and gives the appropriate signal. The two, having agreed on a meeting site, split up to summon the other cell members.

Operations

The Alliance campaign focuses on missions from the Council hierarchy or other sources. Remember, though, all mission types may require support from other character classes.

Mission Notification

The Council originates most missions, passing them down to the appropriate cell in several ways.

Through routine channels: The Council usually employs either psionics or an item enchanted with the *magic mouth* spell. The Council spellcaster describes a member of the cell and sets the spell to trigger when that member enters the object's presence, then passes the object down the hierarchy with specific instructions that guarantee it will reach the appropriate cell.

The *magic mouth* may speak a meeting place and

time, and the recipient's cell meets the Council member there to get the mission. Or it may speak the mission itself, if it's simple.

Alternately, the enchanted object may let a Council mage or psionist "home in" on a particular contact's mind. After the contact touches the object, the link opens and the Council official gives the mission details.

Faster methods: A Council lieutenant may simply drop in on a meeting. The Council mages have tremendous abilities, and if they want to find a meeting location, they can. A high-level visitor usually carries a token of identification or has a display of appropriate skill ready. Though risky, this method gets a mission off to a dramatic start.

Typical Preserver Missions

Because the Council itself commands such magical power, it need not call upon preserver player characters for magical protection. Instead, the Alliance usually assigns missions to lower-level preservers that involve important but troublesome detail work.

For example, the Council may send a preserver and companions to a distant oasis to obtain an exotic spell component. The preserver might visit a library to obtain a scroll or research text. Though the Council regards these missions as simply logistical, they may be used as a pretext for exciting adventures.

On the other hand, the Council may specifically pass along a truly challenging mission such as, "Kidnap the local defiler's apprentice." The leaders could handle this themselves, but they might wish to test the preserver's skill or leadership qualities.

Typical Warrior Missions

Most chapters think of warriors as muscle, and their missions reflect this attitude. Orders may come



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down to a gladiator to rendezvous with and guard a visitor from another city. If a fugitive preserver needs sanctuary, a fighter sets up the refuge, then guards it.

Rangers receive escort missions. When fugitives need safe passage from the city, rangers guide them to a new and distant home, using their knowledge of the desert to ensure safe passage.

Typical Priest Missions

Any priest auxiliary can count on missions to heal a wounded preserver. This may call for a routine trip across town to a wizard's hide-a-way or the infiltration of a slave camp.

But the priest has other roles in the Alliance. Even in a world without gods, human societies have rites of passage, and elemental clerics can administer these where templars are not welcome. These ceremonies include confirmation of birth or adulthood, naming, feast, fast, atonement, purification, and any number of calendar ceremonies such as planting and harvest.

The Alliance may call upon druids to negotiate with NPC druids for safe passage through guarded lands. This could expedite a ranger's escort assignment.

Finally, priests often command powers of oratory and persuasion that the Alliance exploits in whispering campaigns against defilers or the local sorcerer-king.

Typical Rogue Missions

"Steal the local defiler's favorite magical item"—this is an easy and frequent choice for rogue missions. Others include tracing a sorcerer-king's agents or defiler movements, and whispering campaigns.

One risky mission inverts the traditional theft mission. The Alliance sometimes places magical eavesdropping devices in a defiler's hideaway or in templars' quarters. These devices work for only a short time and require frequent replacement.

Thieves and rogues enter the strongholds by stealth or trickery and replace the items.

Typical Psionicist Missions

Like rogues, psionicists engage in reconnaissance, sometimes without ever leaving their chambers. Clairsentient scanning, object reading, probability travel, telepathy, sight link, and many other disciplines fulfill a role in Alliance missions. The Council often assigns psionicists to parties of adventurers who lack their skills.

Powerful psionicists typically either rise to Council positions or ask the Council not to bother them much. When in the mood to help, a high-level psionicist may teleport a fugitive to a safe haven, plant subconscious impulses in the brain of an Alliance enemy, or wipe a troublesome enemy's mind altogether.

Very powerful psionicists (21st-level and above) eventually come to the attention of the Order. This shadowy and secretive organization tolerates the Alliance, but forbids entanglements in its intrigues.

Requital

The Alliance uses "requital" (pronounced with a long *i*, literally meaning "return" or "repayment") as a euphemism for assassination of departed members.

Requital goes back to the Alliance's earliest days. In the centuries since many members have argued for the policy's repeal, but supporters point out its invaluable role in the Chief Aim of protecting the Alliance.

Every few decades the controversy leads to a split, with part of a city-state's membership starting its own requital-free Alliance. This naturally leaves the apostates vulnerable to requital by loyalists, and civil strife follows. So far the loyalists have always won a pyrrhic victory. The squabbling cripples the chapter, creating unrest in other chapters for decades.



Procedure

When a cell learns that one of its members has defected, it must immediately notify the Council by all feasible channels, and then hunt down and kill the member. The message prompts emergency meetings and so reaches the Council with unusual speed, perhaps a day at most.

Then the Council contacts the original cell, learns what it can, and verifies the resigning member's death. If the member has not died, the Council sends emergency hunt-and-kill orders, with a detailed description of the target, to all members. At the same time it begins its own hunt.

The high-level wizards of the Council can search a city-state quickly using the *locate creature* spell in conjunction with *far reaching III* (two spells from the Tome Of Magic). If they cannot find the target in the city, they send the news by the fastest means to the Councils of other cities' Alliances.

Members hunt the escapee as a matter of principle, or as a result of orders. Others may join the hunt for more tangible rewards. The Alliance anonymously circulates a reward notice for the target's body. The reward ranges from 50 gp for a rank-and-file cell member to 5000 or more for a renegade Councillor. The Council uses every magical and psionic means to guarantee the authenticity of any body offered.

In game terms, a member who resigns from the Alliance encounters one attack from former cell-mates within 24 hours. The next 24 hours bring 1d6 attacks from low-level parties. The day after that, the Council descends on the renegade with one attacker from each character class, each of 8th-level or above. (For level, use the leaders listed in the appropriate city entry in Chapter 3, or roll 1d8+7.) If the renegade somehow escapes, 1d6 further attacks by mid-level parties follow each day he or she remains in the city.

If the whole cell has gone renegade, the departure

probably goes unnoticed until 24 hours after their next meeting was to occur. Then a Council member tries to contact the cell leader by magic or psionics; success in the attempt depends on circumstances, but allow it if it furthers the story or brings no harm to the PCs. If this does not allay suspicions, a renegade party that remains in the city soon encounters the full might of the Council. For the attackers, use the party described above, but triple their numbers.

Healing the Breach

Can a renegade return to the Alliance? Possibly, but it takes work.

The repentant member must first reach a Council member and explain his reasons without getting killed. If the Councillor believes the member's story, several psionicians scrutinize the member's brain intensively for lies, suspicious memories, and post-hypnotic suggestions. They search for any evidence that the member betrayed other members or Alliance secrets. This long and exhausting process lasts at least eight hours. A sorcerer-king, an advanced being, or a psionician of the Order could conceal ill intent from this scrutiny; lesser mortals cannot hope to do so.

A member who fails this test suffers a mindwipe, *feeblemind*, or other awful punishment, followed by execution. A member who passes the test enters a period of probation. The Council circulates a message calling off the kill order. Close day-to-day scrutiny follows, similar to the original admission process, but more strict. A Council member may subject the probationer to psionic scrutiny at any time, and often does.

If the member endures all this, the Council begins initiation anew, with a Green Test and Test of Action. A member who passes these can rejoin the Alliance, theoretically without taint of suspicion. In practice, the taint remains until the member carries out some unusually rigorous or exceptionally dangerous service.

Chapter 3: The Alliance in the Seven Cities

The bulk of this supplement describes individual Veiled Alliance chapters in each of the seven city-states. Each entry includes most or all of the following:

- **Overview:** Every chapter has its own style, goals, and challenges. Each entry summarizes the chapter's features, general approach, and degree of success.
- **The City:** A brief description of the local culture.
- **History:** The founding and past accomplishments of this chapter.
- **Problems:** Local issues and challenges peculiar to this organization.
- **Contacting the Alliance:** How to get in touch with the local leadership.
- **Initiation:** Each Alliance chapter has different ways to confirm new recruits. This section gives local ceremonies that can become scenarios.
- **Leadership:** Description and statistics for the major NPCs who run this chapter.
- **Headquarters: Description and map of a chapter's headquarters.**
- **Adventure Hooks:** Short ideas designed to inspire adventures appropriate to this Alliance chapter.

Campaign Style

An Alliance adventure depends on the Alliance's role in the campaign: Has it done well? Does the chapter even know how well it's doing?

The six following entries offer six different approaches. Each approach offers a different adventure style.

Aggressive, Successful (Balic): The chapter vigorously pursues its aims and usually meets them.

Members behave like genuine heroes, self-assured and pure, in a fashion rare on Athas. This style makes for upbeat and fast-paced adventures. Use it if the PCs should make a positive, dramatic impact on the campaign.

Aggressive, Struggling (Gulg): The chapter still actively tries to meet its goals, but fails to overcome powerful enemies. This type of campaign, heroic but tragic, suits Athas well. Adventures have an edge of desperation that produces drama.

Aggressive, Unknown (Draj): This mysterious campaign style emphasizes secrecy and quick escapes—the party seldom knows the results of its vital missions. This campaign emphasizes the Alliance's internal secrecy as well, with mysterious contacts handing down enigmatic missions for inscrutable purposes.

Defensive, Successful (Raam): The chapter mainly protects the status quo. It guards preservers and stops the enemy's various nasty plots. Here player characters valiantly defend the good, perhaps as the last bastion against the forces of evil or chaos.

Defensive, Struggling (Urik): Enemy strength and internal strife overwhelm the Alliance, but it hangs on in what seems to be a vain struggle. This somber, tragic campaign forces the heroes to their greatest courage and self-sacrifice.

Defensive, Unknown (Nibenay): A nightmare setting of attacks from unknown quarters, cryptic perils, and perhaps even betrayal. This dark, even Kafkaesque campaign tone, produces good horror adventures.

The first entry, Tyr, remains undefined. This text assumes that the Alliance campaign, like most DARK SUN™ campaigns, begins in Tyr. Choose the campaign style you like best, based on the other entries.



Overview

Campaign style: *Undefined*.

With King Kalak dead, Tyr's members hotly debate a central issue: Divulgence. Those who argue for immediate revelation include several Myrmeleons. Others favor continued secrecy. On each side a few members argue for a middle course of gradual revelation.

In this turbulent time, the player characters can exercise decisive influence. If they support Divulgence, they face the long-term challenge of revealing the Alliance to the public without invoking a mob attack.

The City

Population: 12,000 (70% human, 10% dwarf, 6% mul, 3% elf, 1% half-elf, 9% half-giant, 1% thri-kreen, a few halflings).

Emblems: Formerly Kalak's profile; currently undecided.

Economy: Iron, silk; economy currently in collapse.

Noteworthy residents: King Tithian; Timor, senior templar; Banther, arena manager; Mandalis, local head of The Order.

Tithian

Human Male Templar

17th-Level

Lawful Neutral

Str 9

Dex 14

Con 13

Int 18

Wis 15

Cha 16

hp: 56

AC: 10

#AT: 1

THAC0: 10

Dmg: by weapon

Unusual sites: Shown on the Tyr city map in the boxed campaign set.

Tyr, in the last days of Kalak's reign, appears in detail in the boxed campaign set, in the adventure *Freedom*, and in the first DARK SUN™ novel, *The Verdant Passage*. This section outlines some events in the city since Kalak's death. Further information appears in the *Dragon Kings* hardcover rulebook and the second novel, *The Road To Urik*.

Even with Kalak dead, Tyr has had to rely on the only people skilled in running the city, the templars. They have no spells now, and their traditional infighting has escalated even further, but they remain in power. Now, though, the templars cannot display their previous high-handed arrogance, and every ranking templar travels with bodyguards to protect against roaming lynch mobs.

The mobs comprise many former slaves, freed by King Tithian (one of Kalak's former templars) but not yet employed in paying jobs, and disaffected freedmen who seek advancement through thievery. Soon after his coronation, Tithian created a dole to give the mobs a small daily food ration, and they have squatter's rights in the tumbledown slave warrens. They remain a menace in the workers' and tradesmen's quarters, and at times have even ventured boldly into the wide avenues of the noble homes.

Tyr's economy, still in a shambles, is slowly rebuilding after a disastrous war with nearby Urik. Many former slave workers in the iron mines have returned there, this time for high wages—though some never live to collect their first paycheck, for the work remains as dangerous as before. Rumor says the templars hire "troublemakers" to work the mines by promising extravagant salaries, then get a week of work out of them and have them conveniently perish in an "accident."

Culture: For months after Kalak's failed attempt to attain dragon form by killing the city's entire population in the gladiatorial arena, citizens refused to



Tyr

return there. They still followed the blood sports fanatically, but only in informal bouts in the marketplace or other meeting places about the city. Now a group of enterprising gladiators and veterans have reopened the arena with official approval, charging an admission of 2 ceramic pieces (half price for children) for an afternoon's gory entertainment.

In times past Tyrians also sought diversion in singing (dissonant yet strangely moving melodies) and dancing (a vigorous, rhythmic stomping). The visual arts found their highest expression in elaborate and colorful skin tattoos. In these unsettled times, though, few can afford to indulge their vanity or appetite for leisure.

History

Tyr's Alliance, now some 400 to 500 years old, has endured longer than all Alliance chapters. In the king's ages since, the Alliance here struggled against Kalak's particularly vigorous persecution.

Simple survival has become its most notable success.

The society owes much of that success to its long-time leader, a transmuter named Acritus. For three centuries, or so legend says, Acritus diligently followed the Five Aims and the principle of requital, permitting no controversy on that sensitive point. He owed his success to a keen understanding of Kalak's mentality. Legend claims Acritus gained this understanding as a boy, when he studied psionic disciplines with Kalak himself, but few believe this legend today.

Much given to shapeshifting magic, he evaded certain doom on at least two occasions by its use. Acritus *polyymorphed* a volunteer or prisoner (accounts disagree on this point) into a copy of Acritus's own form, then had the subject slain in public (or apparently slain, again accounts disagree). In both cases, though the victim's death dispelled the shapeshift, too little remained of the body to allow identification.





The aforementioned uncertainty of historical accounts suffuse almost all matters involving Acritus. His greatly extended lifespan, triple the human norm, has led to much speculation that the original Acritus died after a normal lifespan, and a dynasty of wizards impersonated him in the following centuries. Other rumors say that the wizard shapeshifted into a large brown stone and still lives, if such a state can be called "living," somewhere out in the desert. Probably no one will ever learn the truth, for no one has seen the wizard in the last two king's ages.

Since Kalak's death and Tithian's succession to the throne, official persecution of the Alliance has ceased. Perhaps the role of the sorceress Sadira in elevating Tithian contributed to this happy change. Certainly the chaos that long besieged the city also played its role, for the government had many higher priorities.

But the public's resentment of magicians continues unchanged. The disappearance of one old threat and the presence of the other has led to the current controversy over Divulgence.

Contacting the Alliance

The Tyr Alliance, small like all Alliances (it currently has fewer than 100 members), cannot monitor the city-state and surrounding territories in depth. But because Tyr covers so little area, hardly more than a square mile, open display of magic in any public place often alerts at least one member wizard. If the foolhardy public mage avoids instant lynching, the Alliance may soon contact him or her with warnings or aid.

Those who want to contact the Alliance without throwing fireballs on a crowded street should look for a plaza "bathed in bright yellow light. . . surrounded by six wine shops, two brothels, and a gambling house, all of which have burning torches in the sconces outside their doors." (Troy Denning, *The Verdant Passage*, page 85.) Suspicious and shady

characters dwell here in the Elven Market, so many that one more (such as a mage) usually escapes notice. Characters should check the Drunken Giant wine shop.

Initiation

In a time beyond living memory, Tyr's founders built this city in a green forest. In later centuries the forest gave way to a tremendous swamp, as Athas began the gradual decline into its current sorry state. The original city sank in the swamp, but King Kalak ordered a new city built over the old one. The dark, echoing ruins of that earlier city, UnderTyr, now offers the Veiled Alliance an ideal testing ground.

After the usual Green Test, candidates enter the undercity by any of various routes. The trapdoor beneath a stone table in the Drunken Giant gets little use. Instead, candidates use other entrances in deserted parts of the Warrens, free from unwanted observers. They must enter UnderTyr, find their way through the vast labyrinth to one of the temples of the forgotten past, and enter the temple. Only good and brave characters may enter; the wraith-like "crimson knights" who serve the ancient powers turn others back. Then candidates return to the surface.

An Alliance psionist or mage clairvoyantly follows the candidates' progress. If they succeed, an Alliance cell waits to accept them as they emerge from UnderTyr. But if the crimson knights turn away a candidate, the unlucky person finds a powerful corps of Alliance wizards and warriors, who either kill the unfortunate candidate or pronounce a sentence of exile. Having learned too much about the Alliance, the candidate must leave the city by the next sundown or face requital.



Tyr

Leadership

Matthias Morthen

Human Male Preserver

18th-Level

Lawful Good

Str 13

Int 23

Dex 13

Wis 12

Con 13

Cha 17

hp: 44

AC: 10

#AT: 1

THAC0: 15

Dmg: by weapon

Proficiencies: Dagger; Ancient History +1, Ancient Languages, Bargain, Etiquette, Heat Protection, Psionic Detection, Religion, Reading/Writing, Somatic Concealment.

Psionics: immovability.

Background: Matthias, now in his late forties, has served the Alliance since age nine. His father, a Council lieutenant, raised him to carry on the family's mission. But Matthias worked his way onto the Council by his own merit, through careful study and attention to detail. He has never known much life outside the Council.

Matthias's profound learning, skill, and experience have earned him wide respect and have brought Tyr's Alliance through difficult times under Kalak. So far as everyday administration goes, Matthias surpasses all others. But now that Kalak has died, some say the times demand new strategies such as Divulgence.

For new strategies though one cannot look to Matthias. His lengthy tenure has taught him strength, but has also given him the limited outlook of a (albeit competent) mid-level bureaucrat. He resists all arguments for Divulgence, citing many reasonable lessons from his three decades of

experience.

Appearance: Matthias is balding, jowly, with pendulous earlobes, but genial, possessing an incongruously wise look. He dresses simply, except for two enchanted copper armbands, which are legacies from his father. The left armband holds a *protection from evil*, 10' radius spell (three charges/per day); the right, *protection from normal missiles* (three charges/per day). Matthias triggers them with the command words "borgan" and "lathro."

Role-playing: Matthias has keen political skills and avoids offending anyone; play him as compassionate and avuncular, with a pleasant wit. Player characters should gradually notice his stodginess in trying new ideas and his lack of vision. Though a sympathetic character, he will eventually provoke the PCs into major disagreements.

Romila Parthian

Female Human Preserver/Thief

Dual-Class W12/T3

Neutral Good

Str 12

Int 20

Dex 17

Wis 11

Con 15

Cha 17

hp: 40

AC: 7

#AT: 1

THAC0: 17

Dmg: by weapon

Proficiencies: Dagger; Animal Handling, Bargain, Herbalism, Reading/Writing, Somatic Concealment, Spellcraft +1.

Psionics: catfall.

Background: Romila grew up as a street urchin in Tyr. As a young girl she picked a wizard's pocket, found a scroll, and discovered an innate talent for magic. Her victim tracked her and recruited her into the Alliance, where she eventually rose through



diligent service to the position of Council lieutenant. From this point her story resembles Matthias Morthen's, and she admires him devoutly. Many regard her as Matthias's "other self." But Romila, who is more worldly, knows the need for change. She has become the chief proponent for Divulgence.

Recently Romila secretly fell in love with another Council lieutenant, Athrialix. He seems to recognize the pressures she endures and the sense of duty that motivates her. In contrast, no one recognizes the true Athrialix—a defiler, and the highest-ranking Myrmeleon infiltrator in any Alliance. He has been quietly urging her and her sympathizers to a dramatic Divulgence. His plan sounds reasonable, but he knows it would bring disaster on the entire chapter.

Romila feeds and looks after a ragtag band of urchins who live a hand-to-mouth existence on the streets. These *Ragtag's* serve as her eyes, ears, and early-warning system.

Appearance: Small, thin, and intense, she looks younger than one would expect (about 24). She has a poise beyond her years.

Role-playing: A convincing advocate for Divulgence, Romila seems disturbingly eager. PCs should note her sensitivity to any questions about Athrialix. She shows less tact than she might, but she serves capably and means well.

Given the choice between her imprudence and Matthias's caution, the party may give up on them both. Try to emphasize the two leaders' positive qualities and let them listen to voices of reason when appropriate.

Athrialix Denestor

Human Male Defiler

9th-Level (impersonates 5th-Level Preserver)

Lawful Evil (pretends to Lawful Neutral)

Str 13

Int 22

Dex 18

Wis 8

Con 20

Cha 20

hp: 40

AC: 6

#AT 1

THAC0: 18

Dmg: by weapon

Proficiencies: Dagger; Psionic Detection, Reading/Writing, Sign Language, Somatic Concealment, Spellcraft.

Psionics: conceal thoughts, psychic impersonation.

Background: The late King Kalak gave Athrialix many small, concealable magical items and sent him to spy on the Alliance, but the young defiler didn't locate its headquarters until just after Kalak died. Now, mistrusting the new King Tithian, Athrialix ponders what new patron to seek—local templars, or another city's sorcerer-king?

Meanwhile, the young man is plotting deep trouble for the Alliance, so that he can spring a plan to "rescue" them and thus take control. His well-concealed streak of megalomania convinces him that he could then lead the Alliance's wizards in a massive assault on the dragon and wrest from it the secret of immortality. Athrialix conceals this mad notion behind his most potent psionic and magical screens.

Appearance: Athrialix is a very thin, prematurely balding young man with a few strands of blond hair combed high over his tanned pate. His high-boned cheeks bear gill-like slits, a curious congenital defect without function except that he can open and close the gills at will. They lend him a perpetually haggard look. He dresses conventionally and walks with a stealthy, shuffling gait.

Role-playing: Never let on that Athrialix contemplates insane power fantasies. Like all successful Myrmeleons, he conceals his true nature with perfect aplomb. He displays great charm toward Romila, but outside her presence he loses interest in



Tyr

discussing her.

Notes: Athrialix carries numerous concealed magical items that he can activate mentally to duplicate preserver spell effects without defiling the land. Create these as the story requires, concealing his deception until PCs can root it out.

Hephaestus Domitian Darian Twile

Human Boy Thief

1st-Level

Neutral Good

This young street urchin leads the **Ragtags**, the gang of children that Romila has befriended. A charming fast-talker, Twile gives the player characters occasional gossip and insights into recent events. But he always wants a price, whether it's a ceramic bit or just a mouthful of water. "Hey, gov, a bit of information can fetch a good price in the right market. You want I should take my merchandise elsewhere?"

Twile entertains suspicions about Athrialix, but he won't mention them as long as Athrialix continues to make Romila happy. The party also can't rely on Twile's information regularly because they can seldom find him. The Ragtags wander the city (and undercity), leaving a trail of petty thefts and minor mischiefs. If the player characters ask others for Twile, they discover he gives a different name to everyone he meets, and grafts new additions at will to his already formidable name.

Headquarters

The marble ruin of Kalla-Kouro lies in Tyr's northwest Warrens, about as far away as it can get from Kalak's ziggurat and still remain inside the city wall. The building's reputation as a haunt of ghosts (and worse) keeps most superstitious citizens away. The falling rocks, strange noises, and festering odors fend off the rest. Only members of the Veiled

Alliance enter this ruin. for it holds their headquarters.

In Tyr's ancient history Kalla-Kouro served as a public bath. Today Athasians can barely imagine the idea of a single bath, let alone a public bathhouse, and so the large, high building has become a mysterious antique. A decade ago the Alliance found it, excavated a small subterranean headquarters, and began an elaborate charade to repel casual visitors.

Illusionists created spectral forms, odd sounds, and other eerie illusions. They placed *magic mouth* spells on the entrances triggered to shriek menacingly when anyone entered. Their illusions made chunks of rock seem to fall from above as an intruder crossed the tilting floor. Rogues and clerics passed chilling rumors throughout the Warrens.

Within a week citizens deserted the Warrens around the Kalla-Kouro ruins. Now Alliance members live in the vicinity or hold cell meetings in the area's many tumbledown structures. Only the most resolute intruders visit the former bathhouse, ignore its illusions, carefully cross the upthrust tile floor, and venture into the sunken bath itself where the headquarters entrance lies cunningly concealed behind a pile of debris. There hidden psionicist guards place strong fears or disquiet in the minds of persistent visitors.

If all these measures ever fail to protect the headquarters, Gonazz and Murth stand ready inside the entrance. These two half-giant guards (5th-level gladiators, 46 hp, N) carry crossbows and obsidian knives, and they stand (or crouch) ready to mow down anybody who can't give the right recognition signs. Unfortunately, the recognition signs change a little faster than they can remember, so they often argue with people asking entry.

Map Key

The Council hollowed out this divided chamber



by magic and main force. The twin arms of the chamber originally served two separate functions. Mission planning on the left, led by Matthias, and routine administration on the right, supervised by Romila, have recently become by unspoken agreement separate headquarters for the chapter's pro and anti-Divulgence factions.

The left half: The three rooms comprise Matthias's spartan living quarters (guarded by a *crystal parrot* from the Tome Of Magic); a large research and testing room, a guest room, used as a refuge for fugitives or interrogation of prisoners, and a meeting room.

The testing room currently holds several obsidian spheres, taken from King Kalak's ziggurat after his death. Kalak required these spheres for his attempt to transform into a dragon, as detailed in the Dragon Kings rulebook. The spheres' magic vanished with their owner's life, but Alliance specialists have diligently tried to unlock their secrets nonetheless.

The right half: In the various chambers along this

hall psionics take shifts, clairvoyantly surveying the surrounding area, sending routine messages to other Council members, and so on. One room holds a small selection of spell components and scrolls, packed in a couple of trunks for easy portability during an evacuation. The sick room holds healing herbs and poultices in clay jars, along with several padded cots and clean linens.

The "Second Room": Romila has converted one of the spare rooms here into another meeting room, where her pro-Divulgence supporters gather to debate strategy. All visitors to the headquarters understand that the second meeting room represents a silent, non-threatening symbolic gesture.

Since this "Second Room" debuted, Matthias has found excuses to avoid entering this half of the chamber, nor has Romila entered his half. If Matthias summoned her there, she would go-probably. Tension in the stronghold has increased perceptibly, as everyone waits to see what happens the day Matthias actually sends for Romila.





Tyr

Safe House

Another sanctuary in the Tradesmen's District, once the official Alliance headquarters, still serves as an emergency hideout for wizards far from Kalla-Kouro. A small and unassuming shop that once sold musical instruments not far from the arena now appears closed and boarded over. An Alliance member who whispers the phrase "Free Tyr" in the back alley triggers a *passwall* spell that allows entry through a plain adobe wall.

The small, dark shop holds a store of food and water, a dozen sets of templar robes and other costumes in assorted sizes, and first-aid equipment such as bandages, herbal medicines, and tourniquets. A *crystal ball* or other communication device lets the user contact headquarters, at the DM's discretion.

The Alliance operates similar safe houses around the city, changing their locations every year or so. The entire Council can relocate to any of them at a few hours' notice, making its new headquarters there.

Divulgence in the Game

Should the Alliance go public? The DM must decide according to what direction he wishes the campaign to take.

The Issues

Almost all residents of Athas outside the Alliance hate and despise wizards. Can preservers teach the populace the difference between preserving and defiling magic? Will the people listen? Having listened, will they care?

What else does Divulgence entail? Public revelation of each member's identity? The Alliance headquarters? If so, how can they avoid attacks from fanatics? If not, how can the wizards build the public's trust? Perhaps a dummy public headquarters should be set up, staffed by expendable auxiliaries

in the event of a backlash? Some in the Alliance find this suggestion despicable.

What about revealing just the names of known defilers, then letting mob justice do its work? Would this manipulation of hatred help the lot of preservers?

If the wizards divulge their existence, then what? Do they take a hand in governing Tyr, or use their magic to help the city recover? Or should the society avoid directing its members toward a particular goal, instead letting them pursue their own aims?

