



# DARK • SUN

W O R L D  
BOXED SET

## The Ivory Triangle





Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

# DARK • SUN™

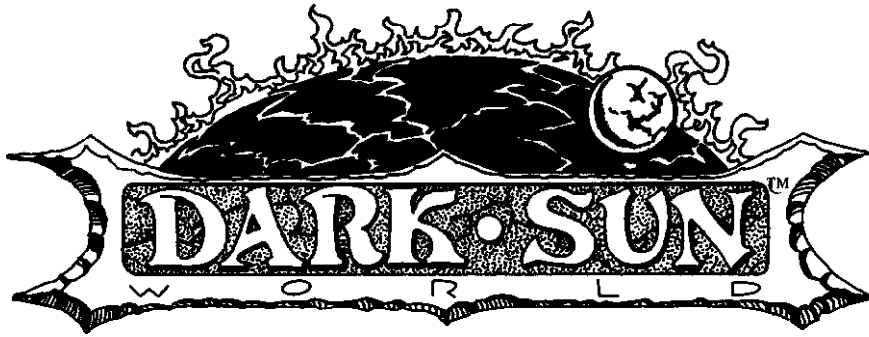
W O R L D

Accessory

## The Ivory Triangle



BEYOND 92



Boxed Set

## The Ivory Triangle

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Respectfully dedicated to the memory of

**Curtis Scott,**

lost tragically in an auto accident August 19,1992.

He will be missed by the many friends he touched through his writing and gaming.


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# Introduction

## Esreva's Journal

*I am Esreva, slave to the templar Brevit Musteva of seven necklaces, himself, like all in the city of Gulg, a servant of the great oba Lalali-Puy. What follows is all that I have seen and heard of the region called the Ivory Triangle, spoken aloud so that the scribe of my master can set down the words, and that all in service to the oba can share the knowledge I have acquired.*

*As a youth, I burned with the desire to see the world in all its glory. I signed on with a merchant caravan, wandering the deserts in the name of profit. In those years, I traveled widely, but my view of the world was as narrow as my margins. My ambition to rise within my merchant house led me to appreciate only what was out of reach and never what I actually had. I knew the sweet joys of freedom, but like most born with that gift, I never truly loved it.*

*One day my freedom was suddenly taken from me. For years I blamed the slave traders who captured me for the curse of a life of servitude. It was they, I felt, who robbed me of my freedom, and they who would be punished for the deed. In time, however, I came to realize that it is my templar master who is truly the slave. It is the templar who must constantly devote his heart and mind to the adoration of his queen. Although my hands are enslaved, my heart is free.*

*As a young slave, I sought to regain my freedom many times. My master was truly merciful in not slaying me for my escape attempts. Perhaps my ability to distinctly recall things I have seen and heard gave him reason to be patient with me. My memory allowed me to maintain a complete store of my master's accounts without the weight of written records. My talents afforded me the opportunity to travel with my master, surveying his domain and committing to memory all he had me see. Our journeys led throughout the Ivory Triangle, and in addition to the many sights my master required me to note, I saw other things which my mind will not allow me to forget.*

*Now I am old. My skin is burned to leather by the heat of the sun, my back scarred by the lash, my limbs withered, and my heart tired. Only my memory, which so often fails in the old, remains strong. Soon I will die, my flesh given to sustain life in the fields and forests of my*

*long-time home. I no longer thirst for the sweet water of freedom. I know I would not live long enough to enjoy it.*

*My master tells me that my words will guide the forces of Lalali-Puy in her battles against those of the Shadow King. This gives me joy. Though I am told she is terrible to behold, and indeed many in the city of Gulg serve her out of fear rather than love, all know that it is the power of our oba that saves us from ruin at the hands of the Shadow King; armies. In the way of a slave, I have aided the oba for most of my life. It pleases me that at the end of my life I still have value in her eyes.*

*In my life, I have gained much knowledge, and perhaps a little wisdom. While the task I now undertake is to recall for the scribe what I know of the lands of the Ivory Triangle, the vanity of an old man requires me to also tell my view of its people. Vanity is a luxury denied to a slave, but in the twilight of my life there are many freedoms I only now have the courage to take.*

*The Ivory Triangle is a supplement for the DARK SUN™ campaign setting. It discusses the Ivory Triangle, a region of Athas whose corners are the cities of Gulg and Nibenay and the slave village of Salt View. This region includes the Great Ivory Plain, the Crescent Forest, and the Mekillot Mountains; in the surrounding area can be found the Blackspine Mountains and the verdant caravan route running toward South Ledopolus.*

*The DARK SUN game world is quite different from other AD&D® game worlds. Life here is tormented by hot, arid conditions, and every day is a challenge for survival. There are no well-watered inns or secure nations where characters can recuperate; every location carries dangers of its own.*

*The world of Athas has been twisted by magic, its very essence warped by centuries of magical abuse. The need for survival has forced all to adapt, changing in crucial ways the character of the various races. Moreover, the nature of magic differs on Athas from other AD&D game settings, and the power of psionics is much more common here than elsewhere. If you are considering starting a campaign on the world of Athas, you should first become familiar with the contents of the DARK SUN boxed set and *The Complete Psionics Handbook* before using the material presented here.*

*This supplement is divided into several parts. This 76-page book includes a sampling of merchant forts, a survey of*



# Introduction



the major slave tribes, and a discussion of the wilderness regions and inhabitants of the area. This book is primarily for the Dungeon Master's use. Scattered through this text are the observations of Esreva, a slave of Gulg who traveled the wastes for nearly 40 years.

The two 32-page books contain detailed descriptions of the cities of Gulg and Nibenay. Each presents details of one city's culture, social classes, military, and economy. Each text is written in the voice of a guide who presents the city from a local perspective. In addition, there are also sample nonplayer character inhabitants of each city, as well as BATTLESYSTEM™ army lists detailing the military forces each can muster.

Two large maps are also included in this box. One depicts the cities of Gulg and Nibenay, and the other shows the entire Ivory Triangle region. In addition, six cards are provided as player handouts and adventure opportunities.

A blinding wave of heat rises from the Great Ivory Plain. In the Crescent Forest, the leaves rustle with the pad of unseen feet. The hunters of Gulg and the wives of Nibenay skirmish on their borders. The ruins in the Windbreak Mountains echo with the howls of the dwarven dead, and

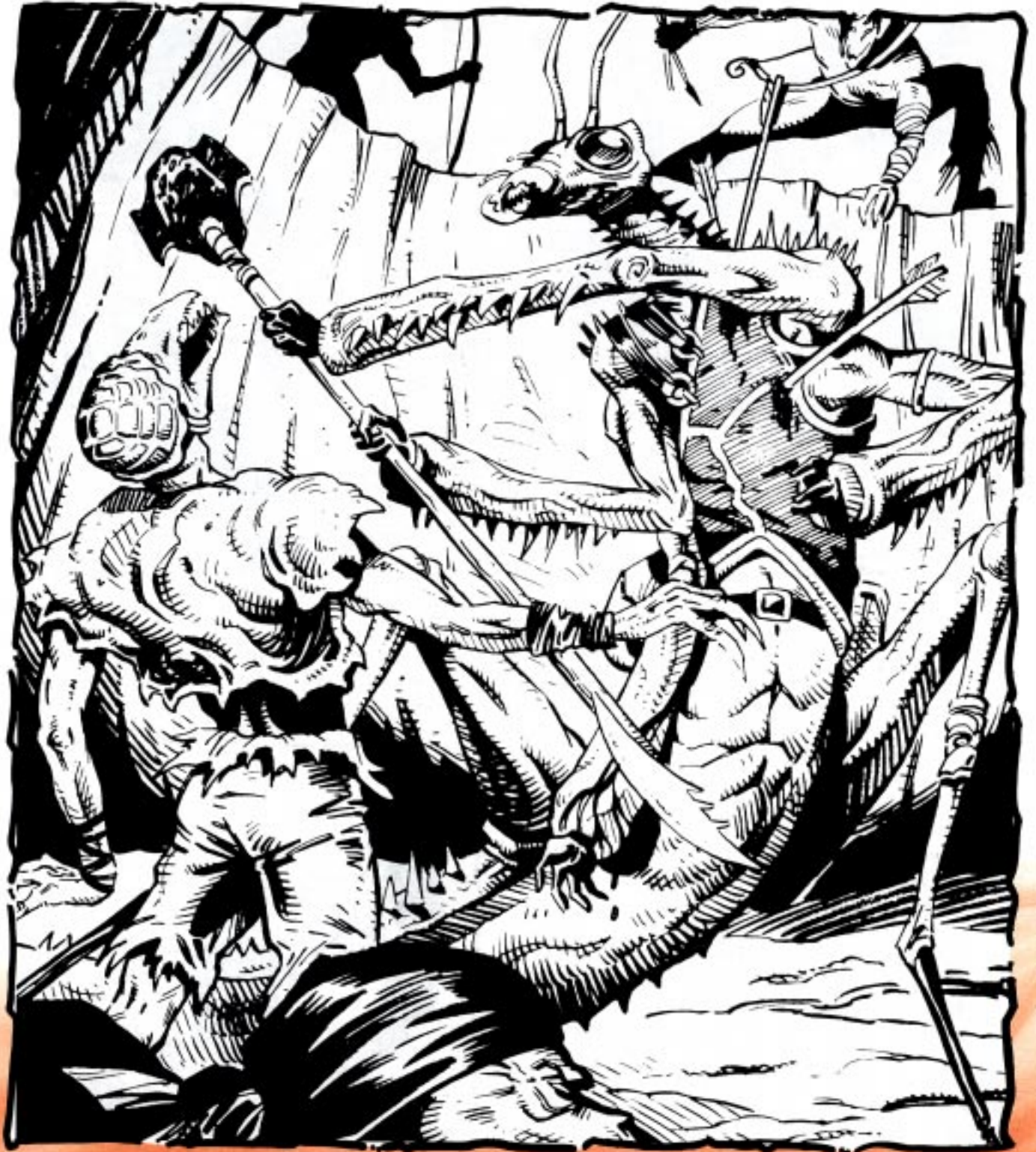
the gith of the Blackspine Mountains lay in wait for a day when they will bury the cities of men beneath the blowing sands! Such are the tensions that bind the Ivory Triangle and threaten to break it apart. What better a location for fame, opportunity, and dark adventure?







## Introduction





# Chapter I: Merchant Forts

The wild lands of Ivory Triangle may seem untamed, but this is not entirely true. The city-dwelling merchants of Athas have outposts in this wilderness. These outposts are supply points for caravans, trading posts with the desert nomads, and rallying points in time of war.

This chapter describes several of the major merchant forts of the Ivory Triangle region. The history, condition, garrison, major personalities, and trading activity of each fort is detailed. A keyed map of the fort is also provided. The exact location of each fort is marked on the large Ivory Triangle map.

Note that these are not the only merchant forts in the Ivory Triangle. Feel free to add merchant forts to this region in keeping with the needs of the campaign.