Each of these thorny questions has at least two sides, and in the Tyr Alliance it seems someone represents every possible combination of views—remarkable for an organization so small. In headquarters and at cell meetings, the debate has gone on for months and many exhausted members have begun to think about forcing the issue.

What will happen?: The player-characters should exercise decisive influence on the debate. They may act to provoke Divulgence themselves, or they may happen upon a Divulgence plot and prevent it. If they meet with the Council on a mission, they could argue persuasively for one side, showing the opposition the error of its ways. To dramatically demonstrate this, one faction could journey from its meeting room to the other faction's chamber.

What makes the player characters right and their opponents wrong. The story's plot, of course. Everything depends upon the direction the campaign will go.

Directing the Action

The beginning of this chapter listed the many tones a Veiled Alliance campaign can take. Divulgence and its results can transform the campaign into a new style.

Suppose the campaign should emphasize heroism, and the player characters should help make Athas a better place to live (or at least a less deadly



place to survive in). In this scenario, Divulgence should work fairly well. With a suitably dramatic demonstration, citizens realize that not all wizards share responsibility for the destruction of Athas. With genuine aid to the populace, preservers build support. People come to them for help. Members can communicate freely with each other through a public headquarters. The public's acceptance comes slowly, but the party can improve the Alliance's position through its heroism.

If you prefer the somber campaign approaches or don't want to change the Alliance's role so drastically, then Divulgence fails—or would have failed, if the player characters prevented it. No one understands or cares about the distinction between preserving and defiling magic. A demonstration of magic or revelation of the wizards' identities would bring down the wrath of the entire city, united in hatred. Redoubled persecution would drive the Alliance back underground, weaker than before. From then on, the characters must draw on their last reserves of strength to defend their cause.

Deciding: Each style has its virtues. Decide whether to change things for the better, for the worse, or to preserve the status quo. Having determined Divulgence's outcome, plant clues that the player characters may use to make their decision. If Divulgence would mean suicide, stage a few scenes of lynch mobs pursuing exposed preservers, and let the party overhear tavern patrons' vitriolic expressions of hatred against mages.

But if Divulgence would be the best thing that ever happened to the Alliance, the player characters should detect notes of confusion among the citizens in the marketplace, and a spirit of acceptance. Encourage them to risk a few good deeds of magic to rescue desperate people from their plights, and stress the rescuees' gratitude. Soon the players should understand that Tyr has grown ripe for change.

A devious DM might plant misleadingly favor-


able clues, provoke the player characters to support Divulgence, and then bring down disaster on the Alliance. Don't! This betrayal gains nothing but bad feelings and could destroy the campaign.

Adventure Hook

1. The characters hear of the "haunted" bathhouse in the Warrens. Investigating, they discover the Alliance headquarters and must evade death long enough to explain themselves. Morthen overcomes his natural caution long enough to let the party face initiation. He needs allies in the Divulgence controversy. Alternately, the party may find the headquarters during Romila Parthian's shift, and she recruits them for the same reason.

2. Athrialix has finally convinced Romila to force the Alliance's hand on Divulgence. She and her sympathizers plan to go to the market and make grass grow everywhere, then follow this with a fireworks show and entertaining illusions. This, they hope, will promote public acceptance. (Talk about entertaining illusions!)

The player characters hear about this from Twile, the street kid, who has also finally seen Athrialix cast defiling magic. The boy barely escaped with his life, and now the defiler hunts him. The player characters may try to head off the Divulgence, or they might lend their support to make sure it comes off well. Then they should go after Athrialix. To protect Twile, they should bring him along—at least, so he argues. In the adventure Twile works as a story device to provoke or sidestep plot complications.



Balic

Overview

Campaign style: *Aggressive, Successful.*

Balic's Alliance has found itself powerful allies. The Dictator, Andropinis, continues to oppress and enslave Balikite citizens. One by one, non-wizard nobles and artists have resorted to the desperate measure of Alliance initiation. Most of those who know of the Alliance view it as one way to strike back at Andropinis.

The current Council leader shows such wisdom that the Balic Alliance, unlike all others, consents to follow a non-wizard. The former slave Ramphion, a popular rhapsode (poem singer), leads the city's wizards though he knows no magic. How did he attain this post? In Balic the members elect their leader.

The City

Population: 27,500 (80% human, 8% dwarf, 3% mul, 4% elf, 4% half-giant, 1% thri-kreen, a few half-elves and halflings; 5% patricians, 15% freemen, 80% slaves). Natives are called "Balikites."

Emblems: Sun, sheaves of grain (in peace); sword, shield (in war).

Economy: Grain, salt, olives, kank nectar; livestock, leather; silver.

Noteworthy residents: Andropinis, sorcerer-king dictator (21st-level dragon, LE); Oriol of Magestalos, First Speaker of the Patricians (O-level normal man, 4 hp, LN); Zanthiros, General of the Militia (F13, 70 hp, LE); Orianestra, Palace Songmistress (R6, 18 hp, LN); Elvar the druid, protector of the dictator's orange groves (DS, 32 hp, N).

Unusual sites: The Megaleneon, the dictator's palace; imperial olive and orange groves; Merchant Emporiums in the agora, surrounded by the Elven Market; amphitheatres around the city, sites of play competitions; and the Shining Bridges, monumental marble bridges across silt-filled ravines around the agora.

Balic looks clean, if not pleasant. Its monumental buildings feature ordered designs of friezes, pedi-

ments, staircases, and spacious porticos surrounded by fluted marble columns. Winds sweep through echoing peristyles enclosed by long colonnades. Wide streets radiate from Andropinis's central fortress.

The bloated and egomaniacal sorcerer-king holds regular parades in his own honor. In these lavish processions he rides in a wicker howdah atop Holostos, the royal mount, an albino inix. City guards and soldiers compel all to attend and cheer. A citizen may only offer illness or severe injury as excuses not to attend; those who skip attendance end up with illness or severe injury anyway.

Dress: In Balic the patricians wear a body-length pleated shirt (a *chiton*), often with a short cloak (a *chlamys*) that leaves the arms bare. The cloak, typically expensive linen imported from Draji, bears a sedate pattern of checks, thin stripes, and sometimes even flowers. Women girdle the chiton just above the waist and wear their hair curled and pinned up with bone or wood pins. Noble women may also wear a waist-length shawl called a *peplos*, but this often proves too hot for even the most overdressed Balikite matron. Older human males wear pointed beards, but young men wear no beard; all cut their hair short. Both genders wear sandals or boots of inix leather.

Culture: Ancient ancestors of modern Balikites developed an elaborate non-religious mythology of fictional parables, like fairy tales. This legendary world pervades all the city's culture, drama, epic poetry, and music.

Poets seldom write their epics; rather, they memorize and recite them, then teach them to performers called rhapsodes. A rhapsode recites or sings a portion of some popular epic as entertainment at patrician gatherings, or in the agora for the ceramic bits of passersby. Many rhapsodes compose their own work as well. The rhapsodes fulfill the same functions as bards in medieval society, but they do not belong to the AD&D® bard character class and receive no special class abilities.



The cultural scene, though distorted to reflect propaganda needs, still draws the intense interest of patricians' and freemen. The city sponsors competitions among playwrights and rhapsodes, awarding high honors to those whose work gains the most favor from the audience.

Citizens attend these competitions in huge numbers, probably as a refuge from everyday oppression. Because of this popularity, intellectuals among the Alliance have begun planting subtle messages of rebellion in their works. Nothing overt, for everything is translated into mythology, but a message which is still clear to the more perceptive members of the audience. Alliance authors have even used their plays and epics as covert recruitment devices.

History

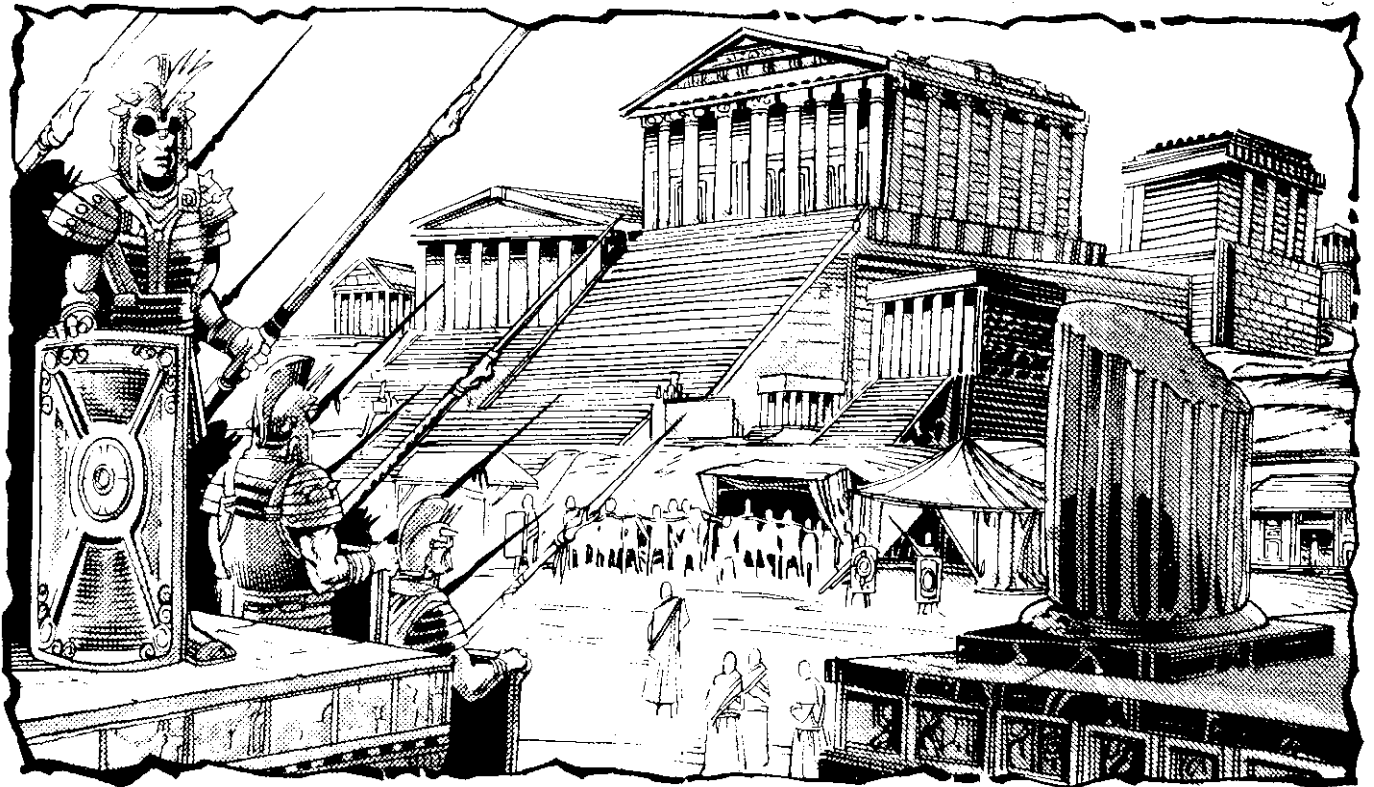
The Veiled Alliance arrived late in Balic, because most citizens here showed slightly more tolerance for magicians. In the last century Darminius the Ab-

jurer visited Tyr to procure a spell component, the hair of an elf maiden. He learned of that city's ancient Alliance while fleeing a pack of elf women who resented his inquiries. Fascinated with the idea of a secret society, and fully convinced of its need, he returned to Balic and began organizing his own chapter.

The society's message of struggle against the sorcerer-king found little favor until recently. For a long time the electorate tried to reform the government through election of templars. This method failed.

After a disastrous visit from the dragon 50 years ago, Andropinis cracked down even harder on the populace to get them to rebuild. Amid this latest oppression, reform-minded candidates for templar often won elections, but most soon perished in unusual "accidents." The others mysteriously lost their reforming zeal after a visit to the dictator's palace.

The turning point for the Alliance came with the recent death of the templar Rampholon. This high-





Balic

mindful reformer won a sweeping victory in the last election a decade ago, and survived long enough to repeal several hated edicts taxing the sale of salt, forbidding certain marriages, and restricting the growing of oranges and other delicacies. Then his son, Ramphion, woke one morning to an anonymous telepathic message. Following its directions, he found Rampholon's body on the outlying reaches of the estate, buried under a pile of salt. The same day, Andropinis reinstated the edicts.

The templar's removal stilled the open unrest, but in the next play competition Ramphion offered a stunning drama called Hero's Burial. It retold a well-known myth of a hero's protest against, and punishment by, evil spirits, but recast the story in symbolic terms that alert audience members could not mistake. Following the play's victory in its competition, the Alliance recruited Ramphion and he quickly rose to its Council. In the next Cathexis election of Council leaders, the membership voted Ramphion its leader. In his four terms since, he has brought the Alliance to a new height of influence.

Contacting the Alliance

Visitors from other cities who try the usual recognition signals usually elicit a whispered message or enigmatic note: "Attend the play."

Theatrical performances or rhapsode recitations occur almost daily at various amphitheatres around the city, usually starting in early morning and finishing before the heat of noon. The works' not-quite-open expressions of rebellious spirit may astonish the newcomer. These plays enjoy such popularity that the dictator must tolerate their subversive tendencies.

Some works even present wizards in a somewhat sympathetic light, or indicate an awareness of the difference between preserving and defiling magic. These usually mean the author or presenter belongs to the Alliance. The visitor who wants to contact the Alliance may start with the performers and follow a

chain of references to a cell member. Auxiliaries of the Alliance may even work the productions themselves!

Initiation

After the usual "Green Test", the Council currently favors missions that hurt Andropinis, however little. "Go into his palace, break a vase, and bring back the fragments." "Go into his library of scrolls and steal the oldest one you can find," and so on.

Less capable candidates must enter the orange groves and bring back oranges. The dictator allows only his highest templars and staff to enter these gardens. The more fruit candidates bring back, the better their chances.

Sometimes it's even easier, depending on the Alliance patron administering the initiation. Given the electioneering that goes on for the leadership, a patron may prefer to induct new members sure to vote his way, waiving the usual requirements "for a while." This has led to some Myrmeleon infiltration in lower ranks.

Leadership

Elections

Balic cherishes its strong tradition of voting on important issues. Granted, the votes for the last thousand years have made little difference and only a small minority, the patricians, can actually vote. Nonetheless, the idea of free elections permeates the entire society.

Leaders in other cities usually choose their own successors. In Urik, rival factions literally fight to replace their lost leader. Only in Balic do Alliance members vote.

The election for a leader and three lieutenants takes place in a Cathexis ceremony. An election usually lasts about one minute. The winner assumes office after 10 days.

Elections occur every three years; the next election



takes place in the year of Priest's Reverence, one year after the beginning of the standard DARK SUN™ campaign. You may instead hold the election shortly after the PCs join the Alliance, so they can either run for the Council or exercise influence in the election. If they run, consider adjusting the number of lieutenants elected, so that every player character can find a spot.

Ramphion

Human Male Rogue

9th-Level

Lawful Good

Str 14

Int 17

Dex 18

Wis 16

Con 13

Cha 20

hp: 50

AC: 6

#AT 1

THAC0: 16

Dmg: by weapon

Proficiencies: Dagger +1, Quarterstaff, Sling; Ancient History, Disguise, Forgery, Jumping, Local History.

Psionics: aura sight.

Background: Ramphion had already won more than one play competition before his Hero's Burial took the Golden Leaf ten years ago. He became disaffected and distrustful of the city government only after the death of his father; originally he saw the Alliance as a worthy cause because it fought the dictator.

In the years since, Ramphion has grown less optimistic about the chances of overthrowing Andropinis. But he has come to respect preservers as "fellow artists." Magic fascinates him, though he has no aptitude for it himself. Ramphion's skillful oratory and political savvy brought him enough votes to lead the chapter. Now in his fourth term, he has done well.

Appearance: He is a hale, hearty man in his early forties, well dressed, perhaps a touch vain about his carefully curled hair and beard.

Role-playing: Ramphion displays sharp insight, a realistic appreciation of situations, respect for others' abilities, and delicacy in handling crises—in other words, fine leadership. He tries to conceal his boyish fascination with magic, except among friends.

Zaethus Nauripides

Human Male Preserver

8th-Level

Lawful Good

Str 12

Int 17

Dex 14

Wis 16

Con 15

Cha 14

hp: 28

AC: 10

#AT 1

THAC0: 18

Dmg: by weapon

Proficiencies: Dagger, Quarterstaff; Ancient History, Etiquette, Modern Languages, Reading/Writing, Riding (Land), Spellcraft. Psionics: contact, mindlink, invisibility.

Background: This once prosperous patrician devotes his small remaining fortune to the Alliance. He also provides its headquarters. A close friend and ally of Ramphion, Zaethus has known the leader longer than anyone else in the Alliance.

Zaethus, though a patrician, drew his family's scorn because theater fascinated him. He even took to the stage under an assumed name. He met Ramphion when he acted in one of the playwright's first works, and they became friends. Zaethus joined the Alliance along with Ramphion, gave up the theater, and redeemed his family standing just in time to inherit the estate. Zaethus still secretly indulges his passion for acting in a way that not even Ramphion



Balic

knows about.

Zaethus wears a *ring of polymorphing* that allows him to change shape three times a day. An elderly Council wizard bequeathed it to him as a legacy, in thanks for his loyalty to the Alliance. Now Zaethus uses the ring to impersonate any of several imaginary "henchmen" whom he pretends to employ.

He journeys to a hideout on his estate under cover of psionic invisibility (his native wild talent), then takes another form. Zaethus uses three forms, representing his three nonexistent henchmen: Mord the mul, a half-giant named Hrink, and an elfwoman, Davriana.

The nobleman plays all these roles to the hilt, coloring his portrayals with distinctive behaviors and background details. Just as someone begins to wonder why the three henchmen never appear together, he (as Mord) may drop a remark alleging intense dislike of Hrink, or paint Davriana as untrustworthy. In this way, observers fall to wondering about the individual mysteries, ignoring the larger mystery.

Appearance: *In true form* Zaethus appears tall, thin, in his mid-fifties, with silver hair and lined aristocratic features. He dresses in highest fashion, favoring paisley designs, and moves with conscious grace.

As Mord, he wears an apron and sandals of inix leather, and sports elaborate abstract tattoos on the shoulders and back.

In half-giant form, vestigial tusks grow from his upper jaw. Long, incongruously blond hair tumbles down his curved back. He wears only a breechclout and a burlap cape.

In Davriana's form he appears a willowy young elf woman with yellow eyes, tight brown blouse and leggings, leather boots, and a hooded poncho with brown camouflage pattern. "Her" brusque and arrogant manner provokes suspicion in everyone around.

Role-playing: Zaethus acts the decent fop, but is self-indulgent and delicate of taste. Though he re-

ally is a fop, he exaggerates the behavior. This leads some to overlook his genuine intelligence and political skill.

Zaethus provides PCs with their easiest path into the Alliance. He will recruit heroes (and most anybody else) who promise to vote for Ramphion. His short-term political gains have led to long-term danger, as his recruits have included myrmelon agents.

Sestus Dimosthenus

Human Male Fighter/Defiler

Dual-Class F7/W4 (pretends to F7 only)

Lawful Evil (pretends to Lawful Neutral)

Str 18

Int 16

Dex 18

Wis 8

Con 20

Cha 17

hp: 42

AC: 6

#AT 3/2 rounds

THAC0: 13

Dmg: by weapon +2

Proficiencies: Bow, Crossbow, Dagger +1, Sword +1; Blind-fighting, Etiquette, Hunting, Survival, Tracking.

Psionics: aura alteration.

Background: Zaethus recently recruited Sestus as another vote for Ramphion. In fact, Sestus, a Myrmeleon agent, serves Andropinis. Trained as a warrior and spy, he showed great ability, and so Andropinis gave him minimal instruction in magic (defiling, of course), provided him with magical items to pass the Green Test, and told him to locate the Alliance headquarters and leadership.

So far Sestus has completed most of the assignment. He has heard Ramphion speak to his cell, and he has talked his way into a Council meeting at the Nauripides villa headquarters. Sestus could go to Andropinis right now with enough information to destroy the Alliance.

But Sestus has ambitions. He believes the Alli-



ance holds a treasure trove of magical items somewhere in Balic, and he wants them for his own. He won't report anything definite until those items appear and he can grab them. He now believes that only winning the position of Council leader can achieve this.

Sestus spreads anonymous lies about Ramphion's plans, and he has begun to sabotage meetings of Ramphion's supporters. With the dictator's cooperation, he has sprung more than one disaster on the Alliance, disasters caused by Ramphion's "errors."

Soon Sestus will announce his own bid. He will get Andropinis to donate magic sufficient to throw the Cathexis election to Sestus. Then he will have power enough to head to the Forest Ridge, root out and enslave the halflings, and found his own city-state. Sestus dreams large dreams, and only this has kept the Alliance alive.

Appearance: He is of medium height, wiry, and in his mid-twenties; a seasoned fighter. Sestus wears armor as heavy as the heat permits, and carries a broadsword in a sheath of oiled leather.

Role-playing: Sestus exudes great confidence and carries himself with poise. He seldom speaks. A well-trained spy, he faultlessly carries off the pose of loyalty to the Alliance. However, he has an easily roused foul temper that may lead him to ill-considered actions.

Notes: While wearing his usual armor and wielding his usual weapons, Sestus cannot cast defiling magic.

Headquarters

The lovely but faded villa of Zaethus Nauripides stands on a small plantation near the city gate. Over the generations, both the sorcerer-king's ruinous taxes and the surrounding estates' shady maneuvering have eaten away at the Nauripides lands. Now, surrounded by thin fields of low, dry wheat plants, the villa displays the last faded elegance of a once-

great family. Zaethus lives here with his elderly widowed sister, Venithia, and four domestic slaves.

Map Key

Exterior: The house has two stories, the second of which is smaller and set forward, leaving an open second-story platform in back. This balcony has no rail or curb, nor a door into the house, but Zaethus sometimes secretly climbs here when in elf or mul form, then invisibly spies on those talking in the upstairs rooms or in the portico below.

The walls of thin brick do little to keep the house's temperature consistent, but they protect against most attacks and resist breakage well.

Interior: Chalk-white flagstones pave the courtyard and portico. Rich tile covers most other floors, and expensive Raamish rugs adorn the bedroom floors. The furniture in every room, though old and worn, shows elegant taste. Scented candles light (but don't heat) each room during the cold desert nights.

Andron (reception room): Zaethus and Venithia greet visitors in this tasteful room, serving sweet hayfrond tea, sesame wafers, goat cheese, and various condiments.

Workshop: This windowless room has thicker walls than the rest of the house. Here Zaethus supposedly dabbles in woodworking, pottery, and other respectable noble hobbies. In fact, the clutter simply conceals the trapdoor entrance to the family tomb beneath the villa. When the Alliance meets below, they *wizard lock* both this trapdoor and the workshop door.

Underground: The family catacombs now hides the Veiled Alliance.

Rough-cut stones line the passage, or *dromos*, to the tomb's antechamber. The dusty rooms leading off this chamber each hold the remains of many past leaders of the Nauripides, now one with the dust that coats every surface in the tomb. These rooms



Balic

hold no treasure, only a jumble of tattered cloth, rotted wooden shields, and other once-prized heirlooms.

The room marked "Library" currently holds the Balic Alliance's voluminous records of its history, meetings, research notes, and so on.

The antechamber leads to a domed tomb, or *tholos*, a circular room with a vaulted ceiling propped up by a square pillar. This tomb once held the remains of the Nauripides founder, and it may yet—but Zaethus has emptied the room of all epitaphs and memorabilia. In this room the Alliance holds its meetings, hides refugees, and sometimes experiments with new spells or recently acquired magical items. This can hold (DM's discretion) the "treasure trove" Sestus seeks.

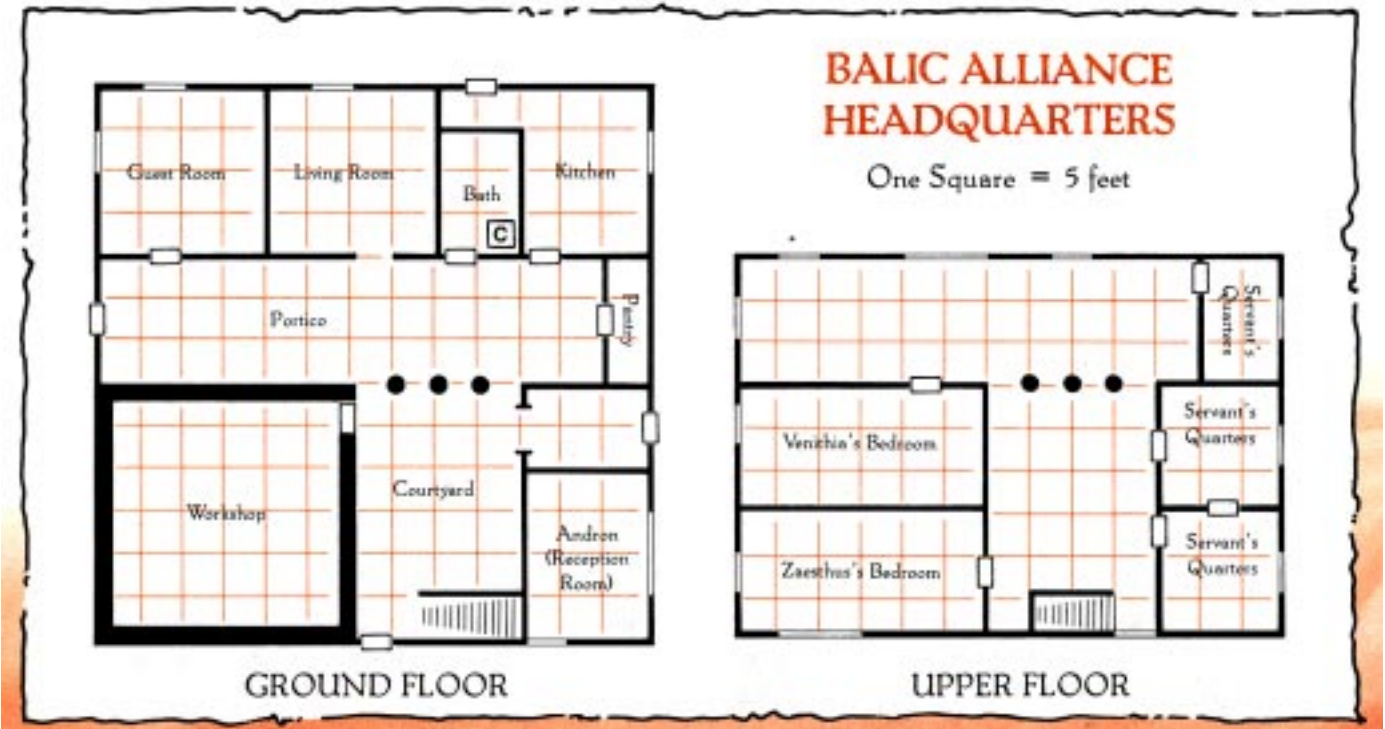
Adventure Hook

A witness reports to the Council that Zaethus's three henchmen attacked an Alliance cell during a

meeting and killed everyone except the witness. The news travels through the cells by emergency channels, setting off a scandal and provoking bad feelings against Ramphion.

Only Zaethus knows that these three henchmen don't exist. Rather than reveal his secret, he contacts the PCs to investigate what happened. Alternately, Sestus or another rival of Ramphion can recruit the party, asking them to track the three henchmen. The trail leads to Zaethus's villa, where alert characters discover the noble's secret shapeshifting. Then he recruits them himself, to find out who impersonated the "henchmen."

Sestus arranged the attack by hiring three escaped slaves and using a wand (a gift of Andropinis) to *polymorph* them into the desired forms. The investigation leads to these three slaves, but probably no further, for Sestus hired them while in disguise—himself. The party can clear Zaethus's name before the upcoming election, but they will incur Sestus's certain wrath.



Overview

Campaign style: *Aggressive, Unknown.*

Draj's sorcerer-king, Tectuktitlay, hungers to find the local Alliance headquarters. From his throne room in his pyramid home, the Temple of two Moons, he has ordered three dozen searches throughout the city.

All the while, the Alliance leaders plot further attacks in their stronghold, a few dozen yards beneath the king's sandalled feet.