## Fort Harbeth

### Esreva's Journal

*Fort Harbeth was the first fortress I visited with my master after he acquired me and learned of my unusual memory. It was also the site of my first escape attempt. We were inside the keep, at the small house they maintain for important visitors. I decided to climb over the low walls and make my way into the desert. From there I would either return to my trading house or take my chances with one of the slave tribes in the desert.*

*There were few guards, and the watchmen were looking outward into the desert. I found an unguarded ladder and made my way to the upper walkway. I quickly pulled the ladder up to the top and flipped it down the far side of the wall. As I moved across the walkway, my foot suddenly broke through the clay and plunged in to a barbed pit. The down ward pointing spikes that lined the narrow tube bit into my leg and held me fast. I cried out and was quickly subdued by the guards.*

*The fort commander had me interrogated by a mind-bender and discovered that I was once a merchant. He presumed that I was working for a rival merchant house and wanted me executed immediately. My master and the commander fought bitterly. My master truly did not care if I lived or died, but he would not allow anyone to destroy the property of the state.*

*My master eventually won—else I would not be here to tell this story. He was angry, however, and his punish-*

*ment was swift. My back still bears the scars from the lashing I received.*

Fort Harbeth is the major fort of House Inika in the Ivory Triangle region. The fortress is located in the southwestern foothills of the Mekillot Mountains, at the intersection of the caravan routes between Gulg, Salt View, and North Ledopolus. It stands at the top of a large hill in the stony barrens, its rear and sides protected not only by the fortress wall but also by the sheer sides of the hill which act as natural palisades. A winding road brings caravans up the hillside to the main gate. In keeping with the traditions of this house, its defenses are quietly understated, but the nomads and raiders of the Triangle have learned better than to attack this powerful fort.

### History

Fort Harbeth began as a supply post of House Riben for caravans on the Gulg-Ledopolus trade route. Located at the rough midpoint between the two cities, the fort was blessed with a natural spring which was too small to support an oasis but provided enough water for as many as 200 men each day. House Riben built a cistern for the flow and a small walled keep to protect the cistern.

The small outpost remained in Riben hands for over 100 years. Shortly after House Inika split off from House Riben, a brief interhouse dispute left the fortress in the hands of House Inika, which used it as a more discreet location to form the spice caravans that traveled from Gulg to Tyr.

The outpost also allowed House Inika to tap into trade with the nomads. Elven merchants, herdsman, and hunters were all welcomed to the fort. Raiders occasionally attacked, so the defenses of the small keep were slowly improved until no raiding tribe would consider attacking again.

As is the case with virtually all merchant outposts, the traders at the fort refused to conduct business with raiding tribes. Merchant houses recognize that the best way to discourage raids on their caravans is to close their markets to stolen goods—unless, of course, they are actively encouraging raids on a rival house. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to tell just where a traveler obtained his cargo. The elven tribes, on the other hand, are always eager to make purchases without asking too many questions.

Initially, the traders of Fort Harbeth also refused to trade



## Merchant Forts

with renegade slaves. As the slave tribes became more stable and began to produce goods rather than just steal them, this stricture was lifted. This willingness to trade with ex-slaves improved the lot of the slave tribes, allowing them to expand and stabilize.

The fort's importance increased as North and South Ledopolus grew. The presence of these dwarven settlements and their silt skimmers made shipment of cargo across the Estuary of the Forked Tongue to Balic profitable. House Inika established an alliance with House Wavir in which the houses would wholesale goods to one another at the crossing. A premium would be paid to the house that assumed the risk of transporting the cargo across the giant-plagued estuary. The arrangement worked out very well for both houses, and Inika eventually established a small emporium in Balic. That base serves primarily as an administrative office and an outlet for some of Inika's most exotic wares.

Fort Harbeth's importance grew again when Fort Fyra was founded. This enterprise, the most well-established of all the slave tribe endeavors, has become an important trading

partner for Fort Harbeth. The fort's "nomad trade" has grown, and House Inika has used the additional profit to increase the staff of this small outpost.

### The Fort Today

Lying near the crossroads of three major trade routes, Fort Harbeth is frequented by nomads, merchant caravans, slave tribes, and even some elven tribes. Some of House Inika's caravans to North Ledopolus and points beyond pass through Harbeth's gates, but the task of marshalling the caravans for Tyr has fallen to the headquarters of the house in Gulg. Recently, trade with North Ledopolus has led to an increase in the supply of dwarven items, particularly weapons, passing through this fortress. Such items can be purchased in the fort, although they are even more expensive here than in Gulg.

In addition to the standard trade goods, Fort Harbeth maintains a large herd of erdlu. These birds thrive on the rough scrub which dots the foothills of the Mekillot Mountains and, with the ready supply of water provided by the







spring, are able to survive year-round without ever straying far from the fortress.

The fortress is an important supply point for the traders who canvass this region. It is rare for a week to go by without a small caravan wandering in or out of the gates. Most of the caravans are of House Inika but some are from other houses, notably House Wavir and the Renythi League.

Fort Harbeth caters to the small, fast caravans favored by House Inika. These caravans haul cargo on the backs of kank or inix rather than using the slow mekillot wagons. The enormous lizards' need for huge quantities of water make such caravans unpopular visitors. The fortress can, however, accommodate mekillot wagons when necessary. In an emergency, the interior of the fort can hold all the beasts of a small caravan, but for normal traffic, there is a good caravanserai just outside the gates.

House Inika actually has good relations with several elven trading tribes, and such tribes occasionally stop at Fort Harbeth. The master trader is naturally suspicious of elves he does not know, and will not allow a tribe to unload booty which they have obviously just stolen in a raid.

The master trader will not permit thri-kreen inside the walls, although he will allow them to trade here. When thri-kreen come to the fortress, a special trading table is set up on the hillside outside the fortress, and all trading is done from there.

## The Garrison

Fort Harbeth's garrison includes a staff of 10 traders, including the master trader Waltian Inika and his assistant, Kelira Legar. This small trading group is defended by 40 soldiers led by Hurgen Vurst, a half-giant. Four of the soldiers are 7th-level sergeants, the rest are all 5th-level fighters. The troops wear hide armor and carry bone battle axes, light crossbows, and stretched leather shields.

The garrison is supported by a well-defended fortress. In addition to the usual defenses of high walls and strong gates, the outer defenses of the fortress are littered with traps. Most of these traps are fairly simple. They consist of covered pits and spined traps along the tops of the walls, intentionally loosened stones on the outer face to deter climbers, and other delaying or injuring barriers. These traps are intended to deter stealthy attacks; the garrison is quite sufficient to repel any direct attack by force.

The garrison has recently been enlarged in response to growing concerns that the slaves of Salt View might choose to raid the fort rather than trade with it. Caravans and traders are watched carefully, and Hurgen Vurst has standing orders to forbid entry of more than 10 non-House Inika individuals to the fortress. Some of the passing traders who have been forced to sleep in the caravanserai have grumbled at this policy, but to date, Fort Harbeth has not been successfully attacked.

## Personalities

### Waltian Inika

Male Human Trader, Lawful Neutral

Armor Class 8 (padded armor)	Str 17
Movement 12	Dex 13
Level 7	Con 12
Hit Points 27	Int 13
THAC0 15	Wis 17
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 12

Damage/Attack: 1d4+1 (bronze dagger), 1d4+2 (sling bullet)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 63; Wild Talent—contact (PS 17; Cost: special+1/round), send thoughts (PS 12; Cost: contact+2/round)

Waltian Inika is a tall, slender man with dark hair and a closely-cropped beard. His silken robes and confident bearing make it obvious that he is the chief trader of Fort Harbeth.

Waltian is a man whose ambition exceeds his ability. While competent, he does not have the vision or strength of character to become a leader. He has spent much of his life in House Inika's most vital trading posts, first as an assistant outpost master and agent, now as master trader of an increasingly important base. He has spent little time on caravans, considering the risks of such an uncomfortable and dangerous lifestyle much greater than the potential rewards.

He has been consistently assigned to the outer posts, away from the cities, for a number of reasons. First, although Waltian is a shrewd and cunning trader, he has made a number of serious mistakes that have cost the house consid-



## Merchant Forts

erably in lost profits. These incidents are in the past, but the leaders of House Inika have long memories.

Second, his natural telepathic abilities make him an ideal representative for a distant outpost. He has sufficient psionic power to make a short daily report back to the main chapterhouse in Gulg. Since his most potent telepathic ability is only one-way and his psionic strength is too low to allow him to attempt to use his power more than once or twice a day, he would not be as useful in a central location.

Finally, Waltian's personality has stood in the way of advancing his career in Gulg. Advisers to the house matriarch, Andiama Inika, disdain his pompous attitudes toward those of equal or lower rank and his obsequious fawning toward everyone above him. Waltian fancies himself an expert on everything and has an exaggerated sense of self-importance. Andiama's advisers hope that the responsibilities of running the fort will eventually tone Waltian down and allow him to develop some polish. No one objects to Waltian's wish to rise in the hierarchy; they are just concerned that he may simply not have what it takes.

### Kelira Legar

Female Human Trader, Lawful Good

Armor Class 8 (padded armor)	Str 15
Movement 12	Dex 13
Level 5	Con 7
Hit Points 13	Int 11
THAC0 17	Wis 17
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 17

Damage/Attack: 1d4 (bronze dagger or light crossbow)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 31; Wild Talent—Aging (PS 2; cost: 15)

Kelira Legar is a lovely young woman in her late twenties. While she has been a trader for several years, most of her career has been spent as an administrator in House Inika's main chapterhouse in Gulg. Her career there was fairly set; she was likely to remain a low-level functionary for the rest of her days. This seemed to suit Kelira Legar well, as her essentially gentle nature was ill-suited to the competitive character of a potential house leader. She was not actually of the Inika family, so any attempt to rise high within the

house would be difficult at best.

Thus it was very surprising four months ago when she requested a transfer to a desert outpost. She explained to Burette, her superior, that she felt the move would broaden her base of experience and would later serve to increase her usefulness in Gulg. Burette agreed that the house would always benefit from administrators with field experience, and arranged to have Kelira sent to Fort Harbeth. The request was sudden and somewhat out of character for Kelira. Consequently, her superior has advised Waltian to keep an eye on her.

Rather than watch Kelira, Waltian has simply kept her outside any of his business dealings. He suspects that Kelira may be a spy from a rival in Gulg and believes that until she exposes herself, he will not give her the opportunity to jeopardize Inika's trade. She spends her days visiting with the caravans, but she has not been permitted to actually negotiate deals with them. She has become increasingly self-confident and outgoing in the desert outpost and most caravan masters prefer her pleasant company to that of the arrogant Waltian. Word is returning to Gulg that Kelira is showing promise and may have potential developing business relationships for the house.

Whether she has the talent to become a dealmaker will never become evident as long as she works for Waltian. While the house makes an effort to groom talent, it is the responsibility of an agent's superior to identify and promote promising agents. Burette would happily take Kelira back in, but now that she is under Waltian's control, it is unlikely she will be allowed back to Gulg. The decision-makers of the house have business to attend to, and Kelira will soon be forgotten. Her career has, like Waltian's, essentially stalled.

No one but Kelira herself knows that her request for transfer had nothing to do with advancing her career. Recently, she discovered that she was a psionic wild talent. For years she had hoped to manifest the power of the mind, but when it came, she was horrified—her ability was the power of *aging*. She fears that she has let some kind of demon out of her soul, and is concerned that she will be unable to resist the temptation of using the power on those around her. In truth, Kelira rarely has a harsh word to say, much less enough anger to cause her to lash out with such a powerful psionic discipline. The power places such demands on her weak physique that it is unlikely she will ever use it, but this does not reduce her fear.



# Merchant Forts



## Hurgen Vurst

Male Half-Giant Fighter/Psionicist, Lawful ?