Impossible? No. Tectuktitlay built the Temple of Two Moons long ago as a shell directly over an earlier, centuries-old pyramid. This meant a larger pyramid for less work. The Alliance works within the smaller, buried pyramid, surrounded by Draji skull racks that animate and chatter in the presence of defiler magic.

The City

Population: 15,000 (60% human, 15% dwarf, 5% mul, 15% elf, 3% half-elf, 2% half-giant, a few thri-kreen and halflings; 40% freemen, 60% slave, fractional percentages of nobles and Moon Priests). Natives are called "Draji" or "the Draj."

Emblems: Feathered serpent, smoking mirror, jaguar, and other ferocious creatures.

Economy: Wheat, rice, other grains, hemp; turkeys, rabbits, textiles, straw mats, and pottery.

Noteworthy residents: Tectuktitlay, sorcerer-king (22nd-level dragon); Chilocotec, commander of the army (Fly, 70 hp, LE); Queen Tionaca, the Flame Woman (D8/Psi8, 30 hp, LE); Ixtabai the Blind, master at the House of the Mind, the king's psionics academy (Psi12, 48 hp, LN); and Maxtlixoco, high templar (T15, 45 hp, LE).

Unusual sites: The Two Moon City (the walled administrative compound in the city's center); Father and Master Temple (the king's pyramid palace); the *tlacochalco*, or arsenal, within the palace; Temples of Ral and Guthay, two lavish shrines to

"divine Tectuktitlay"; Flower War Field, outside Golden Moon Gate; royal menagerie; royal jaguar-breeding pens; hempworks, slave-powered mills.

Layout: Draj extends over a larger area than any other city-state except Raam, and Raam must accommodate far more people in its equal area. The bulk of Draj contains seemingly endless hemp and grain fields, carefully segregated into plots and farmed by slaves. The Moon Priests maintain a bureaucracy as extensive as the fields they supervise, responsible for distributing slaves, collecting harvests, processing fiber, and meting out citizens' rations of grain. They also stage an elaborate, annual cycle of fertility rites.

Beyond Two Moon City, the city-state has no fortress walls. Instead, a mud moat surrounds the squarish central city, separating it from the fields. Entry into this mud moat incurs the death penalty.

A stone road crosses the moat, providing the only entrance into the city. At the entrance stands the Golden Moon Gate, a thick wooden gate inlaid with obsidian and a decorative tracery of copper. Slaves meticulously polish this metal daily. Golden Moon Gate impresses visitors with the greatest concentration of metal in Draj outside the palace and the Temples of Ral and Guthay. A corps of guards discourage theft.

Culture

The sorcerer-kings in all the Seven Cities rely on cruelty and violence. But only Draj makes these part of its very culture. At all levels of society the Draji value cruelty, strength, and ferocity, and they sneer at weakness or respect for the enemy. Warriors enjoy the highest status, rogues the lowest--few rogues remain alive in Draj for long.

The main Draji ceremonies all involve war. The "Flowery Wars" (training battles) occur twice a year. Soldiers dress in full feathery regalia, with jaguar headdresses and many trophies hanging from



Draj

wide leather belts. They fight with real weapons, which are stone-edged clubs. The winners gain glory; the losers get exiled.

The city's symbols display this preoccupation. ferocious jaguar, though now almost extinct outside the Forest Ridge and the sorcerer-king's breeding pens, still represents the city's vicious attitudes, as does the feathered serpent (probably a mythical creature). The smoking mirror, a traditional Draj emblem, indicates a polished obsidian slab. Superstition says that a coward who peers into the smoking mirror sees a dark reflection that will animate, emerge from the mirror, strangle the coward, and take his place in society.

Almost all Draj have coppery skin, black hair, black eyes, and little or no facial hair. Most have a wide face, thin lips, and a prominent chin. Slaves wear white breechclouts of hemp cloth. Everyone else dresses in loose, bright-colored shirts and skirts. All citizens except children wear some kind of head-dress, as simple as a roll of cloth or giant-hair braid

among the slaves and commoners, and more elaborate among those of higher status. By law, only warriors may wear more than one feather.

Draji families belong to large clans with lengthy histories. The eldest member of each clan leads with unquestioned authority. Clan elders gather periodically in long buildings called *tecpans* to debate and resolve problems too ordinary and routine to concern the templars.

The Draj frown on dance, drama, and most music as deviations from purity. They redirect these artistic impulses into the composition and recitation of ceremonial chants. The chants beseech Tectuktitlay or the spirits of the land not to harm the city, or thank them effusively for not having harmed it. Of the other art forms, only sculpture and painting command respect, and only when they glorify violence and war.

Architecture: The Draj build low, flat-roofed pueblos with small square windows and open doorways. Dyed mats or feather mandalas decorate their





walls.

Crafts and science: Draj shows proficiency in some other areas. Draji weavers build advanced looms and Its feather-work excels all other cities save Gulg.

In contrast to its puritanical arts, Draji cuisine surpasses all expectations. Slaves predictably receive only plain bread and raw vegetables, but even common freemen dine well on heavily spiced dishes of corn, red and green peppers, several kinds of grain, and dried, pemmican-like erdlu meat. Everyone washes down the meal with a fermented cactus juice called *pulque*.

The Draj and Raam calendars, though mutually incompatible, predict the motions of the sun and moons more accurately than any other in the Seven Cities. The Draj calendar numbers years in groups of 90, apparently a sacred number for Tectuktitlay. Scholars presume this comes from the appearance of the messenger comet every 45 years—for each cycle begins with its appearance. Draji astrologers regard the comet's onset as a time of momentous omens. Certain years receive extra days to conform with the heavens.

The calendar labels each group of nine decades in a regular cycle of nine symbols drawn from the city's folklore: White Jaguar, Moon, Prince, Red Jaguar, Blood, War, Black Jaguar, Serpent, and Mirror ("Prince" refers to a set of legends about Tectuktitlay before he founded Draj). Historians give each cycle of 810 years an ordinal number, but common usage seldom requires this.

The DARK SUN™ campaign begins in Nineteenth White Jaguar 84. The messenger appears in six years, when the calendar is reset at Moon 1.

The Black Guards

The Draji only call Tectutitlay their hero when they see templars in earshot. But citizens voluntarily name three other famous residents of the city as he-

roes, though these "heroes" serve the king. The three Black Guards, enormous obsidian golems, guard the royal palace and the two temples devoted to Tectutitlay's glory. The king created the three guards centuries ago, and their facial features all resemble his: broad, squat, jowly, thick-lipped, and flat-nosed, with narrow eyes and sharp cheekbones.

The Alliance's sparse historical records (now very illegal) imply that the king originally commanded a force of several dozen golems. No record tells the fate of these, if they ever existed. He has not created any more golems for centuries, and no one knows the reason for this either. Some speculate that the king offended a powerful elemental being who forbade further creations. Wishful thinking, perhaps, but no better explanation exists.

The obsidian Guards have become one more symbol of power among the many in Draj. The king parades them before his public in semi-annual ceremonies. These parades culminate in a secret rite inside the palace (possibly a magical renewal of the golems' energies) attended only by the king and his highest templar. Tectuktitlay trusts the golems implicitly, to the point of entrusting the lowest levels of his palace entirely to them, rather than relying on weak and fallible mortals.

History

Draj's extremely remote location explains the youth of its Alliance chapter, the newest of any in the Tyr Region. Historical records fix its inception firmly in the year White Jaguar 1 of the Draji calendar, corresponding to the Tyr calendar's "Year of Desert Defiance" in the 189th King's Age.

In that year the messenger filled the sky with unusually brilliant light, visible even in daytime. The omen prompted Tectuktitlay, for obscure reasons, to hunt wizards with great vigor. To escape the dragnet, the preserver Diatlaxi fled by night to nearby Raam. There he met more danger from the local



Draj

mansabdars, who at the time were waging one of their countless minor wars with Draj. They almost arrested Diatlaxi, but by chance a Councillor of the local Alliance happened on the scene and together the two men overcame the troops and escaped.

Diatlaxi befriended the Raamish wizard, named Virvidna. The Councillor, learning of preservers' problems in Draj, showed Diatlaxi secret Raamish intelligence records that told of a passage (then sealed) into Tectuktitlay's palace, the Father and Master Temple.

Impressed with the idea of the Veiled Alliance, heretofore unknown in Draj, Diatlaxi joined the society. After a month or two, though, the "licentious and libertine atmosphere of Abalach-Re's pestilent domain" (as he later put it) forced the puritanical Diatlaxi to seek Council permission to leave the city. He returned to Draj and founded the chapter there. After long study and planning, the group secretly entered the king's pyramid by the lost passage, explored, and finally set up headquarters.

Despite this audacity, the Council never succeeded in attempts to infiltrate the palace staff. The Raamish Alliance could capitalize on the sorcerer-queen's apathy toward her underlings, but Tectuktitlay oversees his Moon Priests with relentless zeal. He would spot and destroy spies within a week. The Council dares not magically or psionically eavesdrop on the king, only a few dozen yards above their heads, for he would detect these and discover them.

The society has tried much but accomplished little around the city. It has successfully promoted a few rivalries among the Moon Priest templars, but then those probably would have occurred anyway. The whole chapter appears ripe for better organization.

Unfortunately, no likely prospects to provide this leadership have appeared. The founder, Diatlaxi, died of old age a few years ago, after a lengthy reign. He appointed no successor, for over the decades he

grew still more austere, and no current member has satisfied his stringent tests of morality. (Most agree no one could have.) The current leader, Chimali Zaachila, governs well enough, but she carries a deep secret that prevents solid action. In this atmosphere, the PCs might provide the first decent leadership in years.

Contacting The Alliance

Close by Two Moon City, hundreds of merchants pitch colorful awnings or tents. In their shade they lay out food of all kinds, clay pots, feathered head-dresses, bolts of cloth, hemp rope, twisting sticks of mint candy, rabbit skins, gourds, woven mats, curios, and spices. Some offer many strange items of mysterious purpose: trinkets, luck charms. . . spell components?

A character with Spellcraft proficiency might recognize a component, then delicately question the seller. Use this opportunity to build suspense. Does the merchant himself know what he sells? Possibly, but the merchant may have picked up the component as a novelty and may instantly turn over a suspected mage to the city guard.

Initiation

A wizard candidate here faces the Green Test in one of the hemp fields outside the city. Draj's hemp plants tower eight to ten feet tall, with thick stalks and high branches that bear deep green, fern-like leaves. Here, in the dead of night, a well-armed cell asks the candidate to cast a spell. If the plants die, so does the defiler. Unlike other Alliances, the Draji leave the body in the open, as an example.

After the Green Test, the cell usually requests a further test. After two or three days, during which the request filters up by the usual channels and back down, the Council usually assigns a rescue mission.

Rescue: At any time many prisoners await judg-



ment on the pyramid. Most of these prisoners committed either major or minor crimes; any infraction in Draj brings the death penalty, except in rare cases (usually involving the nobility) when the king commutes the sentence to exile. Preservers and auxiliaries never receive this mercy, so the Alliance often takes a hand, testing candidates in the process.

Draji society has no concept of "jail," so the guards hold prisoners in detention pens—lines of small wooden pens at various places around the city. Their lax security measures make rescues easier than they sound. With proper tactics and courage, a party can spring a prisoner unnoticed.

Four 4th-level warriors guard a typical line of five to 15 pens, a pair of guards on each end. Each guard carries an obsidian sword (1d6-1 dmg) and the short spear and rope (1d4 dmg, target caught on a roll of 3 or 4). They may also carry small wicker shields blazoned with the warrior's family arms. Each pair works a staggered, four-hour shift.

The wooden cells have walls three inches thick, wooden hinges, and primitive peg locks. Each cell barely holds one prisoner; sometimes the Draj join two or three cells together to hold larger prisoners.

Leadership

Chimali Zaachila

Human Female Preserver

4th-Level (pretends to 14th)

Lawful Good

Str 12

Int 20

Dex 12

Wis 13

Con 14

Cha 21

hp: 14

AC: 8 or less

#AT: 1

THAC0: 17

Dmg: 1d4 or by spell

Proficiencies: Ancient History, Spellcraft +2.

Psionics: control light.

Background: Like Balic, the Draji Alliance has a leader of minor magical abilities. Unlike Balic, the Draj chapter doesn't realize this.

Many years ago Chimali, an anonymous O-level sage in the Two Moon City, researched the cultivation of corn. In her spare time she studied the history of magic and wizards. Chimali grew obsessed with learning some real magic. She deduced that a mul slave, Cocoton, served as an auxiliary in the Alliance. She asked to join and study magic.

Impressed by her intelligence and personality, Cocoton took Chimali to Diatlaxi, the Alliance leader. Chimali impressed him also. He took her on as aide de camp and apprentice, and he kept her low skill secret from the Council. Chimali pretended to higher powers, in order to serve her leader; Cocoton helped her conceal the deception.

When Diatlaxi died, Chimali boldly took the lead, bluffing her way by using her extensive lore. She has subordinates to cast spells as an "exercise." Cocoton protects her with psionics.

Appearance: Chimali is an impressive old Draj woman who appears trustworthy and wise. She usually wears a bright smock and fringed poncho. She draws her long black hair up in a topknot held with a wide copper band.

Role-playing: Chimali acts in utter confidence, never uncertain and seldom deigning to offer an explanation for a slip. Increase her proficiency as necessary to continue her bluff, a mere lack of knowledge should not betray her, as this lacks drama.

Notes: When Chimali casts spells (rarely) her magic produces a bright yellow glow above the target and a deep, irregular drumming sound.

After the founder's death, Chimali publicly claimed his *ring of protection* +2. She later claimed other items that provide protection and conceal her bluff. Create these as necessary and continue the deception until a player deduces it.



Draj

Cocoton

Male Mu Fighter/Psionist

Multi-Classed F7/Psi7

Lawful Good

Str 20

Int 20

Dex 13

Wis 15

Con 20

Cha 12

hp: 45

AC: 8

#AT: 3/2 rounds

THAC0: 11

Dmg: by weapon +3

Proficiencies: Harness Subconscious, Hypnosis, Musical Instrument (flute), Reading/Writing, Rejuvenation.

Psionics: 31 PSPs; all-round vision, combat mind, danger sense, poison sense, spirit sense; contact, conceal thoughts, ESP, false sensory input, identity penetration, mind bar, mindlink, truthhear; aura alteration, psychic surgery. Defense modes: All but tower of iron will.

Background: Diatlaxi recruited Cocoton into the Alliance while the mul was still young. The founder saw in him an ideal warrior and spy. He secretly taught him to read and write, and ordered a psionist to train his mind.

Only the mul knows Chimali's secret, and he uses every power at his disposal to conceal it. Cocoton serves Chimali loyally, in more ways than anyone else suspects. He believes she can benefit the Alliance, given experience.

Appearance: Big and muscular, Cocoton looks dumb and impassive, for he conceals his native intelligence. He wears padded cloth armor of Draj make, and has tattooed both arms with the city's usual symbols of war.

Role-playing: Quiet but alert, Cocoton skillfully avoids arousing suspicions of his psionic ability. He "retreats to safety" near Chimali when under at-

tack, shielding her but pretending that she shields him.

Some alert characters may realize Cocoton conceals his inner self if they hear him play his flute. When not guarding Chimali, the mul sometimes relaxes at night by sitting beneath the moons and playing heartfelt, longing tunes of great beauty and sadness.

Nauhyotl Chalca

Human Male Preserver

12th-Level

Lawful Neutral

Str 13

Int 16

Dex 14

Wis 10

Con 14

Cha 12

hp: 35

AC: 10

#AT: 1

THAC0: 17

Dmg: by spell

Proficiencies: Dagger; Etiquette, Herbalism, Modern Languages, Reading/Writing, Spellcraft.

Psionics: control wind.

Background: Nauhyotl served Diatlaxi well, and the young man fervently admired the founder's piety, even though, in the elder's opinion, Nauhyotl fell far short of that ideal himself. Now, Chimali leads the Alliance, and Nauhyotl serves her too, despite her obtrusive mul guardian. But something about her bothers him. . . .

Because of this uncertainty, Nauhyotl hasn't yet reported the templars' latest attempt to infiltrate the Alliance. A mysterious old templar visited Nauhyotl in the night. He hinted that Nauhyotl knew something of magic, and of many who practice magic. If so, Nauhyotl might gain wealth and influence in return for cooperation with the king's worthy goals. Nauhyotl said nothing, and the templar de-



parted, leaving behind a genuine gold coin.

Gold! Nauhyotl had almost never seen it, let alone owned it. He decided a hundred times to throw the coin away, and reconsidered each time. He hardly knows what to do.

Appearance: He is a bright, upstanding-looking young man, thin and wiry, with an owl-like stare.

Role-playing: Nauhyotl means well, at least for the moment. But he has unhealthy ideas, feels sensitive about his uncertain status, and can rationalize anything. Not yet corrupted, he may become corrupt, especially if the PCs assume greater favor than he.

Notes: Nauhyotl's spells create a shimmering aura, like desert air on the horizon, around his hands and every object in the affected area. His spells also create the sound of desert wind and the smell of dust.

Headquarters

The Alliance headquarters resides beneath the shell of Tectuktitlay's Temple of Two Moons. The king built this pyramid five centuries ago over the shell of a smaller one he had built eight centuries before that. He has all but forgotten about the smaller pyramid, and none of his Moon Priests have ever heard of it.

During the larger pyramid's construction, a band of audacious thieves bribed several templar foremen to alter the plans. They built a secret entrance from the palace grounds inside the jaguar breeding cages to the interior pyramid. They planned to steal into the new palace from underneath, then loot the place and retreat the same way.

After the thieves escaped the palace with their plunder, the templars turned them in to Tectuktitlay—though a portion of their loot “mysteriously” vanished. Tectuktitlay had the secret tunnel sealed-but not filled in. Perhaps he ordered this, but the templars failed to carry out the orders.

The tunnel remained intact, and generations later the Alliance discovered it.

The King's Palace

The upper levels of the Father and Master Temple (those built on the shell of the earlier pyramid) contain many administrative cells, a large holding cell, a kitchen, and domestic rooms. A lower level holds rooms where the king confers with his templars and generals.

The lowest levels of the outer pyramid contain treasure rooms and living quarters for Tectuktitlay and his queen, Tionaca, called the “Flame Woman” for her red hair. These levels have no living guards. Only a Black Guard, aided by lesser magical sentinels, protects them.

(Red hair? Tionaca grew up in Raam of Balilan parents, refugees from Andropinis's occasional purges. Draji soldiers took her prisoner during an incidental war with Raam 20 years ago. Tectuktitlay saw her among the prisoners, took her as his concubine, and eventually married her. He gave her the Draji name *Tionaca*, meaning “firelight”, and forbade her from using her given name, Niobe. She has strongly mixed feelings about Tectuktitlay.)

The Black Guard does not patrol the lowest level. No one enters this level except the king and queen. It contains just one room: Tectuktitlay's Crystal Garden.

The Crystal Garden: For 14,000 years the finest jewelers of the Seven Cities filled this room with perfect quartz replicas of plants. Here are ferns, each tiny leaf a faceted stone; spike-leaved maguey cactus, their serrated edges fracturing the light into rainbows; translucent marigolds and camellias, and towering palms; even tall corn plants and cotton bushes, every frond and twig translated into glass.

Council members disagree on the room's purpose. They know that conventional jewelers crafted the crystal plants, and they hold no magic except



Draj

curses inflicted upon anyone who breaks the fragile leaves. Some speculate that Tectuktitlay practices new curses here, using the crystal plants as victims.

The Entrance

The secret passage begins in the jaguar cages of the Two Moon City, directly abutting the pyramid. Xicotencatl, a young Alliance auxiliary who works in the breeding pens (Ra3, 14 hp, LG) always keeps the passage's cage empty and escorts members to its floor trapdoor. All members must give the password, "Have you fed the jaguars their erdlu wings today?"

The unlit passage, three feet wide and seven high, leads up a very long slanting staircase and levels off after a rise of 150', at a 30' tunnel. It ends in a 10'-square room lit by a single torch that burns endlessly, without smoke. A narrow (5' wide) staircase leads down 15 feet.

The open stairs going down end in another,

smaller room lined with wooden racks of human and demi-human skulls of those who have died in service to the Alliance.

Between the racks, on all sides of the room, run long vertical slots. Guards staff these arrow slits, ready with bows, crossbows, and missile spells. Priests stand ready to cast *silence*, 15' radius, and other defensive spells.

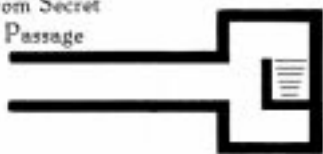
Over many years Diatlaxi laid permanent *detect evil* and *alarm* spells on some of the skulls. The *alarm* does not produce a loud ring, which might alert those in the outer pyramid overhead. Instead, it sets the skulls' teeth clattering. As soon as the guards hear this either they open fire or they ask for the password ("Beneath the king's feet"). Only those who answer correctly may enter. (Optionally, this version of the *detect evil* spell can instead detect only defilers, whether neutral or evil, and not other evil beings.)

The room offers no cover. The only exit, a thick door of agafari hardwood, locks from the other side,

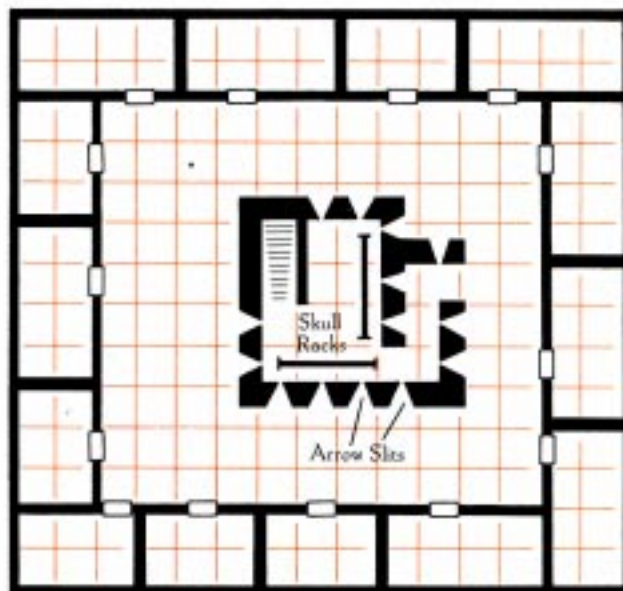
DRAJ ALLIANCE HEADQUARTERS

One Square = 5 feet

From Secret Passage



UPPER LEVEL
ENTRYWAY



MAIN LEVEL



and Alliance preservers can *wizard lock* it at short notice. A sharply bending anteroom beyond the door leaves intruders vulnerable to attacks from the arrow slots.

The Headquarters

A round the stairwell barricade the Alliance has taken over a dozen small rooms, all on the same floor. The society has not moved further into the interior of the pyramid, because it does not need more space yet, and the lower levels hold long standing dangers that rose from the centuries-old evils of Tectuktitlay.

Each of the twelve rooms has foot-thick sandstone walls and a low arched entrance with a thick wooden door. At any time, up to a half-dozen Councillors may occupy private quarters in as many rooms. The remaining rooms hold items recently acquired, spell components, a non-magical scroll library with documents dating back before the Draj Alliance's founding, and two shelters for refugee wizards.

Chimali discourages magical experimentation here, for fear of detection from above. Most masking spells, such as *non-detection*, require expensive spell components that the Alliance can hardly spare. In emergencies she allows it, so long as the spellcasters erect proper magical camouflage.

Adventure Hooks

1. King Tectuktitlay installs a new device in his Crystal Garden, directly above the Alliance stronghold. The evil device vampirically draws life energy from everything in a large radius to grow new quartz plants for the Crystal Garden. Unknown to Tectuktitlay, the item, a cistern or basin, has weakened the Alliance in its headquarters below.

The PCs learn of this plight during a routine visit. They have little time, hours at most, to trick the king into giving up the item or to steal it from the Crystal Garden. If they fail, the Alliance still survives, but those Councillors who fell victim to the

vampiric drain die or lose energy levels. The PCs may have to help find a new headquarters.

2. A new headquarters? Perhaps the solution lies below. The Council must clear out a new level of the interior pyramid—either because it needs more space or to escape the device's radius of effect. The Councillors recruit the PCs to explore and exterminate.

Alternately, something evil escapes from the lower levels and paralyzes or controls all the Councillors. The PCs must infiltrate the pyramid without falling prey either to the guards or the new menace, and drive it away.

3. This hook works best for higher-level characters.

Sensational news out of Raam: Two refugee preservers claim their kidnapped daughter became the queen of Draj! They believe Tectuktitlay has corrupted Tionaca's fundamentally good nature, and they want to confront her alone to sway her back to the path of right. The Council debates strenuously, but the prospect of recruiting the queen compels them to attempt the contact.

The PCs become involved when the Council entrusts them to arrange the details. They don't want to risk exposure, so they employ competent auxiliaries with the arrangements. They insist that nothing in the process reveals the location of the Alliance headquarters. Otherwise, they grant the heroes wide latitude, as well as great rewards if they recruit Queen Tionaca.

Can the attempt work? You decide the outcome based on the direction you want the campaign to go. Recruiting Tionaca would boost the Alliance's fortunes tremendously. But to maintain the "Aggressive Unknown" tone, you may want to leave the players uncertain as to whether their characters actually succeeded. Perhaps the evil Tionaca only pretends to cooperate, but she dares not reveal the Alliance's strategy to the king—because she hopes to enlist the wizards as pawns in her scheme to take control of the kingdom herself and depose Tectuktitlay.



Overview

Campaign style: *Aggressive, Struggling.*

Gulg's Alliance survives mainly because it avoids directly opposing the city's sorcerer-queen, Lalali-Puy. The organization does not see her as a great danger despite her infamous personal cruelty – citizens recognize her as the Tyr Region's only benevolent dictator.

Instead, the Alliance here pursues a still more far-fetched goal. Alone among the seven chapters, Gulg's Alliance works aggressively to restore Athas to its former verdant glory.

Attainment of this dreamers' goal has met little luck. The principal reason lies with its sole leader, who blindly follows the orders of an entity called "the Shadow Tree." He believes this *tree of life*, hidden underground, represents a reborn deity. The tree actually harbors a duplicitous, irrational ghost whose instructions will drive the Alliance to ruin -unless the PCs can help.

The City

Population: 8,500 (80% human, 5% dwarf, 3% mul, 7% elf, 3% half-elf, 2% thri-kreen, a few halflings and half-giant slaves; 5% templars, 15% nobility, 20% noble kin, 60% slave). Natives are called "Gulgs."

Emblems: The hegbo, a large lizard regarded as a loyal guardian of its young; also many abstract symbols.

Economy: Hunting, livestock; fruit, vanilla, cloves, spices, nuts; copra; textiles, feathers; some furs and hardwoods.

Noteworthy residents: Lalali-Puy (pronounced "pie"), sorcerer-queen 21st-level dragon); Modagisho, her lieutenant and advisor (male, Tmp18, 60 hp, LN); Taibela, Chief of Thieves, freeman (male half-elf, F9/T11, 35 hp, LN); "Agafari," real name unknown, local head of The Order (female, Psi21, 70 hp, NG); Spunt, palace clown and slave (female halfling, T5, 20 hp, CN); and Habban-

Puy, Fetish Keeper (C8, 25 hp, LG).

Unusual sites: Sunlight Home (Lalali-Puy's palace); Mopti Wall, a miles-long thorn wall around city (mopti, "thorn tree"); the Grove of Mysteries, the forest grove outside Gulg, guarded by the druid Extambolan (mul, Sphere of Earth, D15, 50 hp, N).

Of the sorcerer-kings, only Gulg's Lalali-Puy genuinely wants to rule her city well. Though not kind by any standard, she recognizes that her fortunes depend on the city-state's health. As a result, citizens of Gulg find life more than halfway livable. Only templars and the nobility could call their lives "good," but even slaves live tolerably well, compared to their counterparts elsewhere.

The reason lies in the society's uniformity, strong cultural values, and system of nobility. The culture reveres the wisdom of elders, the sanctity of forest life, artistic expression in all parts of life, and harmony between society and the wild. Nobles attain their status only through keen understanding of the forest. Their hunting supports the city and most of them realize the interconnected nature of life. Other cities on Athas seldom reach such enlightened understanding. Nibenay, in particular, regards the forest purely as a source of raw materials. This helps explain the bitter hatred between the two cities.

On the other hand, Gulgs mistrust foreigners and show little tolerance for nonconformists, exiling such "criminals" for life. Those who commit real crimes suffer torturous imprisonment until the next Red Moon Night, when eager hunters chase freed prisoners through the forest.

Gulgs prize hunting skill. Some outsiders who know of their deep reverence for animal life find this a curious contradiction. Elaborate Gulg folklore justifies the hunt as a contest between hunter and prey. Once caught and killed, the prey's spirit escapes to the forest to inhabit a new body, beginning the contest anew. Hunters thus feel a bond with animal prey. In contrast, they feel only contempt for the



humans and demihumans they hunt each Red Moon Night, for these opposed the social order—the ultimate crime.

Culture

From time to time everyone observes that no two families on Athas seem to have quite the same skin color. Though this holds true in Gulg as well, people here tend toward much darker skin than anywhere else. They possess wiry black hair and eyes, except for more than the usual number of albinos (the “moon people”). Gulgs overall grow taller than citizens elsewhere, and tend toward thin builds and long necks, with a pronounced bulge on the back of their heads.

Both males and females dress in brightly-colored skirts; women wear longer skirts hung from one shoulder. Older people wear loose pale-colored caftans, a mark of status. Every adult displays some sort of jewelry, from heavy earrings to elaborate

bead necklaces.

Architecture: The Gulgs build their homes with sun-dried clay bricks and thatch their roofs with straw and vines. They model their homes, called *da-gas*, using free curves and circles. Each looks as unique and interestingly crafted as a fine pot. Nobles personally paint their homes ocher and white, and sculpt many seats, nooks, and frames in the clay walls.

Homes stand in many small complexes, usually around a well or granary. The layout of the complexes varies widely. Some incorporate a small granary in or beside each home, whereas others cluster around one large granary. Some stand in orderly rows; others seem scattered like seeds. Each cluster represents a close-knit neighborhood of people who watch out for each other. A mix of classes inhabits each complex.

Art: Gulg art displays less polish than that of Raam or Nibenay. More citizens here create art, but view it as idle pursuit rather than professional





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discipline. Nearly everyone learns rudimentary painting and jewelry-making as a child and perhaps weaving or bone-carving in adolescence. They practice these crafts through life and dispose of the products casually. Only in the Sunlight Home court do professional artists sharpen their skills to match those of other cities.

Gulg has no written literature or drama. Its folk tradition includes many animal fables and myths, and its vigorous, rhythmic percussion music has spread to other city-states.

The Paper Nest

Gulg hosts another secret society besides the Veiled Alliance, this one sponsored by Lalali-Puy. A small membership, comprised of the most favored nobles, carries out one sacred task: making paper. In Gulg as elsewhere on Athas, few cultures make paper in large quantities, and some know nothing of the process. Paper serves as an emblem of office and only the queen and nobility may use it.

The Paper Nest, named for the paper wasp nests that cling beneath agafari trees in the forest, includes between one and two dozen members at any given time. Lalali-Puy heads the society herself. As paper supplies dwindle, she alerts her chief templar, Mogadisho, to gather the Nest. In the dark of night, cloaked by the queen's spells, they enter the forest and walk to a baobab grove no other citizen may enter. There they harvest mulberry branches from its many bushes. Back at Sunlight Home, they begin the paper-making process in a taboo chamber, in the trunk of the Sunlight Home's tree. The nobles vow renewed loyalty to Lalali-Puy, and they leave at dawn.

The Paper Nest's importance lies not in its ceremonial duties, but in its secret power-sharing. Only here does the queen, otherwise autocratically careless of counsel, seek advice from her underlings on issues of the day. They confer with each other as well, setting the direction the city-state will take until

the next time the queen decides she needs paper.

The Noble Speech: By the queen's decree, nobles in Gulg use a consciously archaic form of common speech, taught them when they achieved noble status. This "high speech" uses formal, flowery diction and obsolete words. No one has asked the queen why she requires this, or at least no one has survived the question. Evidently she maintains the speech patterns of her early court, now 10,000 years in the past.

In the campaign, have Gulg nobles speak with "thee" and "thou," and use stilted speech: "In truth, I bring grave news from our valiant warriors." When not around the queen or her templars, a noble may relax into ordinary dialogue.

Red Moon Night

Among several rites that allow candidates to enter the nobility, Red Moon Night has become the best-known.

Whenever the supply of prisoners grows large, as happens twice a year or more, Lalali-Puy sends them into the forest, unarmed and on foot, on a night when both moons are full. The candidate hunters wait an hour, then set off on foot armed only with spear and dagger. Prisoners who survive until morning go free, though the queen exiles them for life. Hunters who bring in one or more prisoners' bodies (or just the heads) receive noble status at the next High Sun ceremony.

Prisoners include criminals, enemy troops, and (the majority) those who simply said one wrong thing in the queen's presence. Lalali-Puy flies into terrible rages at anyone who disagrees, makes an inappropriate jest, or does something improper. Because her idea of impropriety varies with circumstance, her attendants live in constant fear. Occasionally, having condemned the malefactor to run on Red Moon Night, she relents and forgives the victim. As a token of her mercy, she merely has his tongue cut out.



The frequency of Red Moon Nights varies as the story requires. If the PCs become prisoners or offend the queen, they will certainly become prey in the next hunt, which should occur shortly.

Rites of Passage

All children undergo an arduous initiation rite at puberty. The child enters the forest alone without food or water, cannot eat, and can drink (if he finds water) only at sunrise and sunset. The child must walk away from any path or clearing and thrash through the dense underbrush.

After three or four days without food the child usually receives a vision, one that often involves some beast of the forest. This animal becomes the child's totem, a source of strength and an omen of destiny. For example, a child who sees a hawk can expect to become a scout, probing enemy defenses. One whose vision includes a shrew becomes a gardener. After the vision, the child may eat and drink and can return to the city. There the new citizen receives a new name, the so-called "honor name," and instruction in various legends and mysteries from the local sage.

Those with magical talent can learn to focus the totem's strength and magic in the creation of a *fetish*, or embodiment of the totem animal's spirit. It consists of a bone or patch of fur from the totem animal, often decorated with feathers or carved with symbols.

Creating the Item (Optional Rules)

A wizard who undertook this initiation rite at puberty can create a magical fetish at any level. A wizard not receiving a totem at puberty must use the usual rules for enchanting an item (that is, achieve 11th-level first). In that case, ignore the following rules and use the *DMG* procedures instead. You may also decide you don't want fetish magic in your campaign.

Creating a fetish takes at least one year and the

wizard must carry the fetish, touching his skin, all that time. If the fetish breaks contact with the skin for more than a minute or two, the process must begin again. Also, no one other than the owning wizard may touch the item. If anyone does, add another month to the preparation time for each foreign touch. A wizard may carry only one fetish at a time.

After at least one year, on the night of the wizard's birthday, he or she enters the forest and tries to summon the totem spirit. The attempt takes the entire night. Start with a base roll of 2 or less on 1d20, add the character's Wisdom saving throw bonus and Charisma Reaction Adjustment modifier (if any), and add 1 for each year the character has carried the fetish.

A successful roll means the wizard has summoned an aspect, or part, of the totem spirit, then bound it to the fetish and put it to sleep there. If the roll fails, nothing bad happens. The wizard may try again without penalty one year later, and preparation need not start over. (Note that only an aspect of the totem spirit resides in the fetish. The totem still may appear at other initiations, and others may summon it.)

After the spirit occupies the fetish, the wizard need no longer carry it, gains no more bonuses for doing so, and incurs no penalty if anyone else touches it. Treat the fetish as a standard magical item, except that only that individual wizard may use the fetish.

During that night, the wizard also learns and records in his spellbook the 1st-level spell *summon fetish spirit*.

Summon Fetish Spirit (Conjuration/Summoning)

Range: Touch

Components: V, M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None



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This spell awakens the sleeping spirit bound to the fetish. The wizard must build a skeleton or model of the totem animal and incorporate the fetish into it. This requires one turn per Hit Die the wizard wants the summoned spirit to have, to a maximum of 5 turns + the wizard's level.

At casting, the spirit transforms the skeleton or model into the body it will use. Then the spirit tries to carry out one task the wizard requests, so long as it can finish the task before the next sunset or sunrise (whichever comes first). After at least one round of bickering, the spirit tries fairly to fulfill the task's meaning. For example, "Rescue me from these enemies" or "Guide me through the forest safely." The spirit has abilities typical of an animal of that many Hit Dice, as well as magical powers.

After the spirit completes the task, it tries to escape the wizard's power. The wizard must make a Charisma ability check (roll his Charisma score or less on 1d20). If the check succeeds, the wizard has forced the spirit back into the fetish, and he may retrieve the fetish from the skeleton or model. Failure means the spirit has gotten free and may attack the wizard, his companions, or simply escape. The spirit's physical form wreaks great damage until the next sunset or sunrise, whichever comes first. Damage should work against the wizard's interests, not in his favor. Then the spirit vanishes with the fetish, never to return.

The first time the wizard summons the spirit, the Charisma check takes no modifier. On each subsequent summoning, the wizard incurs a -3 cumulative penalty to the Charisma check. Also, the spirit grows more quarrelsome, hostile to the wizard, and slower to fulfill its task. The DM may impose additional penalties if the wizard summons the spirit more often than once a year.

Dispel magic and similar spells destroy the spirit, but as long as the fetish remains intact, the wizard can summon the aspect again, but no sooner than one day later.

Spirit Types

The forest between Gulg and Nibenay can include totem spirits of any or all the animals that dwell there. When a PC undergoes initiation, select an animal totem appropriate to that character's behavior. A strongly aggressive character might receive a panther totem, whereas a powerful but peaceable type would draw the bear totem's attention. A stealthy thief might end up with a rat or lynx spirit. And so on.

Each totem spirit has special abilities, but all have several powers in common. Only +1 or better magical weapons can hit a fetish spirit; non-magical attacks do no damage. A spirit can turn invisible at will to all eyes except the summoning wizard's, but the wizard who summoned it can always see the spirit. The spirit cannot attack while invisible.

Design individual totem spirits as necessary. Common spirits include bear, great cat, rat, lizard, bat, toad, and the like. Statistics for all these appear in the first *Monstrous Compendium* volume. Use these statistics, add the special abilities above, and adjust the Hit Dice total according to how long the wizard spent making the skeleton or model.

History

Some evidence indicates that the same wizard founded the Alliance chapters in both Gulg and distant Raam. After Tyr, Urik, and (probably) Nibenay, Gulg and Raam may harbor the oldest Alliance chapters in the Tyr Region. No one knows which has seniority.

Both chapters claim descent from Clennay the Impetuous, described as "a wild-eyed foreigner from the west." Possibly Clennay never existed except in legend, for the two cities report his eventual fate differently.

In Gulg, Alliance record keepers claim that Clennay tried to create a bear fetish but failed because he had not undergone the passage rite at puberty. The fetish spirit consumed him, transformed him



into a bear, and he fled into the forest forever.

In Raam they say that hunters from Gulg spotted Clennay and hunted him for sport during a savage Red Moon Night. Clennay fled to safety in Raam (conspicuously avoiding Nibenay, for unknown reasons) and founded the Alliance there. This account makes no mention whatsoever of fetish magic. Instead, it claims that Clennay died in heroic battle against the sorcerer-queen's templars, his spirit journeyed to Gulg to curse the wizards there for their cowardice, and the repentant wizards founded an Alliance to avoid his curse. Gulg's Alliance denies this story but offers no speculations about the origins of the Raam chapter.

In the centuries after its founding, the Gulg Alliance espoused no goals beyond the Five Aims. In fact, it paid only lip service to any goal beyond protecting preservers. Gulg had less urgent need to overthrow its sorcerer-king than other cities, and Nibenay's vehement prosecution of its crusade against defilers reduced their numbers greatly. The Gulg Alliance pursued a low-profile, defensive strategy, and in this it has succeeded.

The setback: Ten years ago, Lalali-Puy's templars discovered its headquarters. They assaulted the stronghold, taking the Council by surprise. Only one Councillor escaped.

Ordinarily a survivor would retreat for a time, then return in secret and gradually recruit a new Council. But not this time.

The survivor, a young and talented man named Aukash-Pad, went mad from grief, or perhaps from a templar's curse. Aukash fled into the forest, hiding in the queen's forbidden baobab grove. After days without food or water, he saw a vision of Athas restored to beauty, its stark hills shimmering with fields of clover, shaded by mighty trees, its sky filled with clouds, and the Sea of Silt transformed into a blue-green ocean. With the vision came the conviction that Aukash, himself, must lead the Alliance to achieve this goal.

But a ghost resided in the baobab grove; an incor-

poreal defiler, centuries dead, in life named Portynx. Perhaps because he had died trying to drain life from others to nourish his own, Portynx in death had grown fond of the essence of the *trees of life*. He developed his taste in Lalali-Puy's own orchard near the palace, but the templars discovered and expelled him.

Finding Aukash and divining his situation, Portynx the ghost psionically sent a vision into the preserver's mind: the hallucination of a restored Athas, loud with bird calls and green with rain forests of broadleaf ferns, of creeping vines, towering locust and cypress and cashew trees, a vision to serve the ghost's own desires for life to drain and destroy. Portynx camouflaged his motive, and Aukash took the vision as a prophecy. Still deranged, he fell completely under the vision's sway, never knowing its source.

The wrong turn: Portynx sent more psionic images into Aukash's mind. Following these instructions, Aukash used a *move earth* spell to hollow out a space in the grove beneath a dead baobab tree. Then, guided by the ghost, he bravely stole one of the sorcerer-queen's *trees of life* and transplanted it to the underground lair.

Portynx has persuaded Aukash that the *tree* represents a deity of the Sphere of Water, long absent from Athas but now returned to make the world green again. The ghost actually wanted the *tree* as an endless source of life energy for its insatiable appetite. Residing in it, Portynx has grown drunk on its energies and now sends images to Aukash almost at random. The deranged wizard often reads commands into these hallucinations, then sends instructions to the Alliance based on them. The results vary from fair (researches into high-level spells to restore vegetation) to disastrous (public attempts to grow grass in city streets).

Aukash now leads the Alliance alone. He has dispensed with lieutenants, giving orders directly to his contacts in the first-rank cells. When recruiting a new cell, Aukash makes it first-rank under him, but



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never tells its members that he himself leads the Alliance. Instead, he conveys orders as though “from the Council.” Few suspect that the conventional pyramid structure has vanished, replaced with a dangerously loose arrangement of cells that only one commands.

Contacting The Alliance

Visitors to Gulg with patience and a taste for forest life can find a local mage by staking out a forest source of spell components. These may include mushrooms, odd-shaped leaves, hardwood, and other items. Then they wait; eventually a wizard should come harvesting.

For those with tighter schedules, a journey through several clusters of houses may turn up one that appears more cluttered and more strangely decorated than the rest. Few Gulg homes have doors, which makes the search easier. Magical decorations don't appear obvious, for obvious wizards suffer instant retribution. But adventurers with experienced eyes may spot a concealed glyph or ward, a curious item that might serve as a spell component, or a resident who spends much time home, studying.

A visitor who finds a presumed mage cannot rely solely on the usual recognition signs. Gulgs generally mistrust outsiders. The visitor must present signs of friendship, such as a token gift or service (a rare spell component usually works). The mage may then offer a rendezvous, often in the forest, and provide the requested assistance.

Initiation

The Gulgs dislike foreigners as a rule, and their Alliance feels much the same. “Outlander” wizards receive protection as always, but they cannot usually gain membership unless they have accomplished some great deed or otherwise endeared themselves to a member. In this case, the member may agree to initiate the candidate.

Gulg's culture stresses the importance of the

hunt. To qualify for the Alliance, candidates must hunt the member who recruited them, or another mage from the same cell. At sunset the wizard shapeshifts into an animal form, then runs into the forest. (The wizard cannot, under the rules, take on a new form during the hunt.) After an hour the candidate follows, charged with locating and subduing the prey before sunrise without killing him.

This policy has alienated many members, who cite it as evidence of Aukash-Pad's poor leadership. Since he instituted this initiation procedure, few have tried to recruit new members. Aukash himself became the main recruiter, creating cells answerable directly to him, though the members don't realize this.

Leadership

Aukash-Pad

Human Male Preserver/Priest

Dual-Classed W14/Pr3

(Sphere of Water; unaware of priest level)

Lawful Good

Str 13

Int 17

Dex 12

Wis 16

Con 13

Cha 14

hp: 34

AC: 10

#AT: 1

THAC0: 16

Dmg: by spell

Proficiencies: Dagger; Animal Handling, Heat Protection, Reading/Writing, Religion, Somatic Concealment, Spellcraft +1, Water Find

Psionics: time/space anchor.

Background: Aukash-Pad grew up in a small forest village. He showed magical talent early and unwisely, then fled the resulting mob and took up residence in Gulg. There he joined the Alliance, received excellent training in magic, and eventually



joined the Council.

This did, in fact, prepare him for the shock of Lalali-Puy's attack on the old headquarters, and even for the greater shock of surviving alone. He could have resurrected the Alliance, given time and his sanity. Unfortunately, a curse gone wrong took much of his sanity, leaving him open to the ghostly vision.

Aukash's lunatic attempts to restore Athas to its former glory have produced an unexpected result. He studies the ancient lore of the Elemental Plane of Water, hoping to find wizard spells to bring rain. He scribbles meaningless "spell research notes" about water, meditates endlessly on them, and performs purifications he thinks they require.

The result: Aukash has become a cleric without knowing it! Each morning he "memorizes" both his normal spells and his scribbled nonsense, meditating all the while upon the green visions Portynx has placed in his mind. This meditation gains him the priest spells that his scribbles alone could never obtain. In the same way he "studies" the spells granted to him by the *tree of life* in his lair.

Appearance: Aukash is about 35 years old, tall and slender like most Gulgs, with very dark skin and shaved scalp. He wears a long linen skirt, yellow with maroon stripes, and a necklace of many small bird claws and feathers.

Role-playing: Fiercely protective of the Shadow Tree and utterly committed to his vision of a restored Athas, Aukash feels pity for those who question. Nothing can convince him of the truth that rejuvenating Athas would take thousands of wizards and thousands of years. His compelling oratory has persuaded the more impressionable cells to follow his orders blindly. He never reveals that the "Council" does not exist.

When anyone attempts to reveal the true source of the Shadow Tree's visions to Aukash, he attacks the "heretic" with murderous fury.

Notes: Aukash-Pad's insanity should resist easy detection and simple magical cures. If the PCs con-

vincingly demonstrate the error of his ways, perhaps by revealing and defeating Portynx, he may submit to healing and try to mend the damage he has done.

If you use the optional fetish rules above, Aukash keeps a small ebony bear fetish that he constructed as a youth. He summoned the bear once before to escape the sorcerer-queen's attack that destroyed the Alliance. Aukash fears having to summon the spirit again, for he only just subdued and returned it to the fetish the first time.

The Shadow Tree (*Portynx*)

Defiler Ghost

12th-Level (in life)

Lawful Evil

Str 13

Int 16

Dex 14

Wis 15

Con 10

Cha 3

hp: 30

AC: 10

#AT: 1

THAC0: 17

Dmg: 1d6 or by spell

Proficiencies: Dagger; Direction Sense, Modern Languages, Psionic Detection, Reading/Writing, Riding (Land-based), Somatic Concealment, Spellcraft

Psionics: contact, mindlink, false sensory input.

Special abilities: immune to non-magical weapons; regenerates 10 hp/round when in contact with tree of life; can turn invisible at will; Constitution drain (see below). Takes double damage from energy-draining magic.

Background: See "History", above.

Appearance: Characters should not see Portynx, let alone suspect his existence, until they solve the mystery of what drove Aukash-Pad to his mad quest.

Portynx, driven from his haven inside the Shadow Tree, looks tall, bald, and emaciated, with far too



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broad a grin and too many teeth for a human. His skin, once dark, has grown pale. The ghost wears protective goggles of the kind many living defilers wear (they protect against ash and dust). Leather pouches seem to dangle from a sash across his chest, but these have no more substance than he does.

A glowing, prismatic haze around Portynx's body shows his incorporeal nature.

Role-playing: Like most thinking undead, Portynx both craves and loathes life. His insanity and Aukash-Pad's reinforce each other. He sends repeated hallucinations to Aukash so that the wizard will create more life that the ghost can drain. Inside the Shadow Tree, Portynx has become intoxicated and irrational, but this effect vanishes when he leaves the *tree*.

Combat: When Portynx makes a successful attack roll to "touch" a living target, the target must save vs. spells. Failure means the target loses 1 point of Constitution until healed with *remove curse* or higher-level priest magic. Subsequent touches inflict cumulative losses, and after the first failed save, the target receives no more saving throws against this attack in that battle. For each point of Constitution he drains, Portynx adds 1 to his current hit point total (to its maximum of 30).

A target who loses Constitution to this attack dreams often thereafter of *trees of life* and visions of a restored Athas, until cured.

Detecting and revealing Portynx: *Detect evil* and *detect undead* both reveal the ghost's presence, but *detect magic* only reveals the magic of the *tree of life* he inhabits. *ESP* and similar effects, carefully directed, may reveal the Shadow Tree's secret inhabitant, but spells and devices that detect invisibility do not, at least while Portynx remains in the tree. Clair-sentient psionic disciplines like spirit sense and sensitivity to psychic impressions reveal the ghost. Magical items like a *wand of enemy detection* or a *potion of ESP* also work.

Once they find him, the player characters must drive Portynx from the Shadow Tree before they can

fight him effectively. They can destroy the *tree of life's* physical form (an evil act); a cleric can turn him (as a ghost); and the spells *control undead* and *exorcism* also work. Clever characters might lure Portynx forth with illusions, bribes, or other stratagems. Taunting and threats, however, don't work.

Chkak-a-chakk

Thri-Kreen Druid

7th-Level

Neutral

This druid guards the baobab grove that conceals Aukash-Pad's lair. An unofficial auxiliary (one of very few thri-kreen in any Alliance), Chkak cares little about the Alliance. It respects Aukash-Pad, the only member it knows, and his vision of a restored Athas has won it over. It keeps the wizard's secrets, but it does not guard the lair from intruders.

Headquarters

Gulg natives name several forest preserves outside the city as "The Queen's Groves." Lalali-Puy has forbidden citizens to enter several areas over the centuries, usually because her armies won victories there in minor wars against an army of Nibenay. One of these, the Grove of Mysteries, also serves as an important ceremonial site.

In a different, unnamed grove stand many huge, odd baobab trees, sometimes called "upside-down trees" because their twisting limbs look like roots. Most of these trees died 200 years ago in the battle this grove commemorates. Some few survive, though, and so the thri-kreen druid Chkak-a-chakk guards the grove. The sorcerer-queen tolerates its presence. She doesn't know the druid serves as an unofficial Alliance auxiliary.

None may cut dead trees in a Queen's Grove, on penalty of death, for even dead trees shelter animals in their branches and rotting trunks. One shelters the leader of the Veiled Alliance.



Entering the Lair

Deep in the grove stands an especially large, dead baobab, surrounded by a ring of sterile dirt—the sign of defiling magic. At the base of the massive trunk a jagged crack leads down to darkness. No one suspects that beneath this dead tree, surrounded by dead dirt, lives Aukash-Pad, the wizard committed to the greening of Athas.

Using *move earth* and other spells, Aukash vastly enlarged an existing grotto under the tree. Then he transplanted a *tree of life* from Lalali-Puy's own groves. He cast *continual light* on the grotto walls to keep the *tree* alive, and *continual darkness* on the entrance to conceal it.

Security: Aukash has contrived similarly inelegant workarounds to protect his home. A small iron needle, embedded in a knob of wood in the entry crack, carries an *avoidance* spell; the magic throws back anyone except Aukash who touches the knob. A human-sized figure who tries to enter without touching the knob usually brushes against the opposite edge, tearing open a small paper parcel that holds a pinch of *dust of mind dulling*.

The same trigger also activates a *magic mouth* spell that creates the sound of panthers roaring within the crack. This scares away all but the most motivated intruders. It also alerts Aukash below, giving him time to cast *minor globe of invulnerability* and other defenses.

A thief can use the Find/Remove Traps skill to detect and disarm the trap. Optionally, non-thief characters who enter the crack without touching the knob can make an Intelligence check to notice the paper, and a Dexterity check to wriggle into the crack without breaking it. They cannot disarm it.

The View: Characters, struggling down through the dark crack and onto a wide ledge should find the view startling. Where they would expect a cave, they see (from above!) a huge *tree of life*, the Shadow Tree, growing green under bright sunlight. The cavern's ceiling glows in perpetual noon. The majes-

tic, beautiful tree almost fills the entire room, some 90' tall and 30' in diameter.

A yard-wide path leads down from the ledge and spirals in a gentle incline around the circular chamber. This gives characters a fine view of the *tree* from all sides as they descend. This may tempt them to ignore the six patches of wall where Aukash has placed more magnetic needles with *avoidance* spells. Anyone who touches these areas, visible on close inspection as slightly discolored patches of rock, gets flung out from the wall and falls at least 70 feet (7d6 damage).

Aukash has placed a patch every six feet along the path for the first 30'. Secretly roll a Dexterity check for each character who uses the path without taking suitable precautions; failure means the character has touched an avoidance patch. Fiendish DMs make all checks simultaneously; a more lenient one stops making checks after the first failure, thereby warning the victim's companions.

The Cavern Floor

The path has no other traps. The cavern floor, hard-packed dirt covered with shadows, holds the knotted roots of the Shadow Tree and a wooden water basin, a shallow dish about 2' in diameter. The basin, of living wood, grows out of the trunk at waist level. Beside it lies a pile of incense granules.

Aukash uses the basin for the *magic font* spell that the Shadow Tree bestows on him daily. He pours clear water down the trunk, purifying it by the time it reaches the basin. (If you prefer more stringent rules for creating holy water, like those given in *The Complete Priest's Handbook*, assume Aukash buys the holy water the spell requires.) The basin holds up to 20 vials, but he seldom uses that much.

Aukash uses the incense for the *divination* spells that the Tree grants him.

In a loose patch of earth beneath the scrying basin Aukash has buried a leather pouch containing a



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dozen carved wands of baobab wood, each six inches long and inlaid with small gems (worth 1,000 gp altogether). He uses these non-magical tokens in the *augury* spells he gains from the Shadow Tree.

The Walls: Scrawled writing covers the walls from waist level to as high as Aukash can reach. He studies this barely legible mess each day to “learn” the clerical spells he unknowingly gains through meditation or from the Shadow Tree. Much of this foretells the days of glory when the Shadow Tree will cause all Athas to bloom.

Aukash's Chamber

Because prolonged contact with the Shadow Tree exhausts Aukash, the wizard usually lives and sleeps in a small (15' diameter) adjacent cavern. He has cast *continual light* on an ordinary wooden globe that he can cover when he sleeps. The clean, bare room contains only a straw sleeping mat, a water basin, a clothing hamper, and routine necessities.

Here Aukash hides his spellbook, in a wall cranny concealed by *illusionary wall* and by *misdirection* to delay detection. Unlike most Athasian spellbooks, Aukash's uses actual mulberry-wood paper, pilfered from the stores of Lalali-Puy's temples. He ties the pile of irregular sheets with thin hemp cords.

The room connects with the larger cavern by an open archway and has no other outlet. The air can become stifling, but Aukash refreshes it with *cantrips* or greater magic.

Combat: Aukash retreats to this chamber during an attack. He casts *globe of invulnerability* if he believes the invaders use lesser magic, *wall of force* if they use more powerful spells, or *Otiluke's resilient sphere* against mainly physical attacks. Rather than face heavy opposition, Aukash *teleports without error* (his sole 7th-level spell) to a secondary home near his childhood village, miles away.