Armor Class -1 (braxat hide+Dex)	Str 21
Movement 15	Dex 17
Level 9/9	Con 17
Hit Points 115	Int 15
THAC0 8 (6 with missiles)	Wis 15
No. of Attacks 3/2	Cha 13

Damage/Attack: 1d10+7 (bronze two-handed sword); 1d6+9 (thrown stones)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 102

Defense Modes—intellect fortress (PS 12; Cost: 4), mental barrier (PS 13, Cost: 3), mind blank (PS 8; Cost: 0), thought shield (PS 12; Cost 1), tower of iron will (PS 13; Cost: 6)

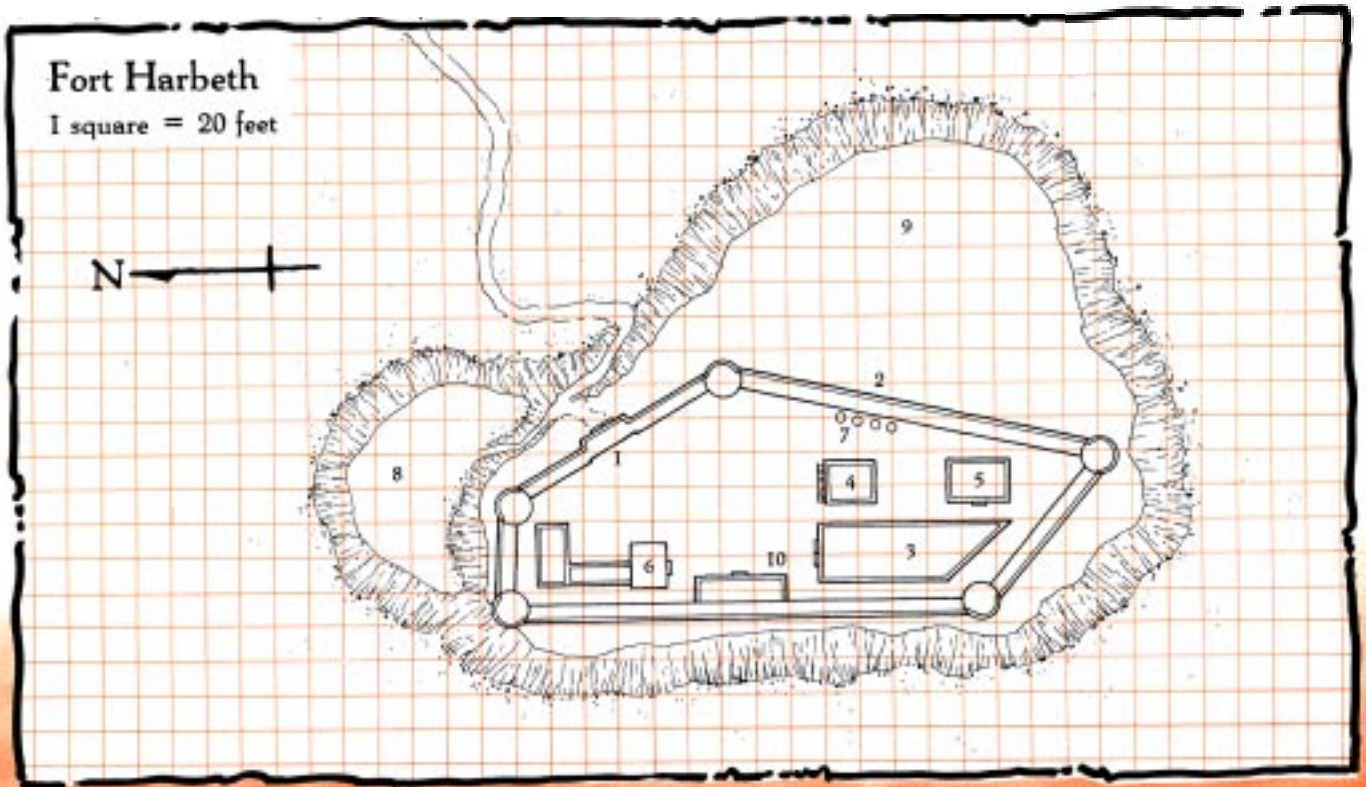
Psychokinesis—Sciences: project force (PS 15; Cost: 10), telekinesis PS 12; Cost: 3+1/round+); *Devotions*: animate object (PS 12, Cost: 8+3/round), control body (PS 15; Cost: 8+8/round), control flames (PS 14; Cost:

6+3/round), inertial barrier (PS 14; Cost: 7+5/round)

Psychometabolism— *Devotions*: biofeedback (PS 15; Cost: 6+3/round), body equilibrium (PS 14; Cost: 2+2/round), lend health (PS 16; Cost: 4)

Telepathy— *Sciences*: domination (PS 11; Cost: contact+varies), mindlink (PS 10; Cost: contact+8/round), switch personality (PS 13; Cost: contact+30); *Devotions*: aversion (PS 11; Cost: contact+8/turn), contact (PS 15; Cost: varies+1 /round), daydream (PS 15; Cost: contact+3/round), life detection (PS 13; Cost: 3+3/round), mind bar (PS 13; Cost: 6+4/round)

Hurgen Vurst is the half-giant garrison chief for Fort Harbeth. He is 11 feet tall, with broad shoulders and enormous strength. He is basically lawful, and tends toward lawful neutral in imitation of Waltian Inika, the master trader in the fortress. Hurgen is more clever than most half-giants, which makes him a particularly dangerous adversary. He is responsible for the network of traps that defend the outer walls, although he leaves their detailed design to those with more crafting skill. He is as respected a commander as can be found in House Inika.





## Merchant Forts

### Fort Harbeth Map

**1) Main Gate.** The gatehouse frames a high gate with a portcullis made of agafari poles from Gulg. The portcullis is open during the day (except when the fortress is under attack), and closed at night. A force of four men is kept in the gatehouse at all times, watching for caravans approaching from the road.

**2) Walls.** These stone walls are 20 feet high and topped with machicolations. Each side of the fort is manned by two guards at all times, and alarm gongs are mounted at the center of each wall. If rung, these gongs will rouse all of the guards to the defense of the fortress.

Sections of the walls are trapped with many 8"-diameter round pits, spined to prevent a trapped person from removing a foot or limb. The pits are covered with sun-baked clay, and they are easily spotted in daylight. Thus, they present a hazard only to a night traveler, or to an attacker coming quickly over the wall. Hurgen has trained his men to channel attackers scaling the walls into one of these areas to further delay their invasion. Hurgen himself has no fear of these areas, as the pits are too small to catch his massive feet. The exact location of trapped areas is left for the DM to determine.

**3) Warehouse.** This building holds the trade goods of Fort Harbeth. Most of the building is a warehouse, covered by a roof of leather on a wooden framework. The roof keeps the sun from beating down directly on the trade goods, but the warehouse is still hellish during midday. The rear section of the building is the slave quarters; 80 slave laborers are herded into this section and locked in at night.

**4) Trading Office.** This building is both the trading office and the residence of the master trader. The building has two stories; a small staircase winds up the front of the building to the entrance on the second floor. The second floor is the trading area; it is austere and functional. This floor also holds the chambers of Waltian's four personal slaves.

The lower floor, which is partially underground and therefore considerably cooler, is Waltian's home. This floor is filled with accommodations, including a direct pipe to carry water from the cistern to a bathing well for the master trader's personal comfort. This bathing well, and the water it consumes, is a sore point with some traders forced to make do with the water in the outer troughs.

**5) Trader's Barracks.** This building houses Kelira and the other traders who serve Waltian Inika. The building is divided into three bedrooms, each holding three traders and one personal slave each. A central common room allows the traders to eat and discuss the day's business in the shade. Waltian rarely comes here.

**6) Garrison Barracks.** Forty soldiers and their 10 slaves reside in the longer main building; the square building to the south is Hurgen's quarters, with ceiling and furniture suitable to his large size. A kitchen has been added to the building, jutting out to the east; the garrison cook is responsible for feeding all of the staff of the fortress.

**7) Cisterns.** These large stone cylinders hold the accumulated water from the spring. Should the spring fail, there is enough water in the cisterns at any one time to support the full complement of freemen in the fortress for six months. (Should slaves and erdlu be given water in that time of duress, the cistern would only last two months.) The spring water flows directly into the cisterns, and the heavy leather awnings over these tanks, combined with the cool flow from the spring, keep the water from becoming too warm and stagnant during the day.

**8) Erdlu Pen.** This low hollow is the pen for the erdlu herd. The herd is allowed to forage for scrub during the day, but at night it is kept here. The sides of the hollow are too steep for the erdlu to climb; the birds can enter and leave only through the narrow, gently-sloped pass. The pass is blocked by a rough gate made of mekillot bones.

**9) Caravanserai.** This large, level area of hard-packed earth is where merchants and their caravans camp when visiting Fort Harbeth. A narrow pipe from the cisterns inside the fortress can be opened to fill the water troughs on the western edge; the water can be shut off from inside, preserving the water supply in case of siege. The area is kept clear of brush by the garrison and by the grazing erdlus.

**10) Stable.** This building houses the small hive of kanks that serves this fortress as mounts. There is supposed to be a full complement of 20 kanks at Fort Harbeth at all times. The fort, however, is often at less than full strength. The kank tenders must ensure that the brood queens do not lay eggs in the stable, so the area is kept free from vegetation. Gravid brood-queens are driven to a nearby valley where the hive can raise the new brood. Once the hatching period is over, the kanks are driven back to the fortress. Excess kanks are sold or driven away.





## Outpost 19

### Esreva's Journal

I will never forget my first view of Outpost 19. The salt-storm in the year of the Wind's Fury had wreaked devastation across the Ivory Triangle, and in the wake of the storm, my master was tasked with determining the condition of the eastern villages. My master had planned to stop at Outpost 19 and demand shelter in the name of the oba Lalali-Puy. What he found instead was a sight for which I curse my memory.

When we arrived at the region where the outpost had been, we were, at first, unable to find it. The huge drifts of salt-encrusted sand which had accumulated on the slopes of the Mekillot Mountains changed the very nature of the terrain, so that landmarks were no longer recognizable, or were buried altogether. Dust from the inland silt basins had been stirred up and lay in thick blankets at the base of the dunes. Eventually, my master made his way up a particularly steep dune, looked

beyond, and signaled for me to follow.

On the far side of the slope, the remains of Outpost 19 poked up through the sand, salt, and silt. Its few buildings had collapsed under the blasting winds and the weight of accumulated sand. Worse, it appeared at the end that the outpost staff had tried to flee. The abrasive sand, carried on the wind, had stripped the flesh from their bones. What remained had been left for the scavengers to gnaw. My master turned and made his way back down the slope. Neither he nor I thought the outpost would ever stand again.

To our surprise it did. Moved to a location less exposed to the winds of the Great Ivory Plain, the outpost opened anew. My master was often called upon to check cargoes here, as the caravans of House Wavir traded with the oba often. My master told me that House Wavir's traders were as slippery as elves; each time I met them I at least found them to be courteous.

A curiosity of the outpost (and of all House Wavir facilities) is that they keep no slaves. The outpost master explained to my master that a man has greater incentive



## Merchant Forts

*to do a good job when he is paid for his work. My master replied that when a man's life is at stake he has plenty of incentive to work hard. I agreed with my master.*

Outpost I9 is a small trading outpost in a stony canyon at the northeastern end of the Mekillot Mountains. Established by House Wavir primarily for caravans traveling between Nibenay and North Ledopolus, Outpost I9 now also conducts a significant amount of business with Fort Fyra.

### History

Outpost I9 was established decades ago, during an expansionist period of the history of House Wavir. During the early years of the leadership of the patriarch Tabaros Wavir, the dwarven towns of North and South Ledopolus were just beginning their efforts to bridge the Estuary of the Forked Tongue. Tabaros, seeing an opportunity to build a trade route to Nibenay, established Outpost I9 in the shelter of the nearby Mekillot Mountains.

The dwarven effort at Ledopolus has been unsuccessful, but Outpost I9 has served House Wavir well. While not the most active of merchant forts, its convenience to southbound caravans from Nibenay makes it a favored stopover. Caravans visiting the villages of the southeastern Tyr region restock here often, as they are welcomed by master trader Ragstol Wavir, regardless of house affiliation (for the most part).