Adventure Hooks

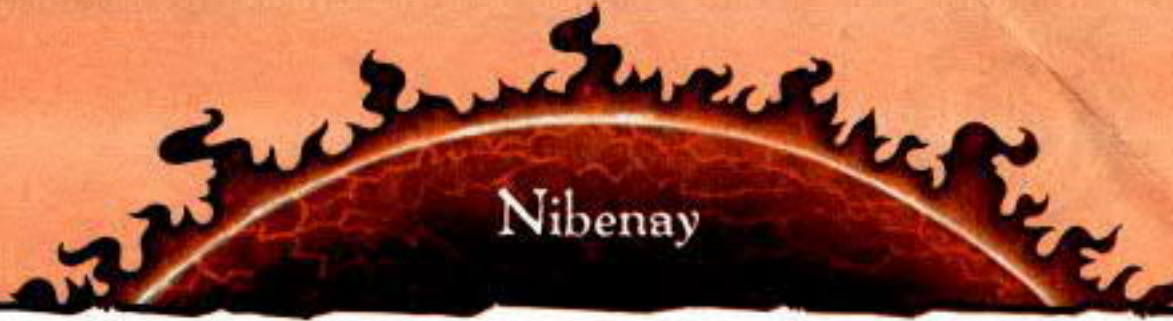
PCs visiting Gulg may find it a decent place by the Tyr Region's standards, but emphasize that here, as in other city-states, wizards need protection from the vengeful populace. After witnessing or preventing a lynching, heroes should want to restore the Alliance to health.

1. Early contacts with cell members reveal the problem. The PCs see, outside the Mopti Wall, a wizard guarded by Alliance auxiliaries as he casts a *rejuvenate* spell on the wall of thorns. Slaves at the wall raise the alarm.

Assuming the player characters help the wizard's party rescue him from certain doom, they must overcome the Gulgs' natural mistrust of “outlanders.” They must also overcome Alliance members' suspicions in order to learn of the “Council's” grandiose scheme to rejuvenate the world. Reaching the cell's next contact up the chain (Aukash-Pad himself), they may eventually discover the full dimension of the problem. If they can trace the wizard back to his lair, they can discover the ghost in the Shadow Tree. Then they must fight the ghost and Aukash, cure or kill the wizard, and set the Alliance back on track.

2. The characters find a fetish among the loot of a slave tribe, bandit gang, or another defeated enemy. They cannot activate it, but soon its former owner, a Gulg sorcerer of great power, locates them by its presence. Supposing them the bandits who stole the fetish, the wizard steals it back, then summons the fetish spirit and demands revenge!

The fetish spirit rebels against the owning wizard and sets off to menace the countryside. Now the wizard tries to enlist the aid of the characters he just tried to attack, so they can help subdue and banish the spirit. (Do they realize he sent it?) In the process they learn of fetish magic and the culture of Gulg. Perhaps they must pursue the spirit back to its home in the forest north of the city-state.



Nibenay

Overview

Campaign style: *Defensive, Unknown.*

The Alliance in Nibenay finds the Shadow King so shadowy, so distantly powerful, that it holds little hope of fighting him. No more could one stop a sandstorm, they say. Instead they simply protect the city's wizards as best they can—Preserver wizards, anyway.

More than any other Alliance, Nibenay's opposers defilers with a genuine passion. Elsewhere, Alliances regard defilers as competitors or troublemakers. Here, it regards defilers as an offense against the universe. The Nibenese Alliance espouses that rarest of commodities on Athas, idealism.

In its cause the Alliance employs (or tries to employ) an ancient spiritual force called the *zwuun*. This being resides in the hot springs outside the city. Alliance members never feel certain of their success when enlisting this fickle creature. The red sun shines on Nibenay as strongly as anywhere, yet shadow shrouds the results of many actions.

The City

Population: 24,000 (60% human, 10% dwarf, 4% mul, 10% elf, 4% half-elf, 12% half-giant, a few thri-kreen and halflings). Natives are called "Nibenese."

Emblems: Many monsters, both real and imaginary; highly conventionalized representations of nobles, the sorcerer-king, and various nats; all integrated in a complex folklore.

Economy: Copper; rice, fruit, vanilla, spices; betel nut; timber, hardwood weapons; linen and dyes.

Noteworthy residents: Nibenay, sorcerer-king (23rd-level dragon); Siemhouk, chief templar (human female, age fourteen, Tmp15/Psi4, LE); Thong Nal, abbot of Exalted Path monastery (aged human male, C3, Sphere of Air, LN); and Au Treng, abbottess of Serene Bliss monastery (human

female, C4, Sphere of Earth, LN).

Unusual sites: Naggaramakam, the Forbidden Dominion (Nibenay's walled palace complex); the Omnipotent Receivers, a line of huge statues of the sorcerer-king bordering the main road leading to the city; the Plain of Burning Water, an area of bubbling hot springs on the city's outskirts.

Nibenese humans, muls, and half-elves look attractive, with round faces, tan skin, and (except for the muls) black hair. All citizens below noble rank wear loose linen blouses and skirts, brightly colored. They wrap their heads in the ubiquitous *krama*, a long scarf always marked with a checkerboard pattern of tiny squares. Some older people have blue-stained teeth from chewing betel nuts.

The culture stresses self-discipline, quiet acceptance of authority, reverence of the elderly, and politeness to strangers. Politeness, though, often goes hand in hand with ruthless dishonesty toward anyone outside one's family. The common wisdom in the Tyr Region has it that a Nibenese merchant grovels as he offers you a hardwood spear, smiles and nods fervently at everything you say, then swindles you out of your last ceramic bit. And as he scurries away, the spear breaks in your hands.

Newcomers to Nibenay may find many local customs curious, if not downright bizarre. Betrothed couples express their commitment by joining themselves at the waist with a long scarf. Friends exchange greetings by yanking each other's hair. Children drag life-sized dolls made of straw and rags, called *sanshiza* ("substitute mothers"). The Nibenese revere cats as vessels of unknowable wisdom, but despise dogs as vermin.

Architecture: With the exception of the sorcerer-king's sub-city, said to be constructed of massive slabs of solid granite and edged with fabulous gems, most buildings are simple structures made of clay bricks and wood. Families dwell in single-room homes, partitioned by papyrus screens to create a



Nibenay

number of variously-sized living spaces. Modest rock gardens arranged in intricate patterns complement many homes. Well-to-do families enjoy the company of pets, birds and lizards in particular, and build special mud houses called *milla* in which to keep them. The number of *milla* erected near a home indicates the family's affluence.

Though quite old even by Athasian standards, and certainly predating the city's founding, the Nibenese culture's origins have vanished in history. That Nibenay himself would never, voluntarily, have instituted some of these customs proves their antiquity.

Monks

Athas has no gods, yet the city of Nibenay has monks. These honor no deity; rather, they seek a mystical state of nirvana, freedom from physical pain through extinction of the self. Monks of both genders shave their heads and eyebrows, and they

dress in bright orange robes. They grow food, study rigorously, and meditate. In fact, their regimen resembles that of a dedicated psionist, though the monks gain no powers. (Optionally, you may allow monks to train in unarmed combat.)

Citizens venerate the monks. Each of the two orders (Exalted Path and Serene Bliss) pledges loyalty to Nibenay, so the sorcerer-king tolerates them. Monks often become the artisans who carve Nibenay's endless murals. Female monks usually fill the templar ranks.

At some point in his or her life, each Nibenese child spends two 15-day weeks living as a monk. Male and female monks stay in separate monasteries at opposite ends of the city. Children of nobles, freemen, and slaves briefly mingle as equals, a phenomenon unique on Athas.

Siemhouk, the Priest Child

Visitors express astonishment that a child has be-





come the highest-ranking official in the city. Natives do not express this astonishment, for they place high value on courtesy. But they still wonder.

Siemhouk, a thin and spectrally quiet 14-year-old girl, came to Nibenay's attention shortly after her birth to a high templar in Naggaramakam, the Forbidden Dominion (Nibenay's palace). The mother died in childbirth, but by various portents Nibenay came to believe that the woman's spirit migrated to her child at death. He found amazing magical and psionic potential in the infant girl, and so he himself took charge of her rearing.

As Siemhouk grew, the sorcerer-king secretly travelled with the child to distant parts of the region, then to other planes. He taught her magic and psionics, as much as she could handle, then protected her as she fought enemies and gained experience. In time, with Nibenay's constant pressure, young Siemhouk achieved prodigious skill in templar magic, beyond any prodigy listed in the palace's extensive histories. In psionics she has not made as much progress; disciplining the mind calls for maturity, talent notwithstanding, but Siemhouk improves steadily.

Why does Nibenay take such care with this girl? Not even his highest templars know his reason. As told in the *Dragon Kings* hardbound, bestial rages seize a sorcerer-king who tries to become a dragon. Those rages still await Nibenay, who has achieved 23rd-level and dreads their imminent arrival. Siemhouk has a wild psionic talent, previously unknown on Athas, that lets her calm those rages. With her, Nibenay hopes to smooth the potentially disastrous transition to his full dragon status.

Dance

A major art form among the Nibenese, dance marks all ceremonies, feasts, and even the rare social gatherings of slaves. The varied style combines stilted postures, quick stamping of the feet, conven-

tionalized gestures representing various emotions, and flowing arm and waist movements.

Three all-night dance festivals (one per phase of the year), called Starlight Pageants, provide Nibenay's chief cultural events. On these festive nights, dozens of young *apsara* (female dancers) come forth from Naggaramakam. On a platform just inside the city walls, in a grove of *trees of life*, they perform a ballet that lasts until dawn. The ballets come from a standard repertoire of 231 ancient dances, each set of three associated with one particular year in a king's age. The stories derive from folklore—modified, of course, to praise the sorcerer-king. The entire city attends, with the notable exception of Nibenay himself.

A ballet follows a specific sequence of movements, augmented by pantomiming actors who comment silently on the story by facial expressions and hand gestures. Some of the actors wear grotesque masks, representing monsters and supernatural forces. While the dancers rest between sections of the ballet, actors entertain the audience with juggling and acrobatics.

The ballets fall into three major styles. The *liaka-ih* represents the dramatic style, a commentary on the tragedy and suffering inherent in existence. *Liaka-ih* dancers wear veils that completely cover their faces and spot their skin with red paint to symbolize blood. The *priytu-ih* style celebrates joy, a comedic presentation where the dancers decorate their bodies with tiny bells and blow shrieking whistles to elicit laughs from the onlookers. The *wriquo-ih* style honors war; dancers wield wooden daggers and swords, swung violently over their heads and between their legs.

The small orchestra that plays for the ballets includes woodwinds, drums, finger drums, xylophones, a woodwind called the *ryls*, and the *khong*, a circular wooden frame lined with copper gongs. A musician sits within the frame to play the gongs. Only the sorcerer-king owns a *khong*, for its heavy



Nibenay

metal content makes it priceless.

During the Starlight Pageants, Nibenay's servile defilers cast many colorful illusions to enhance the ballet. They draw their magic from the *trees of life* around them, one by one. Sometimes the templars keep a druid prisoner on hand, to warn them when one *tree's* life force grows too low.

Even Nibenese caravans employ dance. Entertainers tag along with merchant caravans or start their own, seeking adventure (or maybe escape from the city guards). They travel between the cities, stopping at each oasis for a day or a week, and performing for any audience. Many of these gypsy dancers and musicians psionically entrance viewers, either to heighten their enjoyment or lighten their wallets.

Zwuun

Hundreds of years ago, a cadre of powerful wizards devised a method to tie their life forces into the natural energies generated by the Plain of Burning Water. After the wizards died, their spirits lived on, linked to the hot springs. The Alliance knows the manifestation of their collective consciousness as the *zwuun*.

The *zwuun* appears as a cloud of steam, dozens of translucent human and demihuman faces drifting randomly within. It has no physical substance nor attributes associated with natural or supernatural entities; it has no combat statistics or hit points, and it cannot neither attack nor cast spells (with one exception, described below). Magic and other attacks do not affect it.

The *zwuun* appears only to preservers and their friends, for the wizards comprising the *zwuun* were themselves preservers. The *zwuun* never leaves the Plain of Burning Water, though it may manifest anywhere in this area, rising abruptly from the water's surface in a swirl of mist and vanishing as suddenly as it arrived. No reliable method for summoning the *zwuun* exists, though it remains

fond of poetry and song; reciting a lengthy poem or singing an especially tuneful melody may sometimes entice the *zwuun* from the hot springs. The *zwuun* usually appears spontaneously, either because it has information or because it seeks company.

The *zwuun* communicates by psionic mindlink. It can send and receive telepathic communication with an unlimited number of wizards over a wide range, but it usually chooses to communicate only with those adjacent to its hot springs.

The *zwuun's* knowledge knows no apparent limits. It may reveal the location of treasure or monsters, pass along new spell techniques, or reveal a cryptic piece of information regarding a problem currently baffling the Alliance. However, the mingling of spirits within the *zwuun* has resulted in an inconsistent personality. About four fifths of the time the *zwuun* helps courteously, but at other times it delights in malicious mischief-making, giving intentionally misleading information. This manifestation of the *zwuun* may tell a party that huge black diamonds can be found inside a nearby cave, when the cave really holds ill-tempered dune freaks.

Unfortunately, preservers have no sure way to tell whether the helpful or malicious personality currently dominates. The *zwuun* always communicates courteously and seriously, and magical methods to detect lies give inconclusive results.

Still, the *zwuun* respects a clever mind; if one interrogates it intelligently and in good humor, even its malicious manifestation may respond with indirect honesty. ("A black diamond mine, you say? Are you certain that these black diamonds don't have bony, wedge-like heads and sunken, beady eyes?" "Umm—anything is possible," responds the bemused *zwuun*.) Once per day, the *zwuun* can cast a special *curse* spell on any victim within a 50-yard radius (no saving throw). This curse causes any water that touches the victim to become boiling hot. (Assess damage based on the amount of water touching the victim; a cup of water might cause 1d4



points of damage, but falling into a stream could be fatal.) The curse lasts for a full day. The zwuun reserves its curse for ill-mannered, profane, or otherwise offensive persons.

History

Nibenay's Alliance chapter, probably the third founded in the Tyr Region (after Tyr and Urik), started 300 to 350 years ago, about a king's age after Tyr's. Its founder, Khmal Langgan, apparently received his early magical training as a defiler within the Shadow King's massive temple complex. In his youth he escaped (some say the templars expelled him), and he gave up defiling magic for good.

Khmal travelled the land, started over studying magic with a preserver in Tyr, and learned of the Alliance. Returning to Nibenay under an assumed name, he started a chapter there. He apparently confided something important to his fellow Council members about the Shadow King's activities. However, he instructed them to let this information die with him, and they did so. Now, evidently, no one survives who knows what Khmal found about Nibenay's activities, nor has anyone found a remnant of his copious records about his days as a defiler in Naggaramakam. Unfortunately, Khmal died before confiding to his Alliance comrades the location of his records, said to include a detailed floor plan of the sorcerer-king's palace complex.

The Nibenese Alliance developed its particular hatred of defilers when Thagya Phon rose to the leadership about 20 years ago. Even then, he did not notably oppose defilers until after he returned from a desert sojourn with his family, some two years after that. On the trip a defiler's tribe attacked them, he said, and killed his wife. Since then, the society has achieved significant success in its crusade. No one in the Alliance suspects that Thagya Phon has distorted the events of that trip.

Contacting The Alliance

In a scenario, the dance festivals offer the most dramatic way to introduce the PCs to the Alliance. The society always has several members in attendance, observing the defilers who cast the illusions. A courageous player character can cast a visible spell, then (try to) get away before the mob attacks or the defilers capture him. The Alliance should follow or shelter the party.

A character who refuses to undertake this risk may instead try an Intelligence check to observe someone at the festival who shows perhaps too much interest in the defilers. Then a discreet inquiry or recognition sign may produce results—or a stealthy attack in the night, for the Nibenay wizards harbor suspicions of strangers.

Initiation

In the last decade the Alliance has asked candidates for initiation to sneak into a powerful defiler's home. The society has located almost all of them, but it stays a safe distance away. The candidate must appropriate a magical item or other valuable items.

Lower-level candidates who require a less stringent assignment should try to find a templar from Naggaramakam and learn something, anything, about its always-secret activities. The candidate who returns new information to a contact may expect acceptance as soon as the Council can confirm the report—a matter of hours or weeks, as circumstances allow.

Leadership

Thagya Phon

Human Male Preserver

17th-Level

Lawful Neutral

Str 13

Int 18



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Dex 13
Con 18

Wis 14
Cha 15

hp: 42
AC: 10
#AT: 1
THAC0: 15
Dmg: by spell

Proficiencies: Dagger; Ancient History, Ancient Languages, Direction Sense, Reading/Writing, Somatic Concealment, Spellcraft, Weather Sense.

Psionics: sensitivity to psychic impressions.

Background: Thagya's hatred of defilers borders on obsession, but no one knows the real reason why. Until recently, he succumbed to depressions that arose from his wife's betrayal. Thagya compulsively dwelt on the memory of his wife in the arms of a defiler. Could he have prevented their union? Avoided driving her away to the accursed defiler? Could he rekindle their relationship?

In time, Thagya escaped the spiral of depression and accepted the loss of his wife. To this day, he maintains that a defiler murdered her. He will never publicly acknowledge that she has chosen a new life as an apprentice defiler. If any of his comrades suspect the truth, they respect Thagya too much to confront him.

Except for Alliance business, he seldom leaves the Alliance's underground headquarters. He avoids close relationships with others, keeping even his trusted advisors at arm's length. A loyal halfling, Horga-at-Horg, provides his only real companionship. His interests include not only magic, but military history, engineering, and mathematics. Thagya finds solace in nature, and his compassion for animals nearly equals his contempt for defilers.

A gleaming obsidian pedestal rises from the floor of Thagya's spartan quarters. "That pedestal," he explains grimly to new initiates, "awaits the head of the sorcerer-king."

Appearance: Years of depression have taken their toll on Thagya. Stooped, haggard, and pasty fleshed, he looks more like 80 than his true age of 54. One eye remains permanently dilated (the result of an injury), giving him an unsettling gaze.

Personal hygiene ranks low on Thagya's list of priorities. He seldom bathes, his clothes hang on him like rags, his beard grows in shaggy strands, and dirt cakes his long fingernails. Horga-at-Horg urges him to take better care of himself, but Thagya dismisses manicures, shaving, and similar activities as a waste of valuable time.

Role-playing: Thagya avoids small talk, recreation, and other diversions. He prefers to spend time refining his plans, devising new schemes, or exploring new avenues of magical research.

Thagya speaks in whispers, his eyes locked unflinchingly on the person he addresses. Newcomers find him aloof and cold. Thagya does his best to contain his emotions; when faced with bad news, he lowers his head, closes his eyes, and rubs his chin. However, the mere mention of his wife's name may trigger his fiery temper. The raging outburst may result in a destructive rampage, ending with his withdrawal to his private chambers and his refusal to see anyone for the rest of the day.

Horga-at-Horg

Female Halfling Fighter/Psionicist

Multi-Class F5/Psi5

Chaotic Good

Str 13

Int 10

Dex 16

Wis 15

Con 13

Cha 3

hp: 16

AC: 10

#AT: 1

THAC0: 16

Dmg: 1d6-1 (obsidian short sword); 1d2 (blowgun)

Proficiencies: Blowgun, Bow, Dagger, Sword; Heat



Protection, Water Find, Weapon Improvisation, Weather Sense.

Psionics: double pain.

Background: About five years ago, Horga-at-Horg wandered into the forests near the Plain of Burning Water and spotted a plump bird perched high in a tree. Horga climbed the tree, but as she reached for the bird, she plummeted to the ground, breaking her leg. On one of his rare sojourns outside Alliance headquarters, Thagya discovered the moaning Horga, helped her back to the headquarters, and nursed her back to health. In the process, Horga developed a strong admiration for the stranger, which soon grew to a deep affection. Horga asked to remain with Thagya, volunteering to serve as his bodyguard and companion. Perhaps because of an aching loneliness, Thagya accepted Horga's offer. Soon they became fast friends-but she never explained why she left the Forest Ridge.

Horga's loyalty to Thagya knows no bounds. She protects him from danger, reminds him of his appointments, and chastises him for going too long without rest. Horga understands little of the Alliance's goals and cares less, but she devotes herself tirelessly to the cause; the enemies of Thagya are her enemies. A ravenous appetite remains her only vice; she devours anything even remotely edible, and sulks when Thagya refuses to let her feast on defeated enemies.

Appearance: Horga's pock-marked face and bulky body give her a monstrous appearance, sharply contrasting with her kind blue eyes. A smock of lizard hide covers her tanned skin. She prefers not to wear shoes or sandals; thick calluses protect her feet.

Role-playing: Horga assumes all strangers intend to harm Thagya, until they convince her otherwise. Though not especially intelligent, she has common sense and speaks her mind, even if it means confronting Thagya. For instance, if Thangya plans to

send Alliance members on a dangerous mission, Horga may ask him to reconsider. "Big folk have families. Is task worth life of a little child's father?"

Headquarters

The Alliance's headquarters lies beneath an area of rolling hills about a half-mile north of the city, adjacent to the Plain of Burning Water. An opening five feet wide at the base of a weed-covered hill leads to the headquarters. The zwuun frequents the waters near the opening, intrigued by the comings and goings of Alliance members. The sudden appearance of the zwuun often startles visitors. It rises in a swirl from the water's surface, peers intently with its multiple faces, then disappears in a cloud of mist.

The opening leads to a low-ceilinged cavern. A shallow pool of still water, fed by underground streams, fills most of the floor. Bones of rabbits, birds, and other creatures litter the narrow shore surrounding the pool. The water emits the faint aroma of lemons, but otherwise appears normal. However, Thagya has poisoned the pool with a mixture of salts to discourage trespassers. Anyone sipping from the water must save vs. poison or suffer 2d8 damage (save for 2d4 damage). A filter in the stream that feeds the pool keeps the poison from spreading throughout the water system.

Horga-at-Horg's quarters: East of the entrance cavern, Horga-at-Horg serves as the guardian of the headquarters. She frightens away or murders trespassers who aren't discouraged by the poisonous pool. If the trespassers appear formidable, Horga secretly escapes through the emergency passage that links her quarters with the main chamber and warns the Council. Horga eats small animals that die drinking from the pool; an antidote supplied by Thagya guarantees Horga's immunity to the poison.

A large boulder against the north wall conceals a narrow passage that slopes gently into the earth for



Nibenay

about 20 yards, opening into the main chamber of the headquarters.

The main chamber: Here general Alliance meetings take place. Many alcoves and ledges serve as storage areas and sleeping platforms for guests. A clear pool provides a source of fresh water. Long stalactites hang from the ceiling, and trimmed and sanded stalagmites form crude but comfortable seats.

A soft yellow light bathes the entire chamber, courtesy of the thousands of *isha* moths clinging to the ceiling. The subterranean *isha* moths co-exist peacefully with the Alliance. The moths share their natural fluorescence, and the members grow and harvest a special fungus to feed the moths and keep them healthy.

A broad crevasse snakes across the floor of the east end of the main chamber. Instead of filling it in, Thagya ordered the crevasse covered with a lattice of branches and a layer of dirt spread across the top. Should intruders invade the chamber, the Alli-

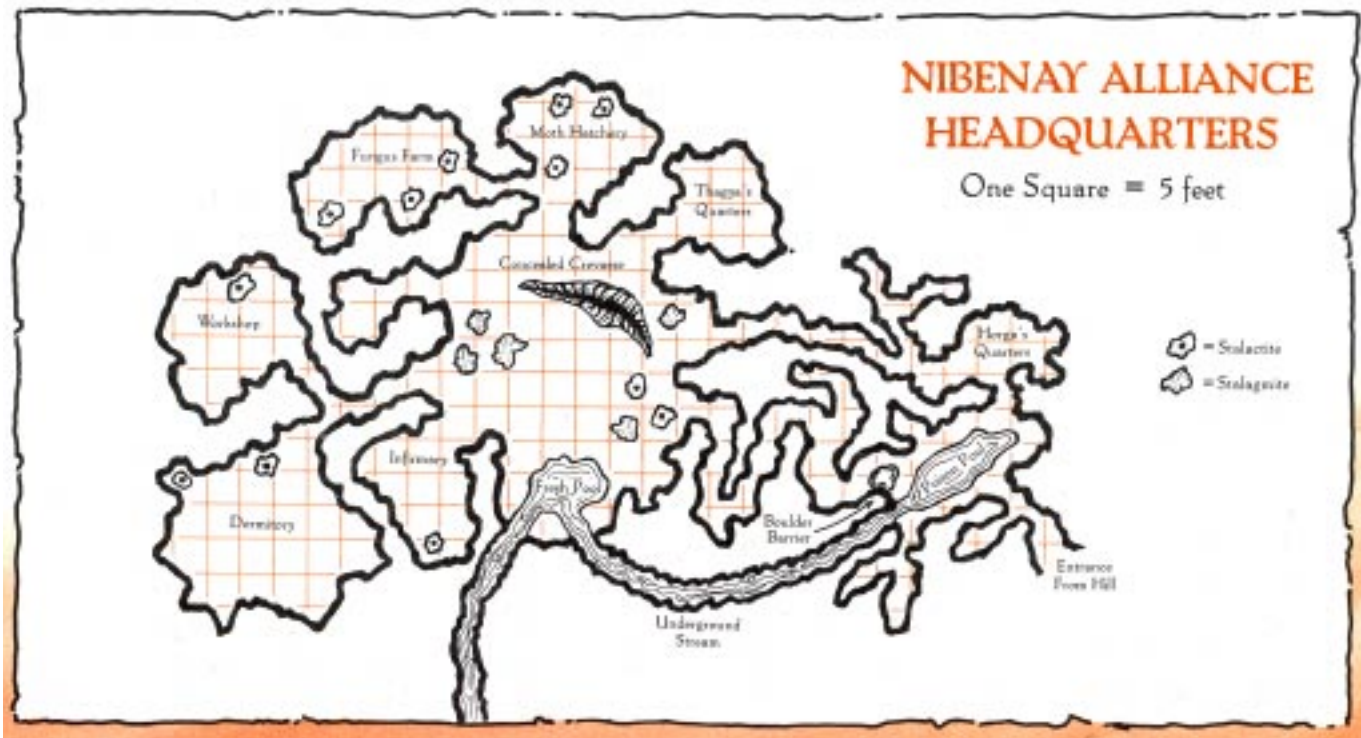
ance members try to maneuver them into the crevasse, where they drop 30 feet and land on sharp stones (4d6 damage).

A network of passages links the main chamber with several smaller caverns, each with a designated purpose:

Thagya's Quarters: This sparse room contains only a floor mat, several storage pots with Thagya's spellbook (actually a disordered pile of non-magical scrolls), and the dusty obsidian pedestal intended for Nibenay's head.

Moth Hatchery: Glowing *isha* moths cover the walls of this cavern, packed so densely that their light burns the eyes. The moths spin silken webs like spiders, making nests for their eggs. The nests hang from the ceiling like heavy curtains. Shallow pits dug in the floor hold fungus and fresh water for the moths.

Workshop: Storage shelves packed with beakers and canisters, long wooden lab benches, and towering stacks of scrolls fill this cavern. Thagya and his





aides use it for magical and scientific research.

Thagya's current project involves an intriguing application of the isha moth webs. Thagya discovered that soaking the webs in a solution of salts and herbs makes them waterproof and elastic, capable of being sewn into airtight balloons. Thagya envisions immense hot air balloons made from the treated webs. Carrying baskets of passengers, the balloons would make aerial assaults against the sorcerer-king's palace.

Though he has prepared enough webs to manufacture a large balloon, Thagya has yet to find a suitable mechanism to direct airborne movement. Nor has he come up with an altitude unit to let the passengers control how high the balloon rises. Research continues.

Fungus farm: Long troughs cut into the cavern floor hold abundant clusters of greenish fungus. Thagya's aides monitor the fungus, adding fertilizer and other nutrients as needed. Harvested fungus fills wheeled storage bins, which aides push to the hatchery to feed the moths.

Storeroom: This room holds poisonous salts for the entry cavern pool, antidote wafers for the poison, dried foods, medicines, and weapons.

Dormitory: Alliance members and their guests use the many bunk beds here. Some mischievous members have carved an unflattering caricature of the Priest Child Siemhouk in the wall. For amusement, they conduct mock tributes in her "honor."

Infirmary: This cavern contains beds with soft mattresses-of feathers and moth wings. The ailing and the wounded recover here. A staff of trained aides, including clerics with healing magic, attend to patients' needs around the clock. Both members and animals receive equal care.