The outpost began as a small building nestled in a protected valley in the eastern Mekillot Mountains. As the outpost grew, it gained some of the characteristics and defenses of a real merchant fort. Still, it is much less insular than Fort Harbeth or Fort Inix.

In the early years, merchant forces from more established houses (primarily House Tsaxala) tried to drive House Wavir from the region. The outpost was burned to the ground several times by "mysterious raiders," although all involved knew who was behind the attacks. Eventually, the House made an alliance with the Swiftwing elves, and the next group of raiders found themselves facing 200 elven warriors. After this bloody massacre, the raids stopped.

Another attacker was far more deadly and unforgiving. Thirty-two years ago, a fierce salt storm from the Great Ivory Plain collided with a westward blowing silt storm and car-

ried a huge volume of choking dust and scouring sand to the eastern slopes of the Mekillot Mountains. This storm buried Outpost I9; everyone there drowned in the dust, and when the storm was over, there was no sign of the outpost at all. When House Wavir heard of the disaster, they sent a new staff to reestablish the outpost. This time it was nestled in a box canyon, protected on three sides by mountain slopes, with the mouth of the canyon pointing inward toward the mountain range. Although the site was different, House Wavir retained the original name in honor of the traders who died in the original outpost.

Outpost I9 still entrusts much of its defense to good relations with its neighbors rather than high stone walls. This lack of physical defense has caused Outpost I9 to suffer occasional raids, but the trading practices of House Wavir have made many allies, and few will risk the revenge that would come from the destruction of the outpost. The outpost is also defended by Astemba Wavir, a powerful preserver, and his powers are sufficient to ward off smaller bands of traveling raiders.

### The Fort Today

The fort has recently become a major trading partner with the slave village of Salt View, through the trading house at Fort Fyra. House Wavir has long opposed slavery, and Outpost I9 has contributed to the prosperity and stability of Salt View. Ragstol has encouraged the artisans of Salt View by purchasing their wares. He allows the performing troupes to entertain caravans as long as the tribe does not follow up the performance with a raid, and he always purchases any surplus salt that Fort Fyra makes available.

True to his merchant ethic, Ragstol has tried to discourage raiding by refusing to open his gates to the ex-slaves any time they show up with anything other than goods he is certain that they have produced. The house wants to see Salt View established as a permanent trading partner, and has authorized Ragstol to make temporary loans to ensure Salt View's survival. Ragstol has encouraged the slaves of Salt View to stop raiding and to increase salt mining as well as the amount of goods produced by its artisans. One day, he tells the traders of Fort Fyra, the ex-slaves of Salt View will be a welcome sight on the caravan trail. So far, this has not happened.

Nevertheless, trade with Salt View and Fort Fyra has been brisk. The people of the slave village prefer to deal with





House Wavir, due to Ragstol's congenial manner and the absence of slaving in the outpost. House Wavir's ties to Gulg and Nibenay are loose enough that its support of Salt View causes it little trouble in those city-states, and the other sorcerer-kings could care less what happens in places so far from their own lands.

The outpost has also kept its contacts with the elven nomads. Several wandering elven tribes visit the fortress. Some travelers claim that Wavir uses this remote outpost as a contact point for their connections in the Shadows. There is a fair amount of festivity when an elf tribe makes camp outside the outpost. During these visits, it is usually possible to buy spell components from the elves. A few elves have occasionally joined here as mercenaries, protecting the small group of traders from the depredations of those who do not know better.

The thri-kreen also trade here, although there is little in the fortress to interest them. Ragstol maintains a good-sized herd of crodlu and erdlu to use as trade goods in case the thri-kreen do come. The thri-kreen have learned that there is often good food here, but the prospect of dinner without a hunt makes their visits rather rare.

Outpost I9 is more isolated than most of the merchant forts in the Ivory Triangle. House Wavir, while large, is not always able to keep regular contact with all of its far-flung outposts. This leaves Ragstol considerable discretion as to how he manages the fortress. He sends regular dispatches back to Balic, but receives formal direction from his superiors in the house perhaps twice each year.

## The Garrison

There are four merchants posted to Outpost I9, including Ragstol Wavir and his son Astemba. The other two are often absent, supervising a regular trade caravan to or from North Ledopolus.

Outpost I9 has a small garrison consisting of 15 warriors of 4th to 7th level. There are a few elves and muls in the force, but the majority are human. The troops are armed and armored in a variety of equipment, with no man wearing any less than hide armor (AC 6). This motley force is surprisingly effective, particularly since they are dedicated to their cause and are well treated by Ragstol.

As mentioned above, the outpost is not well fortified. There is a low wall, but this is mostly to slow any attackers

rather than to stop them. There have been a few raids, but allies of the fortress (either from Salt View or from the elven tribes) have made raiders wish they had picked a less well-connected target.

## Personalities

### Ragstol Wavir

Male Human Trader, Neutral Good

Armor Class 8 (leather armor)	Str 11
Movement 12	Dex 15
Level 10	Con 7
Hit Points 27	Int 17
THAC0 16	Wis 15
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 15

Damage/Attack: 1d4 (bronze dagger), 1d4+1 (heavy cross-bow)

Psionic Summary: PSP's 37; Wild Talent—poison sense (PS 15: cost: 1)

Ragstol Wavir is the 42-year-old leader of Outpost 13. He is tall, topping 6½' in height, with curly, light-brown hair and a long, almost sad face. His limbs are long and thin, and his skin is burned a deep brown.

Ragstol was a caravan master for many years, until his caravan became lost in a siltstorm in the trackless wastes south of Balic. He was knocked unconscious by a panicking crodlu as he attempted to wrap its head with a wet cloth. He was nearly buried in silt before one of his staff wandered near.

Unfortunately, the long exposure to the silt has ruined his health. He is prone to coughing fits, and has lost much of the vigor that characterized his early years.

Although he is physically not what he once was, his mind and his trading skills are as sharp as ever. He has spent much of his time counseling Fyra and trying to convince the ex-slaves of Salt View to give up raiding. He believes that he is making progress with the group and does not want to leave until he feels the area is secure for free trade.

Thus, Ragstol has turned down several offers by House Wavir to return him to Balic. Despite his age, he insists on



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remaining in the field, aiding Salt View and improving Outpost 19. His talents are valued highly enough that his eccentric insistence on being allowed his own way is tolerated by the merchants at the house, but none can say how long the sickly man can continue this pace.

If Ragstol has a flaw, it is that he is too trusting and unwilling to take charge in a situation. In a bargaining situation he is second to none, but in the day-to-day administration of the outpost, he leaves much to his son and his garrison commander. Some of his subordinates enjoy the autonomy and work all the harder, others take advantage of the opportunity to shirk their responsibilities. Some wonder whether this is Ragstol's management style or simply lack of management. Thus far, his trust has been well placed in his son, and at least not a disaster in his garrison commander, but many worry that it is only a matter of time before a crisis arises. At that time, all will know whether Ragstol's command abilities have weakened with age.

### Mersten Vell

Female Mul Gladiator, Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 5 (kank scale mail)	Str 17
Movement 12	Dex 13
Level 8	Con 18
Hit Points 77	Int 10
THAC0 7	Wis 12
No. of Attacks 2 (sword), 3/2	Cha 13

Damage/Attack: 2d4+9 (bronze bastard sword), 1d8+7 (long bow)

Weapon Specializations: bastard sword, bow, cestus, javelin, net, trident

Psionic Summary: PSPs 60; Wild Talent—radial navigation (PS 7; Cost: 4+7/hour)

Mersten Vell is an ex-slave, ex-gladiator, and an ex-inhabitant of Salt View. A simple woman with a warrior's view of the world, she found the transition to a life of art and performance by the slaves of Salt View too confusing. While she finds it difficult to live among the artists of Salt View, she still believes that the people of Salt View should not be

forced to return to a life of slavery any more than she should. She convinced Fyra to allow her to travel to Outpost 19 in order to study its operations. Fyra consented without seeking approval from Xaynon, Salt View's leader. Mersten offered her services to Ragstol Wavir and the master trader gladly accepted.

Mersten is a typical mul. She respects Ragstol, but has not spent much time contemplating his thoughts about trade and the importance of an individual's right to property. Although she is no longer a gladiator in the games of Nibenay (her one-time home), she still thinks in the concrete, straight line fashion that led her to so many victories in the arena.

Her status as the best warrior in the outpost makes her a natural candidate for garrison leader. In a fight, Mersten is likely to set out on her own, regardless of the odds, expecting her comrades to follow and to acquit themselves as warriors. She spends little time on strategic planning, and is unfamiliar with the use of scouts or sophisticated plans. Many friends of Ragstol have urged him to take a more active hand in the outpost's defense, as they see Mersten's inflexibility as a strategist as the primary cause of the outpost's defensive weakness.

Moreover, Mersten is not an even-tempered mul. She tries to control her temper, but she is not always successful. If challenged or under pressure, she has a tendency to react violently. Thus far, Ragstol has been able to control the mul's temper, but if Mersten cannot change her ways, Ragstol is afraid he may have to send her back to Salt View.

### Astemba Wavir

Male Human Preserver, Neutral Good

Armor Class 10	Str 16
Movement 12	Dex 12
Level 5	Con 17
Hit Points 24	Int 17
THAC0 18	Wis 15
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 14

Damage/Attack: 1d4+2 (bronze dagger), 1d3+2 (dart)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 60; Wild Talent—radial navigation (PS 7; Cost: 4+7/hour)



# Merchant Forts



Spells: (1st) *comprehend languages*, *magic missile* (x3), (2nd) *alter self* *knock*, *feign death*

Astemba Wavir is the son of Ragstol Wavir, and appears to be a skilled trader in his own right. He has less skill in negotiating, but he can appraise an item's value more quickly and more accurately than his father. Garbed as a trader and bearing a bronze dagger which is the image of his father, Astemba can look forward to a long career in House Wavir.

Few know, however, that Astemba is secretly a preserver. Astemba takes great care to conceal his abilities, and only his father knows of his illicit studies. Astemba generally selects spells with no material components, or with material components that are easily obtained. He uses his *comprehend languages* spell to demonstrate understanding in languages like that of a normal trader, and indeed has become adept at a few nonhuman languages without magical assistance.

Astemba's magic is Ragstol's secret weapon. He will not use the magic against an opponent in a business negotiation (you get no repeat business by cheating a *charmed* opponent), but more than once, Astemba's *magic missiles* have made the difference between loss of the outpost and the complete rout of attackers.

Unfortunately, since Astemba has developed his abilities secretly, he has a limited selection of spells. There is only a 10% chance that he has access to a spell not on his "normal" spell list. He is a voracious student of magic, and is filling out a reasonable spellbook as fast as he can.

Astemba is developing a close relationship with the Swiftwing elves, using his position to gain their trust and respect. The Swiftwings will probably not completely trust the son for a number of years, but Astemba is hoping that eventually he will be able to turn to the elven tribes for further magical training.

## Perian Evenstar

Female Elven Fighter/Thief, Neutral

Armor Class 3 (kank studded leather+Dex)	Str 10
Movement 12	Dex 18
Level G/7	Con 10
Hit Points 35	Int 14
THAC0 15 (13 with bow, 11 backstab)	Wis 10
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 15

Damage/Attack: 1d8 (bronze long sword or long bow), 1d4x3 (bronze dagger backstab)

Thief Abilities (in armor): PP 30 (0), OL 20 (10), F/RT 30 (20), MS 105 (85), HS 105 (85), DN 60 (50), CW 80 (50), RL 0 (0)

Perian Evenstar is a member of the garrison under Mersten Vell. A wandering elven warrior of the Shadows tribe, she was hired on at Outpost I9 a few years ago to learn more about human ways.

Only Ragstol knows that Perian is his contact with the Shadows. Perian handles the spell components and other illegal trade that Ragstol cannot handle himself, and is the one to contact the Swiftwing tribe when Outpost I9 needs help.

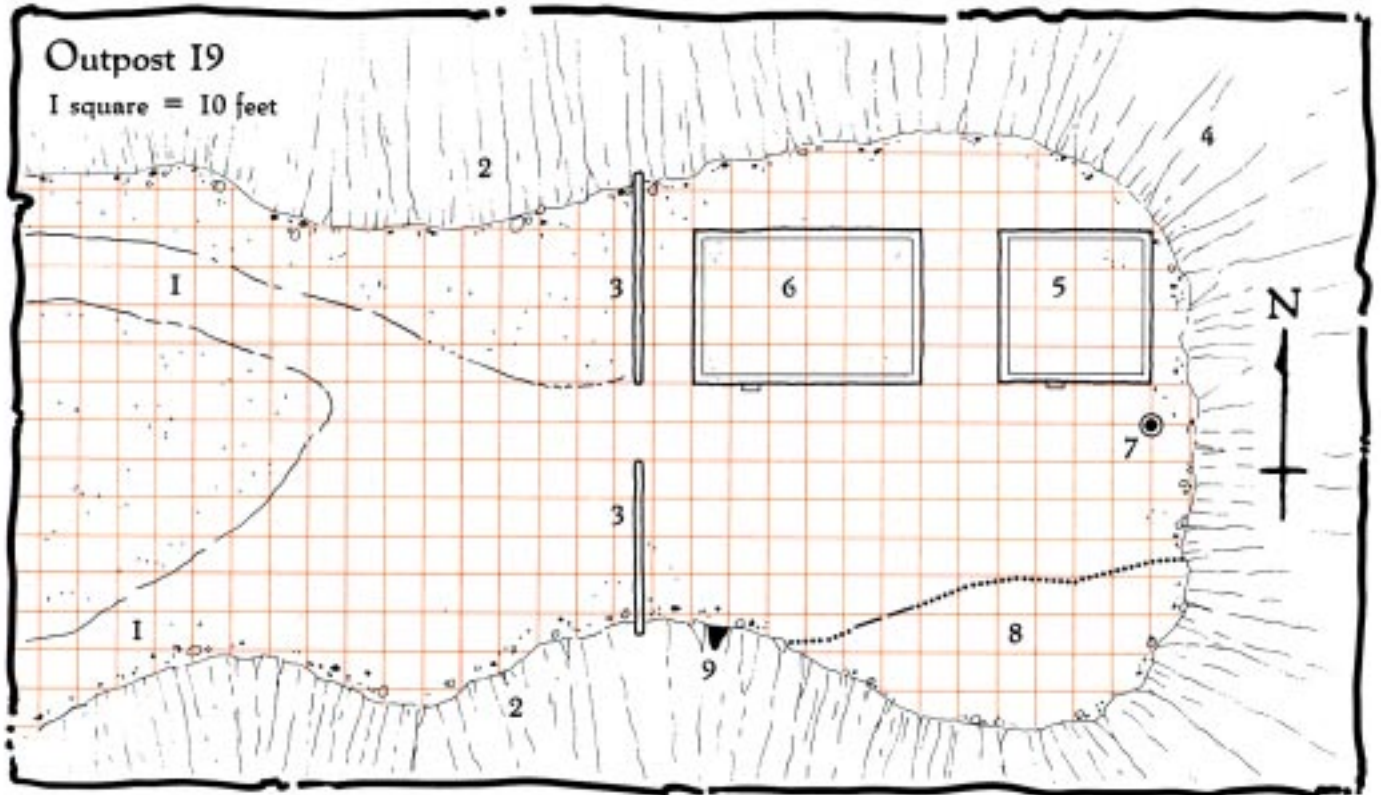
While the Swiftwings are a fiercely independent group, the Shadows are one tribe whose call they will respond to. Many tribes that deal with contraband never encounter the Shadows, but if they do, they are wise to heed them. In return for Perian's assistance, Ragstol collects no tariff on Perian's trade, and the trader will occasionally allow other Shadow members to be concealed at the outpost.

Perian is, in fact, one of the reasons that Ragstol has refused to return to Balic. While House Wavir is not opposed to dealing with the Shadows, such dealings are generally private matters between the Shadows and individual traders. His son is not quite ready to take over, and he can trust no other trader, even in his own house, with Perian's true identity. Moreover, he fears that if he leaves, and the connection with the Shadows is broken, the outpost will not have an adequate defense.

The rest of the garrison does not understand why Ragstol is so fond of Perian. The elf is haughty and prone to testing the garrison of the outpost, and this tendency has earned her the general dislike of the garrison. Mersten Vell was initially very hard on her for her attitude, as her taunts and tests of friendship were incomprehensible to her. Ragstol asked her to restrain herself, and it is an open secret in the camp that Ragstol and Perian have a relationship of some sort. Perian has taken to staying with Ragstol on occasion, to keep people from suspecting the true nature of their arrangement.



## Merchant Forts



### Outpost 19 Map

**1) Caravan Trail.** This narrow trail leads to the open Ivory Plain and is carefully marked and kept clear of debris by the outpost garrison. The trail is hard-packed earth, and is wide enough for one mekillot wagon to pass through. The trail ends in a large open area outside the wall, where visiting caravans camp.

**2) Canyon Walls.** These high cliff walls protect Outpost 19 from the winds and sandstorms of the desert. The canyon entrance twists and turns before reaching the open salt flats, further protecting the outpost.

The canyon walls rise some 200 feet above the outpost and are beautifully colored with bands of various shades running horizontally along the canyon. The lower reaches are scalable, but much of the cliff face is very steep, and thus far no one has successfully climbed up to the top (or down from above). The terrain at the top of the cliffs is unknown; no one has ever managed to approach the outpost from any direction other than the caravan trail.

**3) Wall.** This low stone wall represents the primary line

of defense for the outpost. While the wall is high enough to discourage jumping over it on crodlu-back, it is low enough to see over and can easily be scaled by a normal human. (Thri-kreen can leap over this wall with ease.) Notches have been set into the top of the wall to allow arrows to be fired at any attackers.

**4) Aarakocra Aerie.** The top portion of the cliff wall in this section is strung with a complex structure made of netting. This netting is home to a tribe of aarakocra that hunts across a wide range in the Mekillot Mountains. The aarakocra have been here since Outpost 17 was reconstructed, but all attempts to contact and ally with the birdmen have failed. The aarakocra occasionally steal an erdlu when times are hard, but otherwise avoid all contact with their neighbors below.

**5) Housing.** This building contains the living quarters of the traders and garrison of the outpost. It is partitioned into a number of smaller rooms; Ragstol, Astemba, and Mersten Vell have rooms of their own, while the remaining staff are distributed three to a chamber. A common chamber acts as a dining hall and workroom.





**6) Trading Warehouse.** This wooden building, the largest in the compound, contains the trade goods which Ragstol and the other traders buy and sell. More often than not, the building is more than half empty, as the warehouse was built in expectation of a much higher volume of trade. **Now** and then, however, large caravan drops are made by House Wavir, which ships the goods from South Ledopolus or Altaruk to Outpost 13. These are then doled out to visiting caravans over a period of months.

**7) Well.** This small well is a wide shaft that drops some 30 feet to the water below. The water is tangy with minerals, but is safe to drink. Water is drawn up by throwing waterskins into the well, then hauling the skins up by ropes. Lifting the water is hard work, especially since water must be lifted for the erdlu and crodlu as well as for all the humans. Mersten Vell often assigns drawing up water as a punishment for unruly behavior.

This well is the only supply of water in Outpost I9. As a result, it is not practical for caravans to remain here more than a day or two. The demand placed on the well by watering the animals and staff of a typical caravan in addition to the permanent outpost garrison will quickly deplete it. Caravans knowledgeable of the region are aware of this and bring the minimum number of animals up the canyon to the outpost. New caravan masters are quickly informed of the situation by Ragstol on their first visit.

**8) Animal Pens.** These pens contain the outpost's herd of 40-60 erdlu and crodlu. These flocks are used as mounts for the occasional expedition, trade goods for the caravans, and food bribes or raiding thri-kreen, so the number of animals in the fortress varies wildly. These animals are replenished by caravans and by the slaves of Salt View, for which they are almost the only export.

**9) Cave.** This low chamber is used as a secondary storeroom or as a living chamber when visitors exceed the capacity of the outpost's small buildings. It is 20 feet deep, roughly circular, and has a 15-foot ceiling. At the rear is a narrow tunnel, 4 feet in diameter, which leads off into darkness. The small tunnel was sealed off when the outpost was built to avoid a visit from some hibernating creature.

## Fort Inix Esreva's Journal

*It is with considerable wonder (and some pleasure) that I have observed the decline of House Shom, chief merchant house of the city of Nibenay. Once the most powerful trading house in all the Tyr region, House Shom has suffered from decades of apparent neglect.*

*No where (except perhaps in Nibenay itself) is the decay of House Shom more evident than in Fort Inix. On several occasions, my master had need to visit this monument to the inefficiency and inflexibility of the once-great house.*

*In one of my first visits to the fortress, my master was met by the new chief trader of Fort Inix, a corpulent, balding man named Veltian Asdere. To commemorate his arrival, Lord Veltian (as he wished to be called) had transplanted a cluster of velgest trees from the Crescent Forest outside Nibenay. These trees, accustomed as they were to the moisture and gentle breezes of the Crescent Forest, were suffering terribly under the direct sun and wind of the desert, and it was clear that they had no hope of survival.*

*Imagine my surprise when Lord Veltian informed my master that over 30 slaves had died carrying the heavy plants from the forest to the fortress, and that another 10 slaves were employed continuously just to bring water to these dying trees. The trees consumed as much water a single day as would be consumed by a contingent of men. Moreover, he explained that he had selected the sensitive velgest trees because he enjoyed eating their fruit at the end of his dinner!*

*Clearly, many freemen would think nothing of the death of a slave, so long as the task at hand is accomplished. However, what struck me as truly grotesque about Lord Veltian's words was that he was proud of the deaths of those slaves. He considered his willingness to waste 30 lives and the water of another 50 men to attempt the impossible as a measure of his true power and wealth. Truly, even Lalali-Puy, the great and terrible oba of Gulg, has more concern for her property than this.*

*The true tragedy is that with the decline of House Shorn, there are few caravans that visit this isolated fortress any longer. Instead of being a useful element of the trading network, it is an obsolete outpost. Any other house would have closed Fort Inix decades ago.*



## Merchant Forts



House Shom's largest fortress east of Nibenay is Fort Inix. Once a major caravan stop, it has been all but useless for decades. It is, however, one of the oldest active merchant fortresses in the Tyr region, and controls a strategic oasis in the northern part of the Ivory Triangle region.

Fort Inix can be found at an oasis 30 miles east of Nibenay, just south of the Blackspine Mountains. It lies in a transition zone where the salt flats of the Great Ivory Plain change to the sandy wastes that dominate this region of the Tablelands. The fort itself sits upon a man-made hill.

The Fort Inix oasis is most fertile in the season of sun ascending and early high sun. At this time, the immediate region is filled with flowers, small brush, and other light vegetation. By the end of the high sun season, however, the land has all but dried completely, with only a few deep wells producing water.

### History

Fort Inix was built when the oasis near it was more fertile and the foliage stood year round. At that time, House Shom established a breeding ground for inix here. This breeding

effort produced some of the best inix mounts in the Tyr region, and the fort was built as an adjunct to the breeding effort.