Current patients include an immature kank with a cracked exoskeleton, an erdlu with a chronic indigestion, and an abandoned mekillot egg which the staff is attempting to hatch. Healers scatter the bones of animals that don't recover on the shores of the poison pool, in the entry cavern, to intimidate intruders.

Adventure Hooks

1. Thagya at last finishes a prototype hot-air isha balloon, complete with a functional steering device and altitude unit. He asks the player characters to take the first flight, a reconnaissance mission over the sorcerer-king's palace complex. If the player characters resist, Thagya flatters, bribes, or begs them as necessary to secure their compliance.

The balloon performs as designed; the player characters have no trouble getting it off the ground, and the steering device allows for smooth changes of direction. However, once airborne, the DM may introduce a variety of complications. For instance, a strong wind may blow the balloon off course, sending the party anywhere the DM likes (near the mouth of an active volcano, over a herd of grazing mekillots, or into a deep ravine, which may contain monsters, treasure, or a community of humanoid savages).

2. The balloon may attract the attention of any number of airborne creatures, from giant hornets to curious air elementals. A hard rain storm may put out the fire in the altitude unit, causing the balloon to land in the Naggaramakam courtyard; the PCs may have to struggle to relight the unit, then take to the air before the arrival of a palace security force.



Raam

Overview

Campaign style: *Defensive, Successful.*

The Alliance in Raam negotiates a difficult middle course between the Grand Vizier's tyranny and the anarchy that her rebellious nobles are creating. In this turbulent city, Alliance members have heavily infiltrated the mansabdars, the local constabulary and soldiers. When the authorities apprehend a preserver, they quietly funnel the wizard into the Alliance.

With this leverage, the chapter might act more aggressively than it does. However, Raam citizens have never regarded mundane power as fashionable, outside of Abalach-Re's palatial court. The Alliance's current leaders (including, bizarrely, at least one elf) pursue more intellectual goals, notably spell research.

Junior members and visitors sometimes feel frustration at their Council's abstraction. The leaders may yet redeem themselves, if their current research bears fruit.

The City

Population: 40,000 (40% human, 20% dwarf, 10% mul, 15% elf, 5% half-elf, 5% half-giant, 4% thri-kreen, 1% halfling; 5% priests, 10% templars and soldiers, 20% merchants, artisans, and landowners, 60% servants and laborers, 5% untouchable). Natives are called "Raamites" or "Raamish."

Emblems: Abalach-Re's face; Badna, a four-armed man in a long loincloth. Abalach-Re devised Badna, the "greater power," to justify her authority.

Economy: Silver, gems, flint; jute, a fibrous plant; silk; carpets, textiles, art.

Noteworthy residents: Abalach-Re (21st-level dragon, LE); Grogh-En, senior templar, sympathetic to the Alliance (Tmp10, 27 hp, LN); Yestera-Opik, food wholesaler who knows many rumors (F9,

25 hp, LN); Ushuch-Si, renowned sculptress (Ri', 17 hp, LG).

Unusual sites: Royal Barracks, multi-story military dormitory; Gallery of the Seven Stars, sculpture museum; artisan's plaza; wrestling pits; livestock pens; Benevolence Center, communal housing complex for the elderly; and the Consecrated Sepulcher of Badna ("the Big Tomb"), a huge mausoleum holding the last 30 generations of the sorcerer-queen's husbands and other favorites.

Raam, the most populous city-state, ranks with Draj as the largest in area. Raam also holds the most racially diverse population in the region; here, humans do not make up the majority. Nonetheless, humans occupy most positions of importance. Also, travellers face greater language problems in Raam than in other city-states. Every narrow street buzzes with conversations in half a dozen languages.

In past centuries Raam earned wealth by mining alabaster, sapphires, and emeralds from the mountains to the south. The mines' richest find has become legendary—the "Star of Badna," a blue sapphire said to weigh over 200 carats. Folk tales of this gem's hideous curse proliferate as one nears Raam. Abalach-Re and her highest templars renew and strengthen the gem's curse annually. Though any citizen may attend this public ceremony, no one does, for the gem's magic has grown so that merely viewing it at a distance, without protective talismans, causes violent illness.

The gem mines played out years ago, contributing to the problems that now assail the city. This may help explain why the Grand Vizier has resorted to claiming authority in the name of a fictitious "greater power," named Badna. She coerces the entire population into pro-forma worship of this dubious entity.

Shrines: To that end, she has erected hundreds of tiny shrines called upubadna throughout the city. Each shrine consists of a crude stone replica of a



grinning sun fastened to the top of a wooden post. Beneath the stone sun hangs a prayer wheel, a wooden disk about three feet in diameter. Symbols cover the wheel's rim, each symbol representing obedience, charity, or some other aspect of Badna. Worshippers must spin the wheel, then improvise a brief prayer to Badna based on the indicated aspect.

A merchant can hardly travel from his home to the trade court without passing at least a dozen upbadna. Few stop at the shrines, since no mandate enforces worship. Indifference to Badna increasingly frustrates the Grand Vizier. She weighs various methods to encourage or require citizens to take her deity more seriously.

Culture

In response to the chaos around them, the people of Raam have withdrawn into themselves. Worry creases their faces. They walk with heads bowed,

eyes focused on the street, nodding furtively to acquaintances but rarely stopping to exchange words. Friends share a communal stew or pipe of tobacco in silence. A Raam social engagement tends to resemble a funeral service more than a party.

The city suffers from poor medical care, a tragic consequence of the shaky relationship between the citizens and their leaders. The sorcerer-queen and her aides seem indifferent to public health. Sewage systems go unrepaired; vermin infect the food supplies; hospitals opened one week may close abruptly the next. Chronic diseases plague slaves and artisans alike. They die in the alleys and streets, and garbage collectors haul corpses to the crematory.

In this atmosphere of misery, visitors to Raam feel understandable surprise to find citizens friendly and polite. Oddly, they react more openly to strangers than to each other. They commonly view outsiders as sources of relief, rather than bringers of conflict. They ask, quite courteously, for a scrap of uncontaminated food, help with hauling a dead relative to





Raam

the crematory, or advice for treating an ailing child.

The prevalence of fine art in Raam also shocks visitors. Citizens struggle to create their own beauty, and the results appear everywhere. Ornate murals decorate mud huts of slaves. A silver bracelet bearing strikingly lifelike images of birds and cats dangles from the wrist of a withered crone. A filthy child carries a gleaming *ti-shi*, a bell stick covered with tiny brass chimes. The music of lutes and tambourines wafts from open windows, offering an ironic counterpoint to the misery in the streets.

Architecture: In sharp contrast to the elegance of the ivory and alabaster palace of the sorcerer-king, the rest of the city's buildings look functional and simple. Due to occasional mild earthquakes, they build with light, cheap walls of wood that minimize harm to occupants should they collapse.

Affluent citizens raise their homes on stone supports, elevating them a few feet from the ground. The air circulating beneath provides some relief from the heat of the day. Slaves live in tents of animal skins stretched over long poles. Destitute citizens sleep in the streets.

Laws: Raam has two police forces. The public enforcers, called the *mansabdars*, do a lackadaisical job, and corruption rules them. In contrast, a secret police force called the *kuotagha* brutally enforces the city's laws. The *kuotagha* move freely among the populace, indistinguishable from ordinary merchants and artisans. Chosen for their bloodthirsty nature and deputized to administer justice as they see fit, the *kuotagha* induce terror in law-abiding citizens and criminals alike. They presume all suspects are guilty and treat them accordingly; the *kuotagha* aren't interested in hearing excuses or weighing facts. They may arrest any suspect they feel will interest the sorcerer-queen, but more often they execute the prisoner immediately.

The *kuotagha* carry special weapons called *ghi*, braided strands of leather with thick knots in the center. A *kuotagha* approaches a suspect from be-

hind, and quickly loops the *ghi* around his neck. Before the suspect can respond, the *kuotagha* yanks the *ghi* tight while kneeling the suspect in the back. The knot in the *ghi* crushes the suspect's trachea, while the *kuotagha's* knee snaps his spine. Most suspects die instantly, and the *kuotagha* then disappears into the crowd.

(In game terms, a *kuotagha* makes a normal attack roll when using a *ghi*, modified for surprise in his favor. A successful hit means instant death for victims with fewer than 6 hp. Victims with more than 6 hp suffer 1d6 points of damage and must make a Constitution check. A failed check means the victim collapses into unconsciousness for 3d6 rounds.)

Social Order

Inviolable social strata, or "castes", embrace the whole population. Citizens born into a caste never leave it. Members of one caste cannot marry into another, nor even associate with other castes without becoming unclean. Each caste may include members of all races.

Castes are ranked from highest status to lowest. The highest status belongs to the priests. (Note that this caste does *not* mean the priest character class!) Its members include not only clerics and druids, but also teachers and scholars. They study elementals and spirits of the land, which they arrange in a complicated mythology. This caste includes many devout clerics, called *yogin* or *saddhus*, who have taken vows of poverty. They usually wear simple ocher or white garments.

Slightly lower in status, the vizier (administrative) caste includes templars and *mansabdars* (police officials and soldiers). They wear rich clothing of dyed silk. This cloth comes from the Grand Vizier's prized silk wyrms, kept beneath the palace and fed well on prisoners. Administrators, mainly warriors and rogues, collect taxes and provide services. A few



honest mansabdars belong to the Alliance.

Landowners (nobles), tradesmen, and artisans earn high income, but this carries no status in Raam. In the city's current chaos they barricade themselves in homes just short of fortresses, waiting for the situation to sort itself out. They dress like the vizier caste, but with lower-quality cloth instead of silk.

The laborers, the largest and lowest caste, include servants of the higher castes and vast numbers of slaves who work the fields outside the city. Thin, in ill health, and somewhat desperate, members wear simple white linen shirts, pants, or loincloths. Women scrimp to afford a colorful sari, a full-length cloth wrap.

For true desperation, though, look to the outcasts, those who work in the despised professions of mortician, tanner, butcher, and others dealing with dead creatures. Members of the castes consider them so polluted that they must live outside the city walls in sprawling slums.

The Offspring

In her thousand-year reign the Grand Vizier has taken many male companions, for their life or for a year (sometimes it amounted to the same thing). As a result, over the past millennium, she has borne innumerable children—some say over 400. Citizens call Abalach-Re's many children and their descendants "the Offspring."

Abalach-Re, hardly a careful parent, abandons each newborn infant to nurses just hours after the birth and never thinks of it again. The children belong to various castes, depending on who in court cares to adopt the child—priests, mansabdars, or outcaste servants.

Few Offspring in history have accomplished much, and none ever presented a threat to the Grand Vizier's power. The Alliance leader, Nanda Shatri, an Offspring and outcaste, has become the

first to threaten her mother's reign.

History

For obscure reasons, the origin of Raam's Alliance has become linked with that of Gulg. Consult the Gulg entry in this chapter for more information.

Whatever the circumstances of its founding, the Raam Alliance made a faltering start. Several times Abalach-Re's early persecution almost destroyed the society. A succession of leaders made feeble attempts to stabilize the Alliance, but they barely managed to recruit replacement members for those who died of old age, left the city, or fell to the sorcerer-queen's templars.

A new dawn for the Raam Alliance came with the arrival of Nanda Shatri, a determined, visionary Offspring who promised a new direction for the Alliance, one that stressed long-term goals and careful planning. The new Alliance, she pledged, would prize intellectual talents as well as magical skills. Under this sensible and inspiring woman, the ranks of the Alliance soon swelled.

Shatri made three fundamental changes in the Raam Alliance. First, she has organized the chapter into a rigid chain of command, with Shatri herself as Commander. Just below her, two aides of equal authority, the Sub-Commander and the Secretary, have responsibility for administration and general counsel. Shatri divided the city into four sectors, each with an overseer called the Sectorate. Each Sectorate commands five officers, in charge of Research, Security, Finance, Training, and Information. In turn, each officer commands a varying number of lieutenants.

Second, Shatri cultivated contacts in every level of the government, including the sorcerer-queen's court, the army, and the templars. She used various techniques to keep the informants in line; bribery proved far and away the most effective. Shatri also managed, by lining the pockets of the proper au-



held no meaning. Earning a fair amount of money through many enterprises, she invested it in the finest teachers of magic she could find, gradually becoming a mage of formidable skill.

Following the death of her adoptive parents, Shatri returned to Raam and boldly requested an audience with the sorcerer-queen. Intrigued by Shatri's audacity, the sorcerer-queen set up a meeting. Much to the sorcerer-queen's surprise, Shatri requested authority over the city's crematory. "I was raised by outcastes and have the soul of an outcaste, despite my heritage," Shatri said. "I feel no shame in seeking an outcaste's job." Shatri asked only that she be allowed to run the crematory as she saw fit and keep whatever money she could earn. The sorcerer-queen quickly agreed, happy to delegate the distasteful but necessary operation to someone of competence.

Within weeks after assuming control of the crematory, Shatri turned it into a profitable enterprise. More importantly, the crematory became a base for the Raai Alliance, of which Shatri had recently become leader. For the last 20 years the Alliance operated undetected from the crematory, comfortably financed by its profits.

A few years ago, having gone as far as she thought possible in mastery of magic, Shatri discovered vague references to a highly advanced creature called an avangion. Investigating further, she found hints that she herself might become such a creature. But the process required elaborate preparations, extensive time and resources—more importantly, she needed to cultivate the ways of the mind. Only a psionically tuned mind could handle the vast magical energies that the transformation required. (Only a preserver/psionist of 20th-level can attempt the long transformation into an advanced being.)

With typical resolve and secrecy, Shatri abandoned development of her consummate magical skills and, at age 53, joined a class of seven-year-old noble children at a psionics academy, as they fum-

blingly began their studies in the way of the mind. Happily, Shatri progressed well, and now she takes day-long personal lessons from the Alliance's powerful psionist auxiliaries

Meanwhile, Shatri has set the Alliance researching avangion transformation spells night and day. They hardly understand what they search for, but they follow her with ardent devotion. They race against the chaos that must surely envelop Raam soon.

Appearance: She is in her late fifties, small and heavy-set, with unusual poise. Shatri maintains a shabby appearance, appropriate for an outcaste. She wears ragged brown smocks and scuffed sandals, tying her stringy gray hair into a waist-length pony tail. She has sparkling green eyes, a knowing grin, and a contralto voice almost as deep as a man's.

Role-playing: Shatri loves to talk for hours about magic, economics, and the dozens of other subjects that interest her. She has a keen sense of humor, but takes her duties as leader of the Alliance seriously. She dismisses the concern expressed by some members about her growing obsession with avangion transformation, insisting that she can run the Alliance as well as research spells. She professes complete faith in her subordinates, though she does keep close tabs on them.

Notes: For full rules on the avangion transformation process, consult the Dragon Kings rulebook.

Kalihana of the Ormul

Male Elf Preserver (Vizier Caste)

13th-Level

Neutral Good

Str 13

Dex 16

Con 14

Int 16

Wis 13

Cha 13



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hp: 36

AC: 10

#AT: 1

THAC0: 16

Dmg: by spell

Proficiencies: Dagger; Ancient History, Ancient Languages, Artistic Ability, Herbalism, Reading/Writing, Somatic Concealment, Speller aft.

Psionics: astral projection.

Background: Born to merchant parents in Raam's vizier caste, Kalihana grew up discontented with city life and finally ran away to join a nomadic elven tribe. Life in the desert proved more difficult than he'd imagined. After a year of sandstorms, beigo attacks, and too much kank nectar, Kalihana retreated to Raam.

However, during his desert sojourn, Kalihana had befriended a preserver and had secretly begun study of the magical arts. Back in Raam, he contacted the Alliance. For the last six decades he has continued study, seeking greater command of magic and all known lore of magical items.

It has fallen to Kalihana to lead the Alliance as Nanda Shatri's Sub-Commander while Shatri pursues her distant goal. Kalihana only vaguely knows her purpose, but he pleasantly accepts it as a sign of typical human insanity.

Appearance: Kalihana has a lean frame, spindly arms and legs, a pointed chin, and narrow gray eyes. He prides himself in his appearance and primps before a mirror until every hair on his head lies perfectly in place. He wears stylish shirts and trousers made from the finest material he can afford.

Role-playing: A capable leader, intelligent and cool-headed, Kaliana too often betrays the elvish traits of unreliability and arrogance toward non-elves. Still, when he keeps his fundamental nature under control, few in the Council can match his fine sense of politics and negotiation.

Nothing upsets the meticulous Kalihana more than the time he must spend in the dirty crematory. He shares his displeasure with Shatri, who teases him for it; but mutual respect binds them. Both believe unwaveringly in the goals of the Alliance, though they disagree on how to achieve them.

More than once, Kalihana has expressed to Shatri his concern that her research is a waste of time and resources; Shatri scolds Kalihana for his lack of imagination. So far, Kalihana has deferred to Shatri's wishes, but he grows impatient. If Shatri's research doesn't bear fruit soon, Kalihana has threatened to leave his position as Sub-Commander.

Headquarters

Exterior

Just beyond the western wall of the city stands an imposing granite structure, its walls windowless and featureless except for a set of double doors on the south side. A cylindrical brick chimney rising from the back of the building constantly belches spirals of thick black smoke. The dead of Raam make their last stop here, at the city's crematory.

The outcaste Offspring, Nanda Shatri, operates the crematory, and has for nearly three decades. No citizen in Raam has more job security than Shatri, for few would perform the service for any amount of money. Both the citizenry and the government leave Shatri to her own devices, inspecting the crematory only rarely. Consequently, it makes an ideal location for the headquarters of the Raam Alliance. Thanks to Shatri's shrewd business sense, the crematory turns a profit that fills the Alliance treasury.

Two small buildings stand adjacent to the crematory on either side. The west building, a one-room shack with brick walls and a thatched roof, serves as Shatri's private quarters. It contains only a sleeping cot, a shelf for personal items, and a small desk with a rickety chair. The ramshackle structure and mod-



est furnishings give the impression of poverty, an impression Shatri intentionally cultivates to discourage the interest of nosy officials.

The east building houses a pottery shop, staffed by three Alliance members who manufacture and sell funerary urns. The back section of the building contains potters' wheels, barrels of clay, and other equipment. The front section, the only part of the entire complex that anyone other than an outcaste dares enter, displays the wares for sale.

Interior

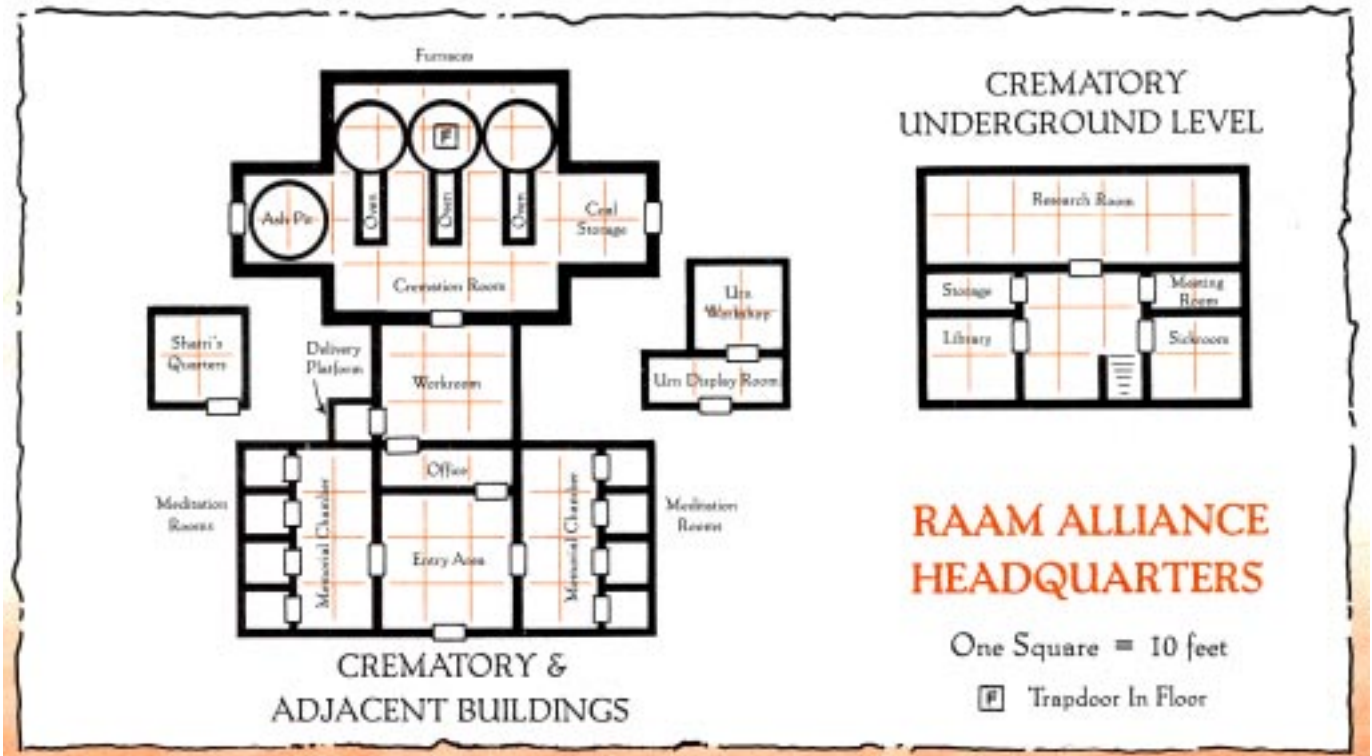
Subdued torchlight illuminates the polished granite walls of the entryway. Two huge memorial chambers open on either side of the entryway. Hundreds of filled urns line their wooden shelves from floor to ceiling. A ceramic plaque secured to the shelf below each urn identifies the remains.

Shatri charges a modest monthly maintenance fee to store the urns. Should a family miss payment for

three consecutive months, Shatri sends word that they have 30 days in which to claim the urn and remove it from the chamber. If the family fails to remove it, Shatri empties and returns the urn to the pottery shop for resale.

Eight small meditation rooms supposedly serve friends and relatives visiting the crematory. In theory, visitors take urns from the memorial chamber into these private rooms, which contain candles and benches. City laws require these rooms, but in practice, no one but outcastes ever use them, for fear of pollution. Shatri and the Alliance sometimes appropriate them for the society's business.

North of Shatri's office lies the workroom where Shatri and her aides process and cremate bodies. The cremation chamber consists of three cylindrical iron ovens and two small alcoves. One stores coal for the furnace; the other contains a pit to hold excess ash. (Shatri sells the ash to farmers for fertilizer.) All three ovens share a common chimney.





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Secret Chambers

The center oven serves as a tunnel leading to a non-functional furnace with a trap door in the center. The trap door opens to a stairway leading down to the Alliance's secret headquarters. These rooms include:

Meeting Room: A Security lieutenant always sits at desk at the bottom of the stairway, noting the comings and goings of Alliance members. The lieutenant's meticulous records tell Shatri the whereabouts of all high-ranking members at any time. The meeting room contains several comfortable chairs, a roster of the members' code-names and their current assignments on one wall, and a detailed map of the city on another.

Library: Neat stacks of scrolls fill this room, sorted by author and subject. For easy reference, lists of the general contents of the stacks cover the walls. The scrolls include research data, personal information about the sorcerer-queen and her aides, maps of other cities, and reference material.

Storage: Emergency rations, weapons, clothes for disguises, and spare lab equipment.

Conference room: This small room contains only table and a few chairs, used by the Sectorates for planning sessions.

Infirmary: A recovery area for sick and injured members, also occasionally used as a guest room.

Research laboratory: Shatri and her assistants use this sophisticated laboratory to conduct magical research. It holds equipment and supplies for researching both magical items and spells. Stacks of scrolls, comprising the spell research library, line long shelves against the walls. Tables and shelves hold test tubes, burners, beakers, potions, and herbs.

Adventure Hooks

1. Shatri orders her aides to sneak into the sorcerer-king's palace complex and steal the larvae of Abalach-Re's personal silk wyrms; Shatri needs the larvae for her spell research. (Alternately, if the

PCs have allied with Shatri, she may send them instead.) After successfully navigating the palace's defenses, the aides return with the larvae. (If the PCs are stealing the larvae, the DM may develop the theft into a mini-adventure, featuring narrow escapes with the sorcerer-queen's security guards and a brush with the angry wyrms).

Unknown to Shatri, the mother wyrms can sense the location of the larvae. The wyrms escape from their pens and leave the compound, determined to retrieve their missing larvae. The sorcerer-queen's panicking security forces cannot stop the wyrms as they make their way through the city, heading directly for the crematory. The PCs must intercept and stop the wyrms, either by destroying them or giving back their larvae, before they reach the crematory and expose the Alliance's secret headquarters.

2. The player characters agree to ambush an elderly defiler named Urax while he takes his nightly walk, in order to interrogate him about a series of unusual experiments he has allegedly conducted on behalf of the sorcerer-queen.

The ambush goes off without a hitch. Unfortunately, Urax has a weak heart and succumbs to a heart attack during the confrontation. Unless the PCs think of it themselves, Shatri tells them to bring his body to the crematory. No sooner does the furnace begin to heat up than the surprised player characters hear a banging inside the oven! A grotesque creature shambles out. (Make this a zombie made of ash or a fiery skeleton; the exact nature of the creature is up to you).

Apparently Urax had relied on his cremation fires and pre-arranged this transformation. The PCs must help Shatri destroy the creature, then discover how to permanently dispose of the remains. This may require burial deep in the earth, sealing them inside an obsidian crypt, or exposure to the glow of the Star of Badna.

Overview

Campaign style: *Defensive, Struggling.*

Templars in Urik teach the citizens their sorcerer-king's approved doctrine of order and of change. These abstract principles underlie all of existence, the doctrine says. Order means death or stultifying misery, whereas change liberates vitality. Hamanu, the Mighty King, clearly has high ambitions to create change throughout the Tyr Region.

The Alliance in Urik concerns itself with change of a different kind: overthrowing the king. However, Hamanu's powerful army makes this unlikely. Furthermore, the Alliance's longtime leader has vanished mysteriously, leaving two rival Council factions to struggle for the society's leadership.

The City

Population: 32,000 (75% human, 5% dwarf, 3% mul, 2% elf, 1% half-elf, 10% half-giant, 3% thri-kreen, 1% halfling). Natives called "Urikites" or the slightly derogatory "Uri."

Emblems: Hamanu's face; Hamanu in battle dress; Hamanu surrounded by red fire; and so on.

Economy: Obsidian; water; slaves; silk; pottery.

Noteworthy residents: Hamanu, sorcerer-king (21st-level dragon); Babantyllos, chief astronomer (P10, Sphere of Air, 30 hp, LN); Tamarapal, High Priestess (Tmp14, 20 hp due to old age, LE); Baneser, priestess and imperial consort (Tmp6, 20 hp, LN); Mulgan-dur-g an of Zolpatl, commander of halfling infantry (F3, 45 hp, LN).

Unusual sites: Destiny's Kingdom, palace complex; Temple of the Mighty King, shrine to Hamanu; Little Jungle, fenced area of army grounds given to halfling huts built in jungle style; Royal Observatory; Three Sisters Observatory; obsidian mines, Mountain of the Black Crown; Potter's Court, pottery market.

Hamanu's palace complex, Destiny's Kingdom,

lies at the center of Urik, but more accurately Urik lies at one corner of the complex. The Mighty King's massive estate extends from the heart of the city in a broad wedge out to the base of Sunrise Hill, where the ancient Observatory's many balconies and platforms stand to watch the dawn.

Destiny's Kingdom, called simply "Destiny" in conversation, could hold the entire city of Tyr, with room left over for Gulg. Only Raam and Draj cover more land. But the vast complex consists mainly of dry desert; the sorcerer-king's magic raised its high wall and many buildings, but his city has too few people to maintain the grounds. This demonstrates, as many features of Urik do, how Hamanu's ambition exceeds his resources. Of course, observing this in a templar's presence guarantees an instant death sentence. So says Hamanu's Code.

Law: In Urik the law reigns supreme, or so claims Hamanu. In fact Hamanu dictates all laws and changes them at his need. But for civil matters in which he takes no personal interest, the Urikite code stands unsurpassed in the Tyr Region for utility, comprehensiveness, and ruthlessness.