According to the stories, the fortress was also used as a way station for the huge House Shom caravans that traveled from Nibenay to thriving settlements east of the Ivory Triangle. Caravans from across the Tyr region would pass through Fort Inix, collecting mounts and trade goods for the long caravan route.

As the climate dried and the oasis withered, the livelihood of Fort Inix went with the water. In time, the oasis could no longer support vegetation year-round, and the inix rapidly gnawed the remaining vegetation to the ground. After that, the inix breeding efforts had to be moved closer to Nibenay, in the protection of the Verdant Belt. As the eastern settlements fell, there were no longer huge caravans passing through the oasis. Over time, the fortress has become more and more isolated, with less and less purpose.

House Shom made valiant efforts to preserve Fort Inix's usefulness. It established a number of small villages in the scrub plains south of the ruins of Giustenal, supported and serviced by House Shom caravans. As soon as those villages





became somewhat self-sustaining, however, the agent running Fort Inix increased its prices threefold to provide the cash required to purchase a popular gladiator. Those villages that did not immediately collapse under the weight of increased prices turned to other merchant houses for their goods.

Over the last century, Fort Inix has become a visible symbol of the fallen might of House Shom. The leaders of the family are preoccupied with maintaining their hedonistic lifestyles in Nibenay. Other merchant houses eye Fort Inix as a puzzling waste.

## The Fort Today

As is typical of House Shom, the complement of the as not diminished with the declining activity. Extensive resources are committed to maintain a huge staff to manage the nonexistent inix herds and caravan trade. Because of its history, Fort Inix is a prestigious post for an up-and-coming agent of the house despite its uselessness, and many vie for the honor of becoming Fort Inix's new master trader.

The post of master trader is at best temporary, as any assigned to this post are quickly transferred either to higher posts. or—if they are not politically adept—to even less prestigious backwaters.

Few traders come to Fort Inix, primarily because prices here are so high. There is a sizable black market selling goods in the bazaar at lower prices, and many believe that this black market consists entirely of goods stolen from the warehouse in the fort.

Prices in the black market are less than those charged at the fort itself, but they are often not competitive with the less heavily burdened fortresses of the other houses in the region. Because the master trader is constantly changing, traders have become used to dealing with the more permanent minor functionaries.

Simply surviving at Fort Inix is becoming more and more difficult. The huge population of the fort (consisting of 75 staff and 200 slaves) taxes the production of the oasis. Over the years, the oasis has been shrinking, primarily because Fort Inix consumes so much of the water for itself.

As conditions continue to worsen, the day when there will not be enough water to support the staff rapidly approaches.

## The Garrison

The staff of the fortress is divided into four main organizations, all reporting to the chief trader. These are the storehouse, the herd, the garrison, and trade operations.

The master of stores and his staff of 10 workers and 30 slaves maintain the inventory of trade goods and supplies that are to be kept available for House Shom caravans. With regular caravans, most of these goods are lost to decay long before a caravan arrives to use them. As a result, this organization is primarily dedicated to identifying stores that have become useless, discarding them, and requesting new stores from Nibenay. The current master of stores is Berdeth Wesran; he is known privately as a good source of inexpensive goods, and many believe that some of the discarded stores end up in the hands of his personal customers.

The master of the herd and his organization (6 workers and 30 slaves) care for the inix herds. Since there are no inix at the fortress (the oasis can no longer support them), they spend much of their time waiting or training in outdated methods of inix care. The current master of the herd is Sermap Yestrev, a slender man in his fifties. Sermap has been master of the herd for nearly 20 years, and makes no secret of the fact that he plans to die in the job. He views his generous salary and light duties as a sinecure owed him by House Shom or is ears of service. Sermap has done little to endear himself to the rest of the fortress garrison. His staff contributes little to the fort's daily operations. Sermap has a long-running feud with Berdeth Wesran, stemming from Sermap's suspicions about Berdeth's inventory management and Berdeth's resentment regarding Sermap's ineffectual staff

The master of the garrison, Werelev, is responsible for maintaining the defenses of Fort Inix. Werelev is a belgoi, and his 40 troops are a mixture of that evil race, half-giants of evil or chaotic temperament, humans, muls, and thri-kreen. Werelev maintains a rough, violent discipline, and more garrison members are lost to internal disputes or Werelev's discipline than are lost defending the fortress. Typically, half of this force remains at the fort at all times, while half can be found "on patrol," raiding nearby villages and caravans of other houses.

The chief trader himself heads the last department, whose purpose is to trade with those who visit the fort,



# Merchant Forts

regardless of house affiliation. This department has 15 members plus 55 slaves, and operates a bazaar just outside the fortress walls. Of all the departments in Fort Inix, only this one is still doing the work of supporting House Shom. Unfortunately, the costs of goods at the fort are determined in part by the market, but mostly by the huge overhead costs that go into supporting the enormously over-staffed fortress. As a result, prices at Fort Inix are uncompetitively high, and few will purchase anything here they can get anywhere else. The only product traded heavily at Fort Inix is lumber, and this is only because Nibenay and House Shom hold a virtual monopoly on lumber in this region.

In addition to the slaves mentioned in the various departments above, every free member of the garrison has a personal servant-slave. The department heads have three slaves each; the chief trader has five. These slaves have no direct duties, except to provide for the comfort of the garrison. While in theory each slave is assigned to a specific individual, in practice they are managed as a labor pool, and a garrison freeman needing help will seize the nearest servant-slave.

## Personalities

### Pevuran Bollos

Male Human Trader, Neutral

Armor Class 8 (leather)	Str 17
Movement 12	Dex 14
Level 10	Con 13
Hit Points 31	Int 16
THAC0 15	Wis 15
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 14

Damage/Attack: 1d4+1 (bronze dagger)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 41; Wild Talent-reduction (PS 11; Cost: varies+1/round)

Pevuran Bollos is the most recent master trader of Fort Inix. Pevuran fancies himself a hero, a remnant of the House Shom at the time of its greatness. He is proud of his physical prowess and his talent as a trader, but over time he has become worn down by the bureaucracy. As a young

man he may have had the good intentions and energy to become a reformer but the closer he has gotten to the centers of power in the merchant house, the more he has become complacent. He focuses now more on his success within the organization and less on the success of his operation.

Pevuran made his fortune on the House Shom trading route between Nibenay, Raam, and Draaj. This route (which primarily trades rope, grains, water, obsidian, and precious metals) has been the backbone of House Shom's prosperity for centuries. Pevuran was unusually lucky in avoiding raids, so his caravans reflected higher profits than most, but he is generally perceived as being a lackluster trader. Pevuran was actually rather thoughtful in planning his trips. He almost always scheduled his runs behind a rather large caravan of a competitor. This, combined with a judicious use of scouts and mercenaries resulted in the successful track record which secured his position here.

Pevuran is yet another of the caretakers assigned the monitoring of Fort Inix. Since his arrival, he has developed an understanding with Werelev, the belgoi master of the garrison. He has not sought to interfere with the normal operation of the fort, and has focused most of his attention on the political maneuvering in Nibenay.

### Werelev

Male Belgoi Psionicist, Lawful Evil

Armor Class 7 (Dex)	Str 18
Movement 12	Dex 17
Level 3	Con 17
Hit Points 30	Int 12
THAC0 15	Wis 16
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 6

Damage/Attack: 1d4+2 (claws)+Constitution drain

Psionic Summary: PSPs 46

Defense Modes—mind blank, mental barrier

Telepathy—Sciences: domination (PS 12; Cost: contact+varies), mindlink (PS 11; Cost: contact+8/round), psionic blast (PS 11; Cost: 10); *Devotions*: attraction (PS 12; Cost: contact+8/round), conceal thoughts (PS 16; Cost: 5+3/round), contact (PS 16; Cost: varies+1/round),





ego whip (PS 13; Cost: 4), phobia amplification (PS 14; Cost: contact+4/round), post-hypnotic suggestion (PS 5; Cost: contact+1/level or hit die), send thoughts (PS 7; Cost: contact+2/round)

Werelev is a belgoi, and has been master of the garrison at Fort Inix for the last eight years. He rules his diverse and violent garrison through intimidation.

Werelev has seen several master traders come and go, and makes a point of quickly establishing his autonomy whenever a new trader takes over the fort. He tells the new master trader that because he has been at the fort so long, the main chapterhouse in Nibenay looks to him for feedback on the new master trader's performance. He assures the new manager that he will send only praise to Nibenay as long as he is not interfered with. He concludes the discussion with veiled threats about the fort being defenseless against raids. This usually results in Werelev retaining full freedom to run, staff, and outfit the garrison as he pleases. Pevuran has little interest in the affairs of the garrison and has let Werelev have his way.

## Fort Inix Map

**1) Motte.** The entire fortress rests on an earthen hill some seven feet high. This huge mound once acted to protect the walls from siege engines, but as trade routes have shifted it is unlikely that anyone will have any interest in capturing Fort Inix. Legend has it that the hill (called a *motte*) is riddled with hidden tunnels which can allow troops to move unseen into or out of the fortress. The truth of these legends is unknown, but not a few members of the garrison have made it a hobby to search for these hidden tunnels.

**2) Walls.** The massive stone walls of Fort Shom are relics of an older, more prosperous time. Twenty feet thick and forty feet high, they are among the most massive stoneworks outside of a city-state. Legend has it that the stoneworks were the construction of giants in a time when dealings between giants and humans were much more friendly. The finer workmanship on the walls is obviously dwarven, however, with some sections polished to a glassy surface.

Such polishing appears only in a few protected corners of the wall, however; time has worn away at the rest. The machicolations are rounded and worn, sections of the wall have developed cracks, and much of the wall has had so

much mortar wear away so that their outer face is riddled with hand and footholds. Even the minimal maintenance of mortaring, which would reduce further wear on the wall, has not been attempted. Only the thickness of the walls and their original quality construction has prevented their collapse.

The only point at which the walls can be penetrated is the main gate, which faces to the northwest. During the day this gate remains open, but at night huge stone doors are set into place in the opening. The gate is wide enough for two mekillot wagons to pass one another, and the arch is high enough to allow passage of even the highest wagon.

**3) Towers.** The outer walls are protected by round lookout towers. Each tower is 40 feet high, with three stories plus a roof. One lookout is stationed at each tower; lookouts work 12-hour shifts, and most in the garrison consider lookout duty to be unimportant and dull. Thus, at night there is a 40% chance that any lookout will be asleep or dicing with a companion. During the day, or when trouble is expected, this chance drops to 5%. Werelev, in one of his few attempts at real discipline, has tried to instill more attentiveness in the lookouts. His last attempt came as he approached an habitual sleeper "on duty" and threw him off the tower to the courtyard below. This caused the lookouts to be more attentive for a time, but as the incident fades into memory the lookouts are relaxing again.

**4) Trading Hall.** This building was once the most beautiful in Fort Inix, and it still is an awesome site. The main trading hall is a vaulted chamber some 40 feet long, its ceiling painted with images of traders exchanging goods, particularly inix. The walls are inlaid with white stone, the floor is marble, and the ceiling is supported by pillars covered with reliefs. Side chambers off the main hall once housed record keepers, private traders and money changers. At the height of Fort Inix's success, this was one of the most active and successful trading halls outside a city-state.

Like everything else in Fort Inix, the trader's hall suffers from neglect. The heat of the sun beating down on the roof has caused the ceiling to crack and chips to fall from the faded frescoes. Centuries of torches have left grey smudges on the white walls, and the marble floor is covered with dust and minor debris. The hall itself is no longer used. There are not enough traders or customers to warrant it.