Hamanu's Code, as some call it, relies on the principle of *talion*, or punishment in kind. If an attacker cuts off a victim's hand, the attacker loses a hand; if a thief steals food, the thief must work to earn that value of food for the victim, and may not eat until then. The Code emphasizes loyalty to Hamanu and the templars, and secondarily a rigid civil order. (Hamanu's rhetoric as a "force of change" only applies outside his own city, it seems.)

Order and change: The Urikite philosophy of amukash revolves around an endless struggle between these two abstract principles. The templar scholars of Destiny's Kingdom teach that Order currently dominates, and so Athas is stagnating, even dying. The Mighty King will assert the cause of change, they say, and restore vigor to the world.

So far the king has not established much vigor even in Urik. His vaulting ambition has diverted



Urik

much of the city's economy to the building of monuments, though not to the ruinous extent that the late Kalak required in Tyr. Hamanu at least keeps his people fed, if the bare subsistence rations of mountain wild rice he allots qualify as "feeding" them.

Temples: Like Tectuktitlay in Draj, Hamanu styles himself a god. He has erected a huge shrine to himself just inside Destiny's walls. Here his priests and priestesses preach the coming glory when he conquers the world. Priestesses outrank priests in the temple; both belong to the templar class.

The Temple of the Mighty King hardly qualifies as a holy place, even by the low standards of Athas. Hamanu indulges his various whims with the priestesses, and he codifies this behavior by forcing the Temple's staff to acquiesce to parishioners' desires. At all times, one priest and one priestess sit on obsidian thrones on an altar. If any parishioner tosses a gold coin in his or her lap, then for the next hour that templar must obey the parishioner's wishes in all matters, save only those that injure someone or

conflict with Hamanu's Code. Only the templars of the Temple must obey this stricture, and then only during their infrequent shifts on the altar. (Adventurers who try to take advantage of this rule more than once or twice certainly incur a stern revenge from off-duty templars.)

Dress: Urikites wear square-cut hair styles with elaborate tight ringlets; men have square-cut curled beards. Some wear a brimmed fez.

Lower classes wear a white linen shirt with short, tight sleeves, knee-length. Upper classes wear the same shirt to ankle-length, but with a striped or diamond pattern and topped with a girdle trimmed with tassels. An elaborate scarf indicates the wearer's station; the longer and richer the scarf, the higher the social rank. Citizens wear the scarves only in the evenings and at night, after the heat of the day.

Among all Urikites and by law, only templars may wear a cloak, and only the sorcerer-king may wear a cloak with a fringe. Templars' cloaks are





bleached white (another unique honor). Hamanu keeps a huge selection of cloaks and changes them daily or more often; popular belief has it that he need never repeat the same pattern in an ordinary person's lifetime. Some say presenting Hamanu with a fine new fringed cloak earns his favor, if he likes it; but presenting him with a cloak he dislikes leads to disaster.

Urikites enjoy competitive sports, such as arm wrestling and a hoop-rolling game known as *pichut*, as well as story-telling and dancing.

Architecture: Buildings range from crude dome-like slave quarters made of brick and sticks to the spectacular *ukrikets*, glistening obsidian towers with open observation platforms at the top. The *ukrikets* serve both as guard posts and demonstrations of Hamanu's majesty. Ornate obsidian statues of Hamanu line the neatly-kept streets. So do immense brick walls covered with white glaze, on which artists paint elaborate scenes of Hamanu's exploits.

Pottery

Urikites consider pottery not only an esteemed trade but a fine art. The whole Tyr region holds Urikian pottery in high regard for its fine workmanship, and traders get high prices for the city's dishes, plates, and a variety of decorative pieces.

Potters make their wares from the soft gray clay found in abundance near the city's obsidian mines. They add dyes and ground minerals to produce crimson, green, blue, and other brilliant colors, then knead the clay into shape on the dozens of potter's wheels scattered throughout Potter's Court. The Court's immense stone kilns raise the local temperature to almost unbearable levels, so potters operate the kilns during the evening and at night. Potters decorate their pieces with lustrous glazes (the popular metallic colors contain little actual metal), and detailed carvings of animals, astronomical symbols, and images of the sorcerer-king.

History

Urik's Alliance chapter almost certainly arose soon after Tyr's. By ill chance Kalak identified one of Averil's original seven Council members in Tyr, a summoner named Vintalus. Warned by his familiar, Vintalus fled the city moments before the guard patrol destroyed his hide-a-way. He took refuge with friends in Urik, instructed them in magic, and slowly built a Urikite Alliance.

The chapter's eventful history in the four or five centuries since encompasses unusual highs and lows. Popular legend tells of a "wizards' war" some time in the foil owing century, when the open desert between Tyr and Urik flamed in the night with magical lights. The next morning, investigators found bones, splotches of odd fluid, fused black glass, uncanny crawling things, and other evidence of wizardry.

This battle marks the only direct conflict recorded between Alliance chapters. Fragmentary records indicate that one society wished to unite with (that is, gain control of) the other. Even at this late date, each society blames the other for the aggression. In the event, both sides lost and retreated, not unlike the recent conflict between Tyr and Urik following Kalak's death. Both Alliances grew perilously weak for a generation, and no Alliance has tried to control another city's chapter since that time.

When the Urik Alliance returned to strength in the following centuries, Hamanu learned of its power and hunted its members mercilessly. He made repeated inroads against them, and the last incursion fragmented the society for many years. Decades ago, a great preserver named Morlak finally restored the Alliance, and under his leadership the chapter has taken particular interest in overthrowing the sorcerer-king.

Unfortunately, Morlak recently disappeared without a trace and without a successor. The squabble over the chapter's new leadership and direction



Urik

has led to a new fragmenting—two rival factions. Player characters who arrive in Urik encounter not one, but two Alliances.

Contacting The Alliance

Visitors and novice wizards know nothing of the recent split. So far as they know, they're simply contacting the Urik Alliance, whether in a tavern, marketplace, at the Observatory (home of a dowdy and doddering old diviner named Thassaphar), or in the Potter's Court, the nominal headquarters.

Actually the characters contact only one of the two factions, and they can't control which one! This becomes important when they choose a side, for they automatically make enemies in the other faction. The player characters can encounter either faction; choose the faction they meet according to the needs of the story.

Magical Pots

Three Alliance members work among Urik's potters. Acting on Council instructions, these wizards cast *magic mouth* spells on bricks and pots, or sometimes on the government's message tablets. The spells convey information to other members.

Every pot with a message carries a symbolic pair of lips worked into its design, either embossed or painted. A second symbol represents one Alliance cell; each cell has its own symbol, such as a dotted square, a candle flame, or a cat's eye. After completing the pot and casting the *magic mouth* spell, the wizard carries it to the marketplace, where one of several merchants (all auxiliary members) puts it on sale at a ruinously high price.

A cell member who sees this pot for sale offers a price containing an agreed-upon password—for instance, "This pot looks likely to crack around the rim, but it looks worth a ceramic piece." The merchant then sells the pot to the member, though both may put on a show of haggling, if observers notice.

The member carries away the pot to a safe place and speaks the keyword to activate the spell. Each cell has a unique keyword that always activates the messages for that cell. The pair of lips animates and speaks the message. Then the member passes along the information at the next meeting.

Myrmeleon infiltrators sometimes argue that the Alliance should use the spells to foment unrest among the citizenry. For example, the spell should activate when anyone approaches, speaking words such as "Hamanu must fall!" This plan, of course, would implicate the potters' guild, which has heretofore escaped connection with wizardry.

Initiation

Though other chapters like to offer initiations based on breaking into the sorcerer-king's palace, in Urik this presents little challenge. Destiny's Kingdom covers a vast area, and the guards cannot hope to protect every foot of its wall. An intruder can walk almost openly inside the compound without expecting to see a patrol.

Instead, each Alliance faction has adopted alternate initiations designed to evaluate a candidate's integrity.

Leoricus's Faction

The candidate stands before Leoricus and a cadre of his trusted aides, or before a cell contact, and answers questions. Typical questions include, "If magic brought this plight on our world, should we not, for morality, outlaw magic altogether?" and "Should a wizard devote most of his energies to improving his own skills or should he concentrate on devising ways to help others?" Leoricus has no right or wrong answers; he wants to see the candidate's ability to reason. All too often he hears the worst possible answer, "I don't know."

Finally Leoricus gives the candidate a small flask of water, then leads him to a dying plant. "Assume



this is your entire ration of water for the day," he tells the candidate. "Would you use it to revive this plant, or would you save the water for yourself?" Ideally the candidate saves the water for himself. ("Even now, plants outnumber strong men and women.")

However, a candidate who answers in the "wrong" has the opportunity to defend his answer. A well-reasoned defense carries the same weight as the "right" answer.

Thania's Faction

Initiation here involves a simple task, compounded by an unexpected problem that tests the candidate's ability to think quickly. For instance, the candidate may receive a pot inscribed with a pair of lips, with instructions to take it to Potters' Court and give it to a particular individual, whom the Alliance tester describes in detail.

Unknown to the candidate, no such individual will appear. Instead, an aide follows the candidate and observes how he handles the situation. A candidate who leaves the pot unattended in the designated location, or worse, asks a stranger to care for the pot, fails the test. Should the candidate wait patiently at the location for the specified individual to arrive, the tester sends a different person who does not fit the description given. This new person tries to convince the candidate that the Alliance sent him. A candidate who refuses to hand over the pot passes the first part of the initiation. A successful Green Test ensures acceptance by the faction.

The Tests in Practice

Failure to join one faction actually increases the candidate's chances in the other. Also, each faction competes strongly for the allegiance of members, or potential members. So a contact may coach the player characters before the initiation, saying, "We prize lucidity of thought," or "Don't trust everyone

you see in Potter's Court." Better this, they reason, than letting potential members get away to the rival faction.

Leadership

Morlak

Human Male Preserver

15th-Level

Lawful Good

Background: Morlak assumed leadership of the fractured Alliance in the wake of the "Week of the Red Hood," an intensive seven-day sweep of the city by a vicious security force hand-picked by the sorcerer-king. The soldiers, their faces concealed by red hoods, ferreted out members of the Alliance and slaughtered them on the spot, killing dozens. Outraged, Morlak organized an underground network to hide the survivors. For some time after the Week of the Red Hood, Hamanu believed he had wiped out the Alliance. In fact, two dozen members hid in safehouses throughout the city. When they emerged, they proclaimed Morlak the new leader of the revitalized Alliance.

Their confidence lay in Morlak's inspiring demeanor, compassion, and careful decisions rather than in his background. Morlak had no close friends and kept his upbringing and personal life secret. He said only that he had misspent his life as a withdrawn scholar before he joined the Alliance. "I knew first-hand of Hamanu's plan to destroy the Alliance," he said cryptically. "Yet I did nothing. The blood of our brethren stains my hands as much as it does Hamanu's."

Morlak seldom asked others for advice. A smile only rarely creased his face, yet he seemed to find pleasure in the oddest things. He would watch in fascination as an ant struggled to drag a crumb to its hill, or study the edges of leaves for hours. Faced with a difficult decision, Morlak ascends to the sum-



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mit of a high hill where he spends the rest of the day alone, in thought.

During such a period of meditation, Morlak disappeared. One morning he walked to the hilltop and settled comfortably on a bed of weeds, just as he had done countless times before. When his bodyguard, the trusted Leoricus, returned for him at sunset, Morlak had vanished. To date, no clues regarding his disappearance have surfaced. Most in the Alliance fear the worst, though some suspect Morlak vanished for reasons of his own.

Appearance: Gaunt and pale, with sunken eyes and thin lips, Morlak resembled a corpse as much as a healthy 50-year-old man. He moved slowly and deliberately, speaking in low tones, almost a whisper. He favored long white gowns that covered most of his bony body. So heavy were the gowns that most would find them unbearable in the heat of the day, yet Morlak showed no discomfort.

Role-playing: Awkward in the company of others, Morlak preferred solitude, avoiding small talk, gently steering conversations to polite resolutions as quickly as possible so he could go his own way. He brooded incessantly, as if wracked with guilt, evoking both respect and sympathy from his followers.

Leoricus the Untameable

Human Male Preserver (Invoker)

14th Level

Lawful Good

Str 13

Int 20

Dex 15

Wis 12

Con 20

Cha 13

hp: 38

AC: 10

#AT: 1

THAC0: 16 (+3 Strength bonus)

Dmg: by spell

Proficiencies: Dagger; Ancient Languages, Engineering, Heat Protection, Modern Languages,

Reading/Writing, Sign Language, Somatic Concealment, Spellcraft.

Psionics: telekinesis.

Background: Leoricus supervised security for Morlak. He a ways assigned at least two veteran guards to Morlak wherever he went. One morning Morlak announced he would spend the day meditating atop a high hill outside the city. Leoricus dismissed the security guards, taking that duty on himself.

While Morlak meditated, the bored Leoricus wandered the area. He discovered a shallow valley occupied by several sunbathing maidens. Leoricus concealed himself behind a rock and watched the maidens for the rest of the day. At sunset, the maidens departed, and Leoricus returned to Morlak's hill. But Morlak had disappeared, with no evidence of a struggle and no sign of a trail.

Leoricus blamed himself for Morlak's disappearance. He vowed to take over the leader's responsibilities, an action he felt sure would meet with Morlak's approval. "I was closest to Morlak," said Leoricus. "I knew him best. He would want me to carry on his work." With that, Leoricus closed the subject.

Many members of the Alliance, however, did not share Leoricus's assumption. They believed that the ambitious Leoricus had disposed of Morlak himself. Led by the half-elf Thania, they left the old headquarters in Three Sisters Observatory to form their own faction in Potter's Court. Leoricus denounced them as traitors; they likewise denounced Leoricus and his followers.

The members who stayed with Leoricus hold him in high regard, impressed with his magic abilities. Leoricus specializes in combat. He developed a single-minded devotion to Invocation and Evocation spells in his early years as a sorcerer's apprentice.

Appearance: In his late 30s, he looks younger; he is of medium height, has a strong build, curled



brown hair and beard; flaring eyebrows and intent gaze; blue eyes. He has a strong baritone voice and carries himself regally; he frequently oils his smooth skin to give it a lustrous sheen. He wears baggy linen trousers and prefers to go bare chested—to display his rock-hard muscles.

Role-playing: Leoricus commands respect, and genuinely believes in the Alliance cause, but he shows little tolerance for disagreement. His faction attracts followers who share his commitment to the goal of overthrowing Hamanu. The rival faction believes (with reason) that the Alliance has no chance to succeed. Leoricus believes these members show cowardice and lack of imagination.

Leoricus, an invoker, behaves snobbishly towards most other schools of magic. He respects summoners and conjurers, and to a lesser extent transmuters. But he derides other schools as “airy abstractions,” and reserves particular scorn for enchanters and illusionists.

Notes: Leoricus’s spells have a sensory effect of purple rings of light that descend with a deep humming and a smell of ozone. As they descend they create the invoked effect; and touching the ground, the rings vanish.

Lodo Gansky

Male Dwarf Fighter

9th-Level

Lawful Good

Str 19

Int 16

Dex 13

Wis 15

Con 20

Cha 14

hp: 48

AC: 10

#AT: 3/2 rounds

THAC0: 12 (+3 Strength bonus)

Dmg: 1d6 (footman’s mace, stone)

Proficiencies: Axe, Dagger, Mace, Short Bow, Sling, Sword; Blacksmithing, Heat Protection,

Sign Language, Survival, Water Find, Weather Sense.

Psionics: enhanced strength.

Background: Lodo served Morlak as aide and secretary, and he now serves Leoricus the same way. Over 40 years ago the dwarf found his focus, “Help the Alliance leader,” when Morlak and several Council members saved his life.

By chance the young Lodo had been wandering by a former Alliance headquarters just as Hamanu’s forces discovered and assaulted it. Morlak and the rest drove off the attackers at great cost, and incidentally, Morlak rescued Lodo from certain death at a half-giant guard’s hands. The young dwarf, searching for a life purpose, resolved on the spot to help the Alliance in all things, and in practice this amounted to helping Morlak.

With Morlak’s unexplained disappearance and the new factional dispute, Lodo endured a brief period of doubt (a rare and shameful experience for a dwarf), then decided to choose a leader and stick by him. Leoricus does not measure up to Morlak in the dwarf servant’s eyes, for the Invoker does not have Morlak’s long perspective and wise management skills. Yet how much better a choice than Thania—not only selfish and short-sighted, but an elf! Despite misgivings, Lodo still devotes all his energies to protecting his chosen leader and the Alliance cause. The membership likes and respects him greatly.

Appearance: For a dwarf, Lodo appears rather thinly built, almost like a heavysset halfling. He wears a gray knee-length skirt with a white belt—commoners’ garb. No one ever sees him without his heavy work gloves, a type well known among laborers in Urik.

Role-playing: Wise, caring, and not impulsive. Though he doesn’t know it, Lodo would make a better Alliance leader than either Leoricus or Thania. Make this gradually clear to the PCs; let them



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suggest the idea to the dwarf, and then role-play the process of convincing the stubborn dwarf his focus of "Help the Alliance" need not really change.

Notes: Under his right glove Lodo wears a *ring of sustenance* that Morlak gave him long ago after 10 years of loyal service. The dwarf mistrusts the ring for its unreliability (his dwarven nature at work), but he wears it out of loyalty to the departed Morlak.

Thania

Female Half-Elf Preserver

12th-Level

Lawful Neutral

Str 14

Int 18

Dex 14

Wis 14

Con 13

Cha 18

hp: 34

AC: 10

#AT: 1

THAC0: 17

Dmg: by spell

Proficiencies: Dagger; Artistic Ability, Herbalism, Pottery.

Psionics: mindlink, contact, ESP.

Background: The daughter of two healers, Thania received an extensive medical education as well as training in the magical arts. Her medical skills served the Alliance well in the aftermath of the Week of the Red Hood. Thania risked her life on several occasions to tend to the wounded. One time she singlehandedly drove off a contingent of ten Red Hoods to rescue an elderly and badly beaten wizard. Her courage earned her Morlak's admiration and an honored position on the Alliance Council.

Following Morlak's disappearance, Thania disagreed sharply with Leoricus about the direction of the Alliance, advocating patience and negotiation instead of violent confrontation. Leoricus dismissed

her as a weakling. Thania responded by leaving the Alliance, taking with her a large body of the membership who feared Leoricus's headstrong obsessions.

Thania believes that Hamanu retains a strong grip on power, at least compared to the late Kalak of Tyr or Abalach-Re of Raam. Therefore she intends to lie low, executing covert actions to disrupt the status quo, but generally remaining out of sight until and unless a full-scale citizens' uprising occurs.

To complicate matters, Thania must juggle her Alliance responsibilities with raising her infant son, a six-month-old named Tasham. The father of her child, a merchant named Rumirock, died in a me-killot accident, leaving Thania alone with their baby. Though Thania has so far neglected neither the Alliance nor her son a growing number of faction members wonder if her devotion to Tasham will ultimately weaken her effectiveness as a leader. The sickly Tasham, who seems susceptible to endless afflictions, demands more and more of her time.

Appearance: Thania has small black eyes, short silver hair, and small ears pressed flat against her head. She wears a flowing white smock and long black scarf embroidered with red lace. At just over six feet tall, she presents an imposing figure, offset by an easy smile and melodious voice.

Role-playing: Though caring and wise, a tendency to hesitate flaws Thania's personality. Too often she withdraws and waits when direct action would serve her better. Aware that some see her devotion to her son as a sign of vulnerability, Thania overcompensates by boisterous language and an occasionally sharp tongue. She views Leoricus as no less than a maniac, and sees herself as the only logical successor to Morlak.

Notes: Thania's spells produce an odor of cinnamon and oranges, along with a low crackling sound and a dim yellow haze. Her more powerful spells create static electricity that makes observers' hair crackle.



Headquarters

Council leaders originally met in the Three Sisters Observatory. They found it ideal, for the sorcerer-king's astronomers no longer used it, after the construction of the more elaborate Royal Observatory on the opposite side of the city.

With the recent split, Leoricus (at Lodo's urging) has taken unofficial control of that headquarters. Thania's faction has moved to a new location, a small shop in the Potter's Court. Each faction knows the other's location, but neither has yet contemplated any drastic, self-destructive action such as attacking the rival stronghold or reporting its location to Hamanu. If tension escalates, Myrmeleon infiltrators may counsel these disastrous actions.

The King's Cup

Dozens of craft shops line Potter's Court, ranging in size from spacious warehouses containing pottery of every conceivable variety to small specialty stores featuring only a single product, such as eating utensils or storage jugs. One shop, the King's Cup, specializes in drinking mugs, sparsely decorated but well-made and affordable for commoners. Located in a secluded corner of the court, the shop does a modest business.

Inside the shop the visitor sees display racks, storage pots, and two potter's wheels—one of which always seems to be broken. The broken wheel stands on an frayed mat bearing the symbol of two lips. The mat conceals a stairway leading to a basement room that Thania's faction uses as a headquarters.

The Three Sisters Observatory

Named for the three identical granite hills nearby, the Three Sisters Observatory once functioned as the main observatory for Hamanu's royal astronomers. Since the construction of the Royal Observatory, the Three Sisters now officially serves as a storage area for astronomical records and equipment.

The observatory bears no resemblance to terrestrial equivalents -no telescopes yet exist on Athas. Instead, the two-story building offers observation balconies, oversized measuring devices, and a flat roof accessible by a staircase. Leoricus's faction meets in a hidden basement room.

The observatory stands on a high hill known as Sunrise Point. It resembles a squat cylinder about 70 feet in diameter and nearly 50 feet tall. Chips and scratches mar the obsidian walls, giving the appearance of decades of neglect. The Alliance has sealed most windows to discourage intruders, and it has also closed off the western entrance with rubble. Candles, torches, and ceiling globes imbued with *continual light* spells illuminate the interior.

Grounds: Several statues representing some of Urik's greatest astronomers circle the observatory. Near the east entry stands a modest guardhouse made of mud bricks, the domain of Thassaphar, an elderly diviner and friend of the Alliance. When strangers approach the observatory, Thassaphar intercepts them, politely inquiring about their intentions. He psionically transmits what he learns to an Alliance member inside the observatory, via mindlink.

If the strangers look young, naive, or easily intimidated, Thassaphar impersonates a stern bureaucrat, demanding to know their birthdays, work history, and other personal information. He stalls them while he meticulously writes down their every word.

If the strangers look like representatives of the king or other officials, Thassaphar peppers them with flattery ("Oh, such handsome sandals! Did you purchase them in the city, or are you from out of town?"), groveling requests ("Look at the shape of this observatory. Surely, kind sirs, someone as close to the king as you can pull some strings. You can get an audience with the king, can you not?"), or friendly banter ("Military men I served myself, you know. Ever heard of General Johorequ?"). He tries to learn as



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much as he can without arousing suspicion.

First floor: The eastern entrance opens to a large anteroom. A black and white ceramic mosaic of the constellations fills most of the floor. Should anyone step on the mosaic, the pressure triggers a mechanical device in the Alliance's secret basement room, alerting them. Walking on the green ceramic borders of the constellation mosaic avoids activating the alarm. The Alliance has imbedded similar warning mosaics in the floors, just beneath the sealed windows, in case an intruder dislodges the mortar trying to enter this way.

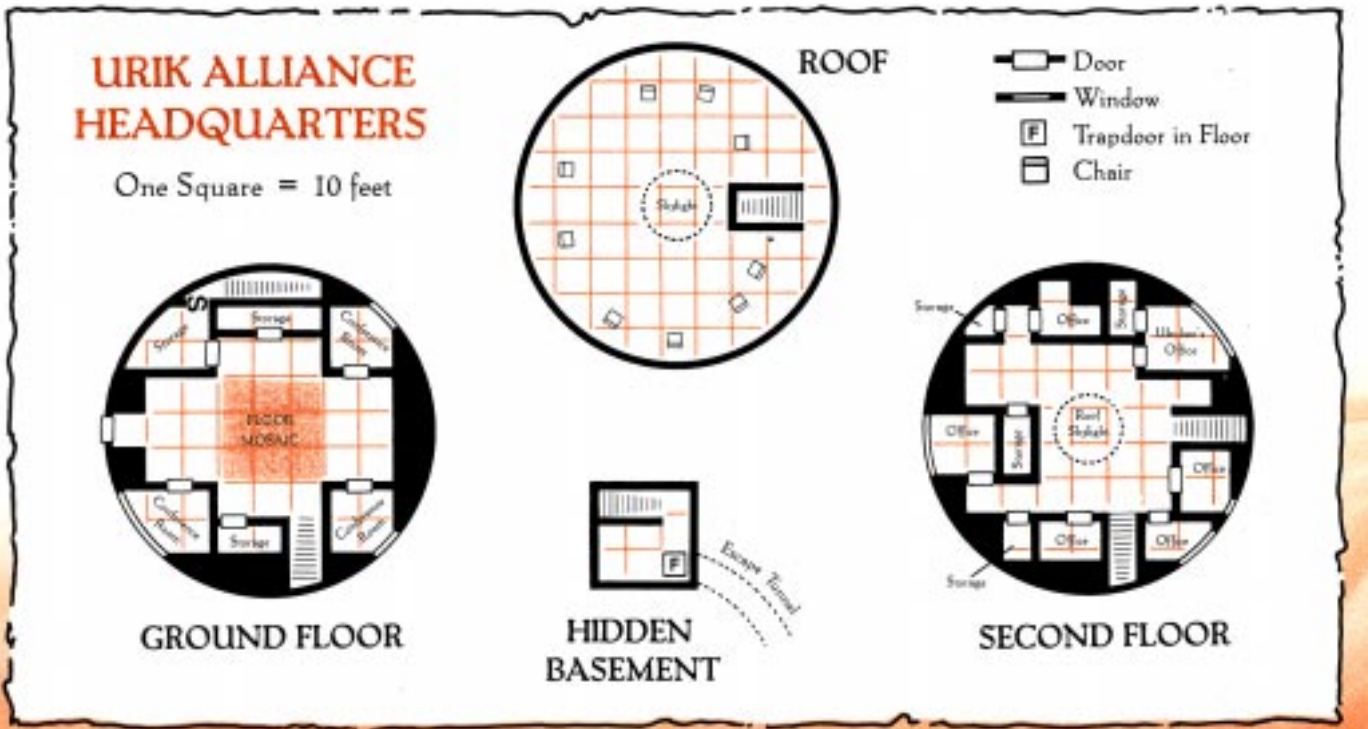
Most rooms on this floor originally served as conference and study chambers. After the construction of the Royal Observatory, these rooms became storage areas. Some now hold ancient records (mostly old and outdated astronomical charts) or spare equipment (barrels of graphite for polishing lenses, stacks of blank papyrus scrolls, and rulers of various lengths). One conceals the secret weapons cache: knives, daggers, and blowguns.

The north wall looks like solid brick, covered with a mural of the phases of the moons. By placing a hand on the image of the waning moon, a visitor can open a secret panel, revealing a stairway that leads to the Alliance's basement headquarters.

Basement: The Alliance headquarters consist of a single room with tile floors and ceramic brick walls. One wall bears the etched names of Alliance members lost in the Week of the Red Hood. Each meeting begins with members touching the wall and bowing their heads for a moment of respectful silence.

A round wooden meeting table stands in the middle of the room. A trapdoor beneath the table leads to an escape tunnel that winds deep into the earth, opening in a weed field about 100 yards away.

Second floor: The second floor has storage areas like those on the first floor, as well as several private offices originally belonging to the observatory's one-time resident scholars. Now that the scholars have died or relocated to the new Royal Observatory,





these offices contain desks, chairs, empty shelves, cabinets, and not much else.

The largest office belonged to a brilliant and eclectic researcher named Ubukez, whose interests included not only astronomy and mathematics, but medicine, anthropology, and meteorology. About a century ago, Ubukez wandered into the desert, presumably on a research project, and never returned. Most of his records remain in his office. Alliance members have examined Ubukez's records, but have found nothing of interest. An open skylight lets observers study the skies above.

Roof: Obsidian tile covers the roof, except for the open skylight that serves as part of the second floor ceiling. Reclining chairs enable astronomers to observe the stars without straining their necks.

Adventure Hooks

Thania's baby comes down with a bad case of Tok's Fever, which could prove fatal if left untreated. Thania believes that the ancient scholar, Ubukez, had developed a cure for the fever. Further, Thania thinks the cure may lie in his notes in the Three Sisters Observatory. She sends an emissary to the observatory to ask for the notes. Leoricus rebukes the emissary. Enraged, Thania vows to get Ubukez's notes, whatever the cost.