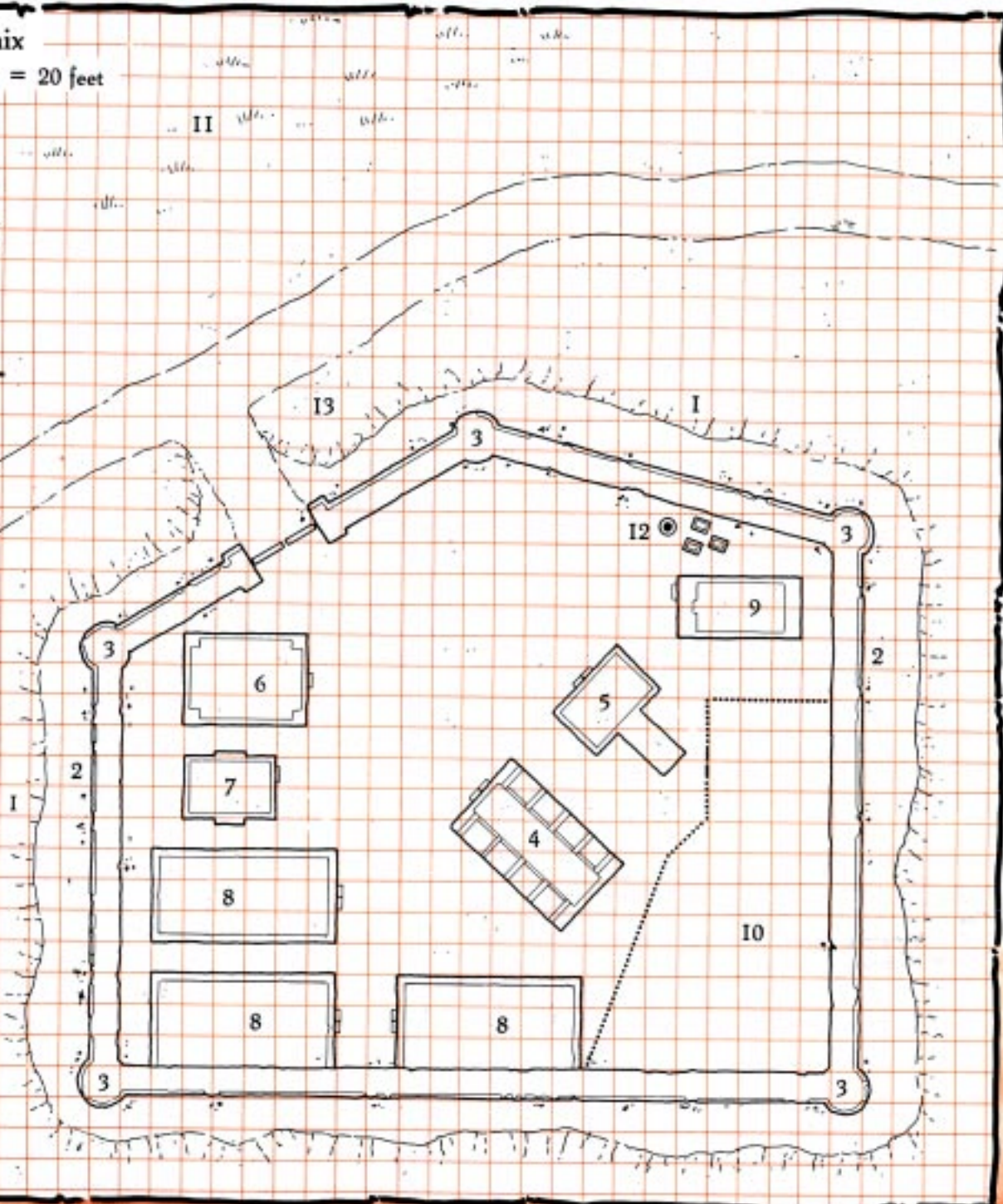
Occasionally, a new chief trader decides to reopen the Trader's Hall. For a time there is a lackluster effort to



# Raiding Tribes

## Fort Inix

1 square = 20 feet







reclaim the building, but long before it opens interest wanes and the work stops.

**5) Chief Trader's Residence.** This building is both the residence of the chief trader and the hostel for important visitors. The building is among the most ornate in the fortress, and is in excellent condition. The interior is filled with historical treasures and the finest of furnishings.

This luxury, however, is something of a sham. The "historical treasures" are little more than memorabilia with no intrinsic value, and the furnishings, while ornate and valuable, are of varying styles, some dating back as far as 40 years. The surroundings are certainly comfortable, but the constant turnover of new chief traders gives the decor of this residence an eclectic, unfinished look. Before any one trader can complete redecorating in the style he prefers (given the delays involved in getting anything from the master of stores) another chief trader-with his own ideas of appropriate decoration-has come along to take his place. Thus, the residence is never (and never will be) complete.

The rear portion of this building houses the chief trader's staff. Like the chief trader himself, the staff is frequently replaced. This chamber is more functionally furnished, with little in the way of luxury. Aside from beds and lockers, there is a small resting area modestly outfitted with cushions.

**6) Garrison Barracks.** This building houses Fort Inix's ragtag garrison. This building is a square frame of wood, almost spartan in its simplicity. The interior is divided into a number of sleeping areas; bunks are divided up more by the race and temperament of the occupants than by any semblance of military organization. Beds are rough ticks, stuffed with sand or straw, strewn haphazardly within the sleeping areas. Equipment is stowed in chests or in piles; theft and insects are chronic problems.

The central dining area here doubles as a duelling pit. Disputes within the garrison are solved with knives as often as by Werelev. In part this is because Werelev is likely as not to have both parties executed, regardless of who is right. In his words: "You are soldiers, not bawling children. Fight your own battles!" Duels here are more common than Werelev would like, but not so common as to deplete the garrison. Replacements are hired on periodic trips to Nibenay.

**7) Master of Stores' Residence.** This two-story building houses the master of stores and his freeman staff, many of

whom are also his family members. While the exterior of this building is rather plain when compared to the other residences, the interior is filled with the finest furnishings and accoutrements that can be had from the warehouses. The walls and floors are of the finest woods, and the rooms are comfortable and spacious. The building is in good repair, as the master of stores has made sure that repairs to his home are made promptly and well. It is said that of all the people in Fort Inix the master of stores lives a life second in luxury only to the master trader.

**8) Warehouses.** These enormous warehouses store the trade goods which are Fort Inix's ostensible reason for survival. Like many of the buildings in Fort Inix, the warehouses are not in good condition, but the master of stores has made some efforts to keep them in repair.

The stores are "organized" in a system devised by the Amburr Wesran, the great-grandfather of the current master of stores. It is said that no one but a Wesran can find anything in the confused morass, although Berdeth seems to be able to locate virtually anything in the huge stacks of goods. The master of stores' staff spends most of its time inventorying and cataloging the huge storehouses, identifying items that either through wear or neglect (or sale on the black market) are in need of replacement from Nibenay.

The warehouses also act as the sleeping quarters of the slaves. A section has been set aside in one of the larger warehouses as slave quarters; while the freemen of Fort Inix have done little more than provide the slaves with some straw, the slaves have turned this section into comfortable quarters, with bedding, braziers, and even some seats "borrowed" from stores. While the slaves are no more successful than anyone else at finding things in the Wesran organizational scheme, they view the improvement of their quarters as a kind of scavenger hunt, and borrow what they find and can use. So long as the slaves are well-behaved and limit their pilferage, the master of stores and his staff do not interfere. (This is more because interfering would require work and attention rather than any feeling of charity on the freemen's part.)

**9) Herder's Hall.** This building is the residence for the herder staff, including the chief herder. While this position is maintained as a symbol of the history of House Shom, the chief herder has little responsibility at Fort Inix.

Sermap Yestrev's feud with the master of stores is manifest in the condition of the Herder's Hall. While the exterior of



## Raiding Tribes

this building is no more run down than any other building in Fort Inix, the interior is a shambles. Entire rooms are uninhabitable because the floor has collapsed or cracks in the walls go unsealed. A portion of the building has been infested with giant centipedes (from *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™ I*); the affected rooms have been sealed to prevent their spread. All of the herders except the chief herder are huddled in a single room, with a tightly-sealed door to prevent any centipedes which escape their confinement from getting to the sleeping herders. The chief herder has repeatedly requested the slaves and materials to restore the Herder's Hall, but so far has been politely refused.

**10) Inix Corral.** This large fenced area was once the corral for the inix which made this fort great. Unfortunately, as alluded to above, the inix are gone, but the corral still waits for the return of the lizards.

When House Shom caravans bring livestock to the Fort, they are housed in this corral. Temporary repairs are made to shore up the collapsing fence, and the master of herders and his staff actually have animals to care for. Soon, though, the caravan leaves, taking its livestock with it, or the livestock is sold off to the neighboring tribes, and the herders return to a life of idleness.

At one end of the corral stands a half-collapsed stable. The current dispute between the master of stores and the master of the herd regards who should repair the stable. Both are insistent that they have too many other duties. Should the stable collapse, Werelev will ask the master trader to step in and resolve the dispute.

**11) Oasis.** This area is the outermost edge of the vegetation supported by the oasis. Primarily scrub brush and flowering cactus, these plants take their water from deep roots which go down several feet to the water table of the oasis. Fortunately for Fort Inix, the oasis no longer seems to be receding, although it is shrinking on other sides. There is no open water at the oasis, although a deep well can be found near its center. This well always has water, even in the dry high sun season, and when the cisterns get low slaves are sent to the outer well to replenish the water supply.

**12) Well and Cisterns.** This 30-foot-deep shaft provides the water for the entire fortress. Ten slaves (provided by the master trader) work day and night to draw water from the well and place it into a cistern from which the fort draws its water. Several complex arrangements to bring the water up

have been tried, but slaves with buckets have proven the most effective solution. In the season of sun descending, the well goes dry, and the fortress must survive on the stored water in the cistern for a period of several weeks. During this period, slaves are put on half-rations of water, and freemen may be put on half-rations late in the spell. Each year, the dry spell gets longer and longer, but the cisterns—augmented with occasional trips to the well at the oasis—have been able to support the residents.

**13) Bazaar.** This large area is where the traders set up when a caravan or nomad tribe comes, or on the regular “market days.” The bazaar is divided into a number of booths, each of which offers a portion of the fortress’ goods. These booths are easily assembled and disassembled, and are brought back into the fortress and stored in the warehouse when customers are not available. All of the traders in this bazaar serve House Shom, and therefore the prices set by the house are rather high. Fort Inix still has, however, the widest variety of goods of any trader in the Ivory Triangle region.

## Fort Fyra

### Esreva's Journal

*House Fyra is a recent addition to the peoples of the Ivory Triangle. Traders in salt, they are among the most contentious, fractious groups I have ever met.*

*I made my first and only visit to their fortress, Fort Fyra, only a few years ago. My master sought to engage one of their rare caravans to procure a supply of salt. Rather than finding a trader and negotiating a deal, my master found himself in a discussion with nearly half the inhabitants of the fortress. Apparently the house would not accept such a commission without agreement from a majority of its members, and each felt he or she should comment on the proposed arrangement.*

*As you might expect, the result was most unsatisfactory. Before long, my master was forgotten in the struggle among house members to be heard. Merchants were screaming at one another in groups of two and three, and before we left a fist fight had broken out in one corner of the courtyard. My master gathered his personal belongings and fled these madmen, swearing that never again would he deal with such as these.*





Fort Fyra is the sole trading fortress of House Fyra. This small outpost is little more than a trading post at which those interested in trading for salt can meet with the merchants of the house. Most of the house staff and workers are employed in the slow, dangerous work of mining salt, so few house members are available to assemble traditional trade caravans. As a result, House Fyra is almost totally dependent on other houses' caravans willingness to trade with them.