If the PCs have allied with Thania, she may order them to sneak into the observatory and steal the notes. If they have allied with Leoricus, they may have to prevent this theft. In either case, a violent clash probably erupts between the two factions at the observatory. Here the player characters may try to heal the breach between the factions, but this probably comes only after one or the other leader dies.

If Thania gains access to Ubukez's notes, obtaining the materials necessary to cure her baby may require delicate negotiations with dune traders or adventures in other cities.

What Happened to Morlak?

At the behest of Thania or Leoricus, the PCs might search for the missing Morlak. They may find one of the following solutions to the mystery of Morlak's disappearance:

1. Hamanu captured and imprisoned Morlak. The Mighty King holds him hostage as a trump card in case of an Alliance uprising. The player characters must make their way through a subterranean cavern network, winding beneath the royal palace, to liberate Morlak.

2. Hearing that an Alliance underling saw Morlak in a marketplace, the PCs interrogate merchants, bribe lowlifes, and evade Hamanu's security forces. Eventually they discover Morlak wandering the streets as a brainless beggar, the result of accidentally rubbing a cursed gem that afflicted him with a *feblemind* spell.

3. Morlak wanted the two factions to come to terms and thought the best way to achieve this was to withdraw and let them realize they needed each other. While pretending to mediate, he consumed a *potion of diminution* and hid in a hole in a tree. He has monitored the activities of both factions ever since, disappointed that they have been unable to find common ground.

Morlak appears to the PCs and implores them to act as intermediaries in a settlement between the factions. He promises to reveal himself once the factions have reached an agreement. He will not participate in the negotiations, believing that his presence will cause Leoricus and Thania to behave as they think he wants, rather than as they truly feel.

Meanwhile, Morlak plans to search for and recruit new young preservers. His investigations may inadvertently result in one of the two options discussed above.

Villages and Oases

The Veiled Alliance maintains a strong presence in the trading outpost of Altaruk and a small contingent in the slave village of Salt View. Urik's mining village of Makla usually bring in one or two preservers with every slave shipment, but these don't live long enough to develop a useful support structure. No known members live in the villages of North and South Ledopolous, Ugo, or Walis.

The many smaller towns that dot the desert landscape may include one or two citizens who know the society's recognition signals, but these owe allegiance to no chapter and make no reports to a council. No Alliance member should rely on these contacts, who often prove only temporary.

Altaruk

A caravan stops over in Altaruk every three weeks or so. Those that serve the Balican merchant houses of Wavir, Rees, and Tomblador (the village's sponsors) stay for two or three nights. Others must pay 5 gp per caravan mount each day—a ruinous total that restricts their stay to one night per trip.

Between caravans, residents endure a tedious life of 'bad meals, boring guard duty, and routine maintenance, punctuated by episodes of stark terror during the occasional giant attacks. In this, village life resembles that in an army camp or fortress. Citizens pass the time gambling, competing in wrestling or knife throwing contests, or, remarkably, learning to read. Altaruk's leader permits all citizens to read. He also has introduced other radical ideas that have made the preservers' hard lives almost pleasant.

The Alliance in Altaruk

Only in this small village does the general populous realize the distinction between preserving and defiling magic. This has made life much easier for the Alliance.

A round the fortress walls grow tall pyracantha thorn bushes. These provide some defense, but

mainly they serve another function. Every guard on the battlements knows of the Green Test. When any wizard asks entry, the guard demands to see a *cantrip* or other spell. He observes the thorn bushes closely during the spellcasting. If they survive, the guard allows the wizard in. Otherwise he sounds the alarm.

Of course, a crafty defiler can easily foil this crude test, but its very existence shows that attitudes in Altaruk differ greatly from the rest of the region. Wizards at the outpost thank the one person responsible for this.

Arisphistaneles

Human Male Preserver/Trader

Dual-Classed W4/Trad12

Lawful good

Str 15

Int 17

Dex 16

Wis 16

Con 18

Cha 18

hp: 50

AC: 8

#AT: 1

THAC0: 15

Dmg: 1d4 (dagger) or by spell.

Proficiencies: Dagger; Appraising, Bargain, Disguise, Forgery, Reading/Writing, Somatic Concealment.

Psionics; feature alteration.

Background: Born to cruel slave parents in Balic, Arisphistaneles ran away at the age of 10. He promptly fell into trouble with a templar, but a passing wizard rescued the boy and adopted him. Arisphistaneles developed intense admiration for magic, but little talent for spellcasting. Still, he joined the Alliance in Balic and served it loyally.

His real talents lay in business. After managing his adoptive fathers' affairs, the youth joined the merchant house of Wavir and rose rapidly in the



firm. He never lost his commitment to magic, though, nor an accompanying belief that all thinking beings have a right to literacy. When the House of Wavir appointed him to supervise their trading post at Altaruk some three decades ago, he quietly began implementing his ideas. As long as the bai-ante sheets continue strong, the sponsoring merchants look the other way.

Appearance: Arisphistaneles is age 54. He wears Balican clothing, the chiton and chlamys, and leather armor. He is of average height, muscular build, though paunchy, and bald-in fact, completely hairless. Some speculate that the Captain must have dwarf blood in his past. However, a small proportion of Athasian humans have no natural body hair.

The Captain exploits this using his psycometabolic wild talent, a rare and minor variant of metamorphosis. Arisphistaneles can change his facial features and fingerprints, the shape of his hands, and so on. He can grow webs between his fingers and toes, or point his ears. He sometimes uses the last trick to impersonate a mul, a handy disguise.

Role-Playing: He is outspoken, haranguing, curmudgeonly, but amusing and charming in his way. Abusive toward those who question the wisdom of teaching slaves and soldiers to read, and harshly taunting of those who refuse the opportunity to learn. But Arisphistaneles regards those who show a thirst for knowledge as his blood kin.

Note: The trader character class appears in the Dune Trader supplement. DMs who lack that book may substitute "rogue" for "trader."

Adventure Hook

Despite Arisphistaneles good offices, some in Altaruk still maintain the old prejudices against wizards. Some of these have high-level connections with the merchant dynasties that sponsor the village.

Amphiucus, a mul trader for the House of Rees,

takes self-righteous offence at the way mages here parade around in the open. He has roused the wrath of his patron, Cecrops Rees, grandson of the patriarch of the House of Rees. "In the best interests of the firm," Cecrops has hired a couple of half-elf mercenaries to infiltrate and subvert the compound. The Captain hires these mercenaries just as the PCs arrive. Their mischief (arson, sabotage, rabble-rousing) begins shortly thereafter, implicating the heroes.

Salt View

The Alliance in Salt View

In contrast to nearby Altaruk, people in this boisterous slave village hate wizards as much as other Athasians do. The uneducated, even savage residents form mobs and lynch those even suspected of magical ability. Between lynchings, they spend their leisure time in an endless cycle of gambling, drinking, and brawling. For a change of pace they stage cruel animal fights, more ruthless than those in any city-state's arena.

NPCs

Citizens of Salt View know of only one wizard: **Old Hildera** (W3. 8 hp, LN), an aged woman who once lived in Tyr as an Alliance apprentice. But many decades ago, someone discovered her powers and her teacher had to smuggle her out of the city ahead of an angry mob. He sat her up in this distant village, where she cleans shacks and tents using *cantrips* and *unseen servant* spells. In the decades since she came here, she has never found anyone who could instruct her further in magic.

Because of her gentle nature and low prices, the villagers tolerate her, though no one will appear in public with her. Desperately lonely, she has Begun instructing a few village children in minor magic. Should the adults discover this, they would instantly hang her.



Villages and Oases

No one knows that another, more powerful wizard, lives in Salt View. Phriantus (W 10, 35 hp, LE) is a Balikan defiler who once served Andropinis. He plundered one of the king's most advanced spellbooks and several devises that hid him from magical or psionic pursuit. He fled Balic and reached Salt View before discovery of the theft.

Since then Andropinis has slain more than a dozen templars, by way of encouraging the survivors to hunt Phriantus more aggressively. But Phriantus has changed his appearance, aura, profession, and habits, while he waits out the king's wrath and studies the spellbook. It holds 10th-level spells that far outstrip his ability—nothing less than psionic enchantments, the most advanced magic on Athas.

Oases

Few oases support a permanent population. Two that shelter individual preservers, Alliance members, deserve mention: Grak's Pool and Lost Oasis.

Grak's Pool

Grak the half-elf employs many mercenaries, including one preserver—his own brother, Regg. The two stick by each other in a world that mistrusts them both.

Regg, a 7th-level diviner, spends most of his days studying magic, sometimes via psionic communication with Alliance wizards in distant cities. In this way he learned the Alliance recognition signals. Out of boredom, rather than treachery, Regg passes reports of interesting or suspicious travellers to any Council member who asks. He enjoys talking with visitors and would gladly reveal his abilities to another preserver.

Grak (7th-level fighter): AL LN; AC7; MV 6; HD 7; hp 24, THAC0 14 (+2 to hit from strength bonus); #AT 3/2 rounds; Dmg 1d6+4 (metal morningstar); SZ M; ML 10; Str 14; Dex 15; Con

15; Int 17; Wis 12; Cha 10.

Regg (7th-level diviner): AL LN; AC10; MV 6; HD 7; hp 20; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg by spell; SZ M; ML 10; Str 14; Dex 15; Con 15; Int 17; Wis 12; Cha 10.

Lost Oasis

Many years ago one Lionus, an invoker from Balit, discovered ancient scrolls relating to the early history of the dragon and the sorcerer-kings. He never told anyone what he found, but he left shortly after and took up residence at this oasis, near the ruins of Kalidnay. The old hermit has explored the ruins ever since, growing riper and hairier with each season.

Despite a lack of results and numerous close calls with death, Lionus still believes the destroyed city holds some powerful secret. He tells visitors, with some excitement if not coherence, his theory that the dragon destroyed the city. "The sorcerer-king here tried t' do somethin'. . . against the dragon, maybe. . . dunno. Tried t' kill a whole lot o' folks. Maybe some kind o' folks we never heard of. Dunno why. You help me explore, I just know we'll find somethin'."

Lionus has explored some of the extensive ruins and thinks he may have befriended the local druid, the thri-keen Darwadala. Though not quite crazy, the old wizard has had little social contact for decades and barely resembles his old Alliance associates.

Lionus (5th-level human invoker): AL LN; AC 10; MV 6; HD 5; hp 15; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg by spell; SZ M; ML 6; Str 12; Dex 13; Con 15; Int 16; Wis 7; Cha 8.

Chapter 4: The Veiled Alliance Campaign

This chapter discusses some of the issues involved in running Veiled Alliance adventures, either alone or in a connected campaign.

The Alliance In Adventures

Noble Quaestor, at your initiation you asked of the founding of our society, "What great wizard brought all this about? What traitor betrayed its existence to the sorcerer-kings?" and you wondered why we smiled. We had no time then to expound upon the question—the guards attacked then, as you no doubt recall—and thus my reply has had to wait. The tale begins with Daclamitus, a man of sinister nature and dark look, of pursed lips and measuring gaze, cloying to superiors and cruel to underlings. The black robes of the templar bespoke his black heart. But I move ahead of my story. . .

Many kings' ages past, Daclamitus rose high among the templars of Tyr. Even by that evil calling's standards, his cruelty and ambition became

proverbial. His underlings knew Daclamitus as a cunning man, as evasive as a jarbo. His endless devotion to self-advancement earned him the nickname "the Sleepless One." His zeal in tracking traitors soon brought him the respect of Kalak, who granted him nearly unlimited power as his senior adjutant.

Daclamitus's office let him indulge certain private ambitions, including an interest in ruins and objects of magic. Perhaps he hoped to obtain some device from ancient days that would let him rise farther—even to the black throne of Tyr

It happened that a group of adventurous antiquarians, having studied ancient texts, set forth across the desert by unknown paths to search for the lost city of Kor. After many months, when they did not return to Tyr, Daclamitus claimed their homes and goods in the name of Kalak. But on a day blackened by the blowing sand, they returned from the wasteland bearing a strange helm.

Daclamitus ordered the weary travelers seized





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and imprisoned. But torture could not make them reveal the helm's powers. They died professing their ignorance.

For a time the helm lay upon Daclamitus's desk. He sensed its magic, but could not decipher its purpose. How could he unlock its secrets?

At last desire for power overcame cowardice. Alone in his chambers, he put on the helm. As though a curtain had parted, he saw the evil of his life. A spellbinding vision showed how all his actions had made his heart small and petty, how he had stamped out all citizens' impulses toward freedom, truth, and beauty. The ancient magic wrought upon him changed him so powerfully and painfully that he fell into a swoon lasting days.

When he woke, he felt reborn. He asked his servants to bring him the helm, but discovered that out of fear they had torn it from his head and melted it in a blacksmith's forge. He forgave them this and resolved to begin a new life, redoubling his zeal in a high and worthy cause: hunting wizards. He would rid Athas of the magicians who almost destroyed it!

But his political acuity had not left him. He knew that doing this good work required craft and subtlety. If Kalak ever suspected his new nature, the Sleepless One would fall into a permanent sleep. Fortunately, his great abilities in the arts of the mind concealed his thoughts, and his skill in duplicity hid his actions. Yet his newfound emotions betrayed him.

The washerwomen and the stableboys spoke of the templar's new kindness, and the tale found its way to a skulking, obsequious young man, an ambitious junior templar named Antrifos. No matter to whom we speak, the templars hear. Antrifos began watching Daclamitus from secrecy.

In the following weeks Daclamitus persecuted wizards in a spirit of righteous vengeance. Even his name could make a mage turn pale with fear. Many of our calling fell to his wrath, but they did not die vainly. For as he took endless tortured confessions, the templar began to suspect what no templar knew:

that magic take many forms and perhaps, just perhaps, it could serve not death, but life.

Finally Daclamitus heard of a beautiful mage-woman who dwelt "beyond sparkling water," a wizard of power and purity. He longed to capture her. The templar felt certain that her confession would teach him, at last, the truths of magic. But for months he heard no more about her, neither her name nor the meaning of this "sparkling water." So his persecution continued.

One night at his palatial home his guards brought him a drunken merchant, a caravan driver. The traveller told a story of a waterfall gleaming at night upon a distant peak. The merchant spotted it for only an instant, when the two moons took a certain position, and this wonder emerged flashing like a sheet of silver in the night.

Daclamitus called astronomers and geographers to his home, so that he could find this mystery by square and compass. His eagerness drew the attention of Antrifos, who made discreet inquiries of a servant.

The young man's informant told him, "The high templar seeks a waterfall in the desert. The sages place this miracle at Regal Tar, which I know has no more water than a bone." Antrifos thought, "My leader has learned of great power, or he has gone mad. Either way, I shall exploit his lunacy."

Meanwhile, Daclamitus arranged an expedition to Regal Tar. Great was their hardship in the wasteland, but at last, in the cold desert night, they came to Regal Tar. Daclamitus scaled the peak alone, lest his troops' presence alert the wizard. High on the mountain, he saw the twin moons of Athas hanging low in the sky, like glowing eyes through dark fabric. Above him, a waterfall descended from the jagged summit to a crack in the dark volcanic rock. He paused, awed by its beauty, and then, in lethal silence, climbed up to the crevasse.

Filled with wonder, he whispered Kalak's name to silence spells that might sound an alarm. Then he stepped through.

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As the curtain of water parted, he entered a garden of green delight. Ferns flourished in each corner, grasses and sedge grew like a carpet, and spidery air plants limned every crag of the cavern wall. The pungent air closed in damply and light diffused through the cave from no clear source.

The templar silently walked deeper into the cave. He had never seen so much green outside Kalak's gardens. There the plants grew in orderly array. This feverish growth, though attractive, struck him as—undisciplined.

He stopped in surprise. On a bed of green moss, surrounded by a livery of pink orchids, lay a thin black-haired woman with tawny skin and finely drawn features. Daclamitus stared mesmerized. Could this beauty command the defiling magic that blighted the world? How could she maintain this sanctuary? Suddenly angry at his own doubt, he fell upon and gagged her, then bound her hands with leather thongs.

As she stared in panic, he told her, "Never let your guard down while a templar lives." He meant to sound smug, yet as he watched her struggle with her bonds, he felt only shame, and his voice revealed it. She fell still and looked at him with curiosity. He said, "I seek—" and then, after a pause, he finished, "learning." The word surprised them both.

When he took her from the cave, she put up no resistance. Then he perceived a dark shape against the darker sky. A low growl, an odor of sweat-now, in the light from the cavern mouth, a speckling of black on yellow fur—he knew the beast. A jaguar, from the Forest Ridge, moving to attack!

As he prepared his defenses, Averil managed to struggle free of her gag. He prepared to call for help, but he stopped in amazement as Averil said, "Naurax, back! Don't hurt him." The creature halted and growled in frustration. Then, to the templar's astonishment, Naurax turned and silently vanished into the darkness.

Templar and wizard looked at each other. "You mean to take me to Tyr, I assume," she said in a

cool contralto voice. He nodded, forgetting to scowl as befit a captor.

On the long mare back to Tyr, Daclamitus interrogated the woman, who gave the name Averil. He asked, "Why did you save me from the jaguar?"

"I value my sanctuary," she said, "I swore a vow that no living thing would come to harm there, if I could help it. There I gather everything I love."

On that long trip he asked more questions, and she answered frankly. His questions grew less hostile and more far-ranging. He drank deeply from the fount of her knowledge, first learning of preserver magic and then, before the trip ended, resolving that the way of the preservers should not perish.

When he reached Tyr, Daclamitus artfully deceived his underlings and brought Averil undetected from the torture chambers. He forged the evidence of her death. Then he hid her beneath the sorcerer-king's very nose, within a secret grotto in Kalak's own gardens. In his heart love grew for Averil, his daring partner in challenging the evil of the world.

But Antrifos, the ambitious watcher, did not believe the record of Averil's death. How had the Sleepless One failed to secure more information than this feeble transcript showed? "No," he thought, "he continues his scheme." So Antrifos continued to observe. . . .

Story Device

The Alliance works well as a plot device to introduce important story elements or expedite logistics. Its high-level mages and psionicist auxiliaries can clairvoyantly locate dangerous or useful NPCs, provide vital spell components to spellcasters, or cast teleport magic to move the heroes rapidly to their destination.

Conversely, the Alliance can oppose the PCs in all these goals, for its own inscrutable reasons. It could mistakenly believe that the player characters



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intend harm to a preserver, or that the PCs are agents of the sorcerer-kings. The Alliance's obstruction becomes a useful way to delay the PCs or lengthen the adventure. Then, once everyone sorts out the mess and the Alliance apologizes, it may ask the heroes to find and root out the source of the bad information—a Myrmeleon, no doubt.

Taboos: On the other hand, in a scenario's climax, try not to send "the Alliance cavalry" charging over the hill with wands blazing just in time to rescue the hapless PCs. This steals the heroes' thunder, and it makes players wonder why they bothered playing.

Also, avoid making the Alliance an all-purpose magic shop. This secret society, fighting for its life, can't afford to provide a handy spot for the party to drop in and get someone to analyze or buy magical treasure.

If the players complacently rely too often on their Alliance contacts, try this. One time, when they reach their usual rendezvous, they find a burnt wreck, with bodies everywhere and templars waiting nearby to attack anyone who shows curiosity. This shows the party that life in the Alliance carries as much risk as other kinds of life on Athas.

Mission Source

The Alliance offers an excellent way to pull the player characters into adventures. As members of a cell, they receive mysterious orders from a hidden leadership. As outsiders, they get a mysterious visitor in the night, offering a perilous task for excellent pay. (This means the visitor, an Alliance lieutenant, can't afford to risk members on a necessary mission.)

Adjust this method according to your players' style. If they enjoy a sense of mystery, not a word will escape the patron's lips. If they suspect mystery assignments, the Alliance patron can be more forthcoming.

The Alliance seldom pays more than half a fee in

advance, and often less. This may lead to problems when non-member heroes, flush with victory on the assignment, try to collect their fees. The patron may have disappeared or been executed! Don't pull this unless it leads to another adventure to recover the patron (or the fee). Otherwise, the burned heroes will never trust the Alliance again.

Opponent?

It usually serves little purpose to cast the Alliance enemies of the PCs, unless the players play defilers or templars. Because of its secretive methods and ruthless requital policies, heroes may suspect the Alliance at first (and perhaps at second or third). But heroes and Alliance alike work toward the same goals. Do everything possible to smooth misunderstandings and disagreements. They both have enough real enemies!

The Alliance can constructively oppose the party in a couple of ways, though. First, an especially snoopy player may follow a lead more quickly than you wish, threatening the surprise you wanted to keep for later. In this case, the investigator may "accidentally" run into an Alliance mission. For unrelated reasons, the preservers have blown up the hero's destination, or have temporarily hidden the information source. Do they tell the hero why? Of course not—why do they call it a "secret" society, anyway?

Another kind of confrontation can dramatically introduce the Alliance into the campaign. The party encounters an NPC fleeing a pack of Alliance assassins. The NPC begs help. If they help the fugitive, the heroes face the full might of the Alliance. As the conflict develops though, the party should gradually realize that the NPC left the Alliance for criminal or cowardly purposes, and that the society has good reason to silence the traitor.

By the time they sort things out, the heroes and the Alliance should come to respect each other. The players become aware of the Alliance's struggle

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against an unforgiving world. In return, even if the heroes helped the traitor to escape, the society can forgive them because of their ignorance. Nonetheless, the heroes should eventually hear that another band of assassin mages silenced the fugitive.

Campaigning

Demographics

How many preservers live on Athas? How many defilers? The answers determine the size and power of the Alliance, and of its enemies.

Numbers of preservers: In the DARK SUN™ campaign background, ten to fifty thousand people live in each of the seven city-states in the Tyr Region. Only a rare few, less than half of one percent of the population, cast preserving magic.

Each city has approximately 15 preservers of great power (above 8th-level), not counting the player characters. These, scattered among the levels from 3 to 20, lead the Alliance. Usually one or two wizards of each type (preserver and defiler) follow their own agendas as independent agents. After all, who dares order them to do otherwise? Higher-level wizards, such as the "Great One," ordinarily give up societal entanglements and leave a city during their ascent to avangion status (explained in the Dragon Kings rulebook).

Below this rank one finds perhaps 12-20 accomplished preservers (say, 5th-to 8th-level), again omitting PCs. At most all preservers of this rank have either joined the Alliance or concealed their power from its leaders.

As for the lowest rank, the students of magic (1st-to around 4th-level), accomplished wizards of the Alliance keep a total of perhaps a dozen apprentices. Probably just as many dilettantes study low-level preserving magic on their own. All the apprentices and a few of the others belong to the Alliance, which keeps tabs on most of the rest, but plenty of beginners always slip by. "Like trying to count a swarm of bees," says one lieutenant.

This census implies that about 40-60 preservers, not counting the player characters, live in a given city. If that doesn't suit your campaign, adjust the totals. Greatly increasing the number of high-level mages creates a magic-rich campaign, with prolific wonders and splendid high-level marvels. Reducing the number of wizards creates a more realistic setting, and it increases the importance of PC spell-casters. It may also increase the threat from an angry populace: the rarity of wizards magnify the deeds of PCs.

Numbers of defilers: Defilers outnumber preservers in the city-states by a factor of three to five. Defilers may make up just over one percent of a city's population.

The distribution of defilers across the levels matches that of preservers, described above. The 40-70 defilers of level-9 or above may conceal their powers well, but sometimes the local Alliance knows their identities. These defilers have somehow arrived at an understanding with the sorcerer-king. They usually command so much power that the Alliance must tread with caution.

All defilers below this rank (some 40 to 100 of 5th-to 8th-level, and up to twice that many below 5th-level) hide their abilities. Otherwise, enemies would besiege them. Defilers, mistrustful by nature, do not take apprentices as often as preservers do. Beginning defilers sometimes discover their abilities by instinct or accident, but this rarely occurs among preservers.

Tone

Athas encourages adventures of a far different kind from other medieval fantasy worlds. Harsh conditions prohibit high political intrigue and imperial clashes that span continents. Few heroes aspire to world-shaking power, instead taking survival as sufficient reward.

The Athasian campaign calls for a smaller scale, like that of classic sword-and-sorcery fantasy stories.



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In these, heroes roam the world, moving from one situation to another. First they might work as thieves, then try a hitch in a bandit gang. When everyone in the gang perishes at a monster's hands, the heroes then join an army. After a colossal battle where they alone survive, they spend a few months commanding a company of mercenaries. And so on.

The Veiled Alliance offers an excellent framework for this campaign style. The society's inscrutable methods and wide range of operations can plausibly bring PCs to almost any situation. The Alliance may command them to spy on templars, explore ruins, join a caravan, fight a battle, or kidnap a preserver from a slave tribe.

The Alliance also suits the atmosphere of the Athasian campaign in that characters face constant danger. Never forget the most important factor of a Veiled Alliance campaign. . .

Secrecy

The characters get their mission. From whom? They don't know. For what purpose? They may never find out. Can they get any help? No. Telling anyone, even a casual onlooker, could mean relentless pursuit, arrest, and (at best) exile. If they succeed, will anyone know? Who can say? If they get tired, can they just bow out? No!

The Alliance campaign has a different flavor from almost any other kind of AD&D® adventure. Even espionage or intelligence missions in more conventional campaigns have an end—the heroes reach their home territory, or escape across the battle lines, and they can relax. On Athas members of the Veiled Alliance can never relax, except among themselves.

Sounds grueling? Yes. Never let the players forget the need for secrecy. If they do, punish their characters with the consequences.

Secrecy among themselves? Logically, one might expect such a secretive organization to foster paranoia among its members. It might even turn them

against one another by giving one member of a cell secret information about another, or it might tell one member to withhold vital information from others.

In practice, don't let the Alliance descend to such extremes. This would damage the trust between players, a trust that always proves difficult to repair. A player may give others cause to doubt, but don't risk the campaign by encouraging this kind of behavior.

Secret pleasures: Secrecy brings satisfaction as well as obstacles. Between awful ordeals, foster the players' sense of adventure. After all, their characters belong to a genuine secret society—they have secret identities. Encourage them to make mysterious jokes that baffle onlookers. Exchange signals across a crowded room with a seeming stranger, and know the thrill of finding a kindred spirit despite true danger, and know the value of their high cause. Played well, these benefits should convince the PCs to behave even more secretly, just as they would after a deadly raid by templars or a berserk lynch mob.

Intersperse the use of the carrot and the stick. Remind the players at all times that the members of the Alliance must seek the shadows; and they must search very hard, beneath its merciless red sun.

"The summer's night at end, the sun stands up as a crown of hostile flames from that huge covert of inhospitable sandstone bergs; the desert day dawns not little and little, but it is noon tide in an hour. The sun, entering as a tyrant upon the waste landscape, darts upon us a torment of fiery beams, not to be remitted till the far-off evening. . . Grave is that giddy heat upon the crown of the head; the ears tingle with a flickering shrillness, a subtle crepitation it seems, in the glassiness of this sun-stricken nature: the hot sand-blink is in the eyes, arid there is little refreshment to find in the tents' shelter; the worsted booths leak to this fiery ray of sunny light."

Charles M. Doughty,
Travels in Arabia Deserta (1888)

Veiled Alliance

by Allen Varney



Few safe havens exist on Athas, and fewer still for preservers. In the hidden places of the cities—a potter's shop, a crematoria, even under the very palace of a sorcerer king—the Veiled Alliance abides, aiding and protecting preservers and auxiliaries, and standing against defilers. In Tyr, Balic, Draj, Gulg, Nibenay, Raam, and Urik, protection from the dark forces of Athas endures.

Secret recognition signals preserve their identities. For those seeking membership comes a testing: after true intentions are proven, tests are administered and, if failed, lead to a terrible death. If successful, the candidate looks forward to years of perilous work and strife—the results of which may never see the pages of a journal. And no one quits the Alliance without facing requital.

Veiled Alliance presents the DM™ with all the information required to create Alliance-centered campaigns on Athas—detailed information about the five aims, adventure hooks for each Alliance, recognition signals, and maps of various headquarters. All the features you need to create thrilling, fundamental challenges to the Alliance on the ruthless world of Athas are now revealed.

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