House Fyra is also a symbol of the hypocrisy of the city-states. When Salt View first began to grow into a stable village, the oba Lalali-Puy and the Shadow King barred any house which traded in their cities from trading with this center of raiding activity. It serves no merchant's interest to trade with raiders. However, as Salt View began to show some promise as a legitimate trade partner, House Wavir of Balic ignored the ban. The houses based in Gulg and Nibenay obeyed the edict until Fort Fyra was established. The merchant houses who trade with Salt View through Fort Fyra maintain the polite fiction that the two are entirely separate entities. While House Wavir has been most forward thinking in their efforts to lead the ex-slaves away from their

dependency of raiding, some other houses will trade with Fyra to the extent that it serves their own interests, and to the extent that it will protect their caravans from attack by the ex-slaves. The rulers of Nibenay and Gulg have authorized trade with Fort Fyra at the discretion of their Templars.

## History

In the early days before the founding of the village of Salt View, Xaynon's band roamed the Ivory Triangle region, raiding caravans and struggling to survive. After a raid, Xaynon's band fled into the desert in several directions to confound pursuers. After such raids, Xaynon had established a number of rallying points where his forces could regroup and distribute their booty. Fort Fyra began as such a rallying point.

Over time, Xaynon's band erected crude fortifications in the rock cleft, so that they could battle pursuers if necessary. In those days, however, this site was not distinguished from a dozen others with similar characteristics.

That changed when Xaynon's raiders decided to settle



## Merchant Forts

into village life. At that time, they located the salt mine where the village of Salt View was constructed. This fortification was the closest to that site.

Xaynon decided to upgrade the fortress, so that soldiers who sought to follow Salt View raiders back to the village would instead be directed to this fortress. He assigned the dwarf Fyra, one of his trusted lieutenants, guardianship of the fortress, and posted 300 warriors, all ex-slaves, to defend it.

Fyra discovered that a fortress in the desert was a magnet for travelers. Customs of the region require that any caravan be given water and salt, unless he is a blood enemy. To avoid the ire of the caravans (which already sought the people of Salt View for their raiding), Fyra abided by the custom. When the traders asked the purpose of this fortress, he announced that the fortress was Fort Fyra, first outpost of his "merchant house," House Fyra.

The visitors seemed to understand immediately. They praised the baffled dwarf's foresight in being the first trader to commit himself to controlling the salt trade. Fyra quickly learned that salts, as well as being used to season foods and preserve meats, is also used to produce textile dyes, soap, glass, and pottery in addition to preserving leather hides.

Xaynon thought Fyra's explanation of the fortress' purpose was inspired. Not only did the story of salt trade make an excellent cover for the fortress, it was a terrific premise for the village of Salt View to establish a false front of legitimacy in order to work its way out from under the trade ban. He assigned a portion of the raiding goods to pay those who worked to mine the salt.

### The Fort Today

House Fyra is beginning to do well but is facing difficulty at Salt View. While refined salt is a valuable commodity, mining and processing the salt is an expensive process. In the early days, gatherers could simply walk to exposed deposits, collecting the large lumps of salt which lay near the surface. Over the years this has become impractical, as the surface salt near the fortress has all been collected, and a mine must now actually be dug to find veins of salt. Fyra has begun the construction of a new salt mine near the fortress. This mine will reduce the cost of the salt, but requires a considerable investment to get it started. Moreover, mining salt is extremely hard work, and the ex-slaves of Salt View command high wages for their labor. Xaynon is not prepared to

make the investment necessary to ensure Fort Fyra's long-term production capability.

Ragstol Wavir, the master trader of Outpost I9, has spent a significant amount of time counseling Fyra and encouraging the artisans of Salt View. He has convinced Fyra that the population of Salt View will continue to increase and that the raiding activity will have to increase to support the community. If this happens, there is certain to be retribution from the merchant houses or the city-states. Even if Salt View escapes their enemies, they will drive off all the caravans in the area, and will no longer be able to find the goods to steal. The tribe, Ragstol argues, should stop the raids and channel all of their resources into legitimate trade. In this way the income of the community will grow with the addition of productive members. They will be able to freely buy the specific supplies they need rather than hoping to find something useful among their loot. Lastly, they will be able to ensure that their children are not hunted, but rather sought as trading partners and allies. Fyra believes in this vision and is struggling to gain support for the mine among the factions of Salt View.

Xaynon is not interested in the salt trade. The ex-gladiator has no natural inclination toward such activities and he is uncomfortable with how such a change would realign the power structure within the village. Rather than support the construction of the mine, Xaynon has gradually reduced the amount of goods allocated to the project. He contends that House Fyra should support itself.

The artisans of Salt View, however, have rallied to Fyra's side. For the first time, they have found a market for the goods that they manufacture. They are using the revenue from their sales to help invest in the mine. Xaynon is not pleased with this development, but he has allowed it to continue.

As more and more people become aware of the fortress, the number of caravans which visit the outpost increases. This allows Fyra to sell more salt, trading for necessities for Salt View and cash to pay the workers. It is now something of an open secret that "House Fyra" is associated with the village of Salt View, but no official notice has been taken of their relationship.

Thus, House Fyra is at a turning point. Should the mine become established, the House will have enough stability to survive without Xaynon's support. If internal dissension should prevent the mine from opening, then the house will fall.





## The Garrison

The fortress's occupants are all ex-slaves. They are divided into three major groups: traders, soldiers, and salt-workers.

Traders represent the "public face" of the house to caravans and to the people of Salt View. While ultimate leadership of House Fyra rests in Fyra himself, day-to-day operations are managed by a "master trader" who is selected by a democratic vote. A majority vote confirms an individual to the post as master trader; their term lasts two years. The master trader appoints a cadre of assistants and officers who comprise the "traders" of the house. The exact number of traders in House Fyra varies from master trader to master trader, but generally hovers around 30.

Master traders select their assistants for a variety of reasons, including talent, skill, or mere political favoritism. Major decisions are resolved by a vote of the traders in an effort to keep those who supported the master trader in his camp. Their constantly shifting votes place the House in constant turmoil, as political alliances shift and the direction of the House changes. Fyra had been working to keep the house on a consistent course, but his eroding relationship with Xaynon has weakened his popularity, and there is talk of ousting him by election-something that until now had never been considered. Some have proposed that another be assigned Fyra's role, while others think the position should be abolished and all decisions made by the master trader and his staff. Only the lack of a strong challenger and cohesion among the ranks keep Fyra in place.

The soldiers who occupy Fort Fyra are independent of the house, but provide protection to house activities as part of their "cover." While 300 warriors are assigned to the fort, in practice no more than 75 are ever there at any one time. Others are guarding salt-workers, escorting nearby caravans, or simply "on leave" at Salt View. It would be impractical for the fortress to support such a huge contingent of soldiers at all times; in time of trouble, however, all 300 are posted to the fortress, and the traders and salt-workers are sent to Salt View. Soldiers receive votes like any other "member" of the house, and there are always a number of senior military officers among the ranks of the traders.

The salt-workers are both the most and least powerful group in House Fyra. More than 200 people are involved in the gathering and refining of salt. This makes them a powerful voting block. However, they are rarely available to partic-

ipate in the political battles. They labor in the refinery, turning the huge millstone to grind the salt. They work in the mine, excavating tunnels through solid salt. As a result, there are rarely more than 40 salt-gatherers in the fortress at any one time.

Fyra is the sole coordinator for the artisans of Salt View at the fort. With Ragstol's advice places orders for certain quantities of various items from the craftsmen.

## Personalities

### Fyra

Male Dwarf Gladiator, Neutral

Armor Class 1	
(kank scale armor+shield+Dex)	Str 18(94)
Movement 6	Dex 16
Level 11	Con 16
Hit Points 77	Int 15
THAC0 8 (7 battle axe)	Wis 14
No. of Attacks 2 (battle axe), 3/2	Cha 8

Damage/Attack: 1d8+7 (battle axe)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 34; Wild Talent-spirit sense (PS 11; Cost: 10)

Fyra is a dwarf, born into slavery and trained as a gladiator. He spent over 75 years in the gladiatorial arena, and never lost a fight. Like Xaynon, he did not enjoy the many deaths he cause and because of his race and his dour manner, he had never become a crowd favorite. When Xaynon urged the other gladiators in his pen to break free, Fyra was the first by his side. It was the combined strength of the mul and the dwarf which pulled the door to their pen off of its hinges, beginning the rebellion which would find them both alive and free.

Fyra traveled with Xaynon's band for all the years of wandering. He was Xaynon's constant companion, and the two ex-slaves saved one another's lives many times. This bond of friendship caused Xaynon to put Fyra in charge of the fortress now known as Fort Fyra. Now at 132, he is just beginning to feel his age. While Fyra first took this on as just another assignment, the growth of House Fyra and his



## Merchant Forts

vision of a prosperous and free community has become his *focus*.

It is this single-minded determination to make House Fyra succeed that has caused the recent friction between Fyra and Xaynon. Xaynon sees the salt merchant stratagem only as a minor cover to their fortress. Fyra sees the success of a salt trade as central to Salt View's (and his own) very survival. Fyra chafes at the lack of support and resources Xaynon offers, while Xaynon cannot understand why his old friend has invested so much in a whim.

Xaynon is happy with the way things are in the village. In spite of his claim that leadership has been thrust upon him and should be democratic, he cannot help but feel pride in what he has accomplished. In a village of merchants strength and fighting prowess might not count for as much.

None (except other dwarves) recognize what has happened to Fyra. Most believe that Fyra's continual efforts to expand House Fyra is a result of his spending too much time with the master trader of Outpost I9. The raiders of Salt View feel Xaynon is excessively lenient toward his old friend. They do not like the idea of the village artisans usurping their control over village affairs. Even Xaynon does not realize that the fate of Fyra's soul hangs in the balance. As is typical of dwarves, Fyra has not bothered to inform anyone, so the impasse continues.

### Melestan Eltrabel

Male Half-Elven Ranger, Neutral Good

Armor Class 7 (studded leather)	Str 13
Movement 12	Dex 14
Level 5	Con 13
Hit Points 25	Int 14
THAC0 16	Wis 13
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 17

Damage/Attack: 1d8 (long sword)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 56; Wild Talent- *Devotions*: all-round vision (PS 10; Cost: 6+4/round), combat mind (PS 10; Cost: 5+4/round), control flames (PS 12; Cost: 8+8/round), Sciences: telekinesis (PS 10; Cost: 3+1/round+), teleport (PS 14; Cost: 10+)

Melestan Eltrabel is an up-and-coming member of House Fyra, perhaps due to his exceptional number of wild talents. Initially assigned to guard duty at the garrison, he has spent much of his time traveling with the salt-workers, protecting them from creatures and bandits. He is well liked by most everyone in the fortress, and is viewed as one of the most capable members of the garrison. He holds the rank of trader, but has not affected the manners of the merchants who pass through the gates of the fort.

While Melestan has no ambition to lead, others in Fort Fyra feel he may be a potential challenger for Fyra's position. They encourage him to take more and more responsibility, and lavish praise on him in hopes of convincing him to pursue the position.

The effort seems to be working. Melestan has become more forward with his own opinions in trader council (although many of those opinions were fed to him by "close advisors" from the various groups), and has even directly challenged Fyra's authority in a few areas.

### Lestria

Female Human Druid of Earth and Fire, Neutral Good

Armor Class 10 (none)	Str 14
Movement 12	Dex 14
Level 10	Con 11
Hit Points 51	Int 15
THAC0 16	Wis 13
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 15

Damage/Attack: 1d8 (scimitar)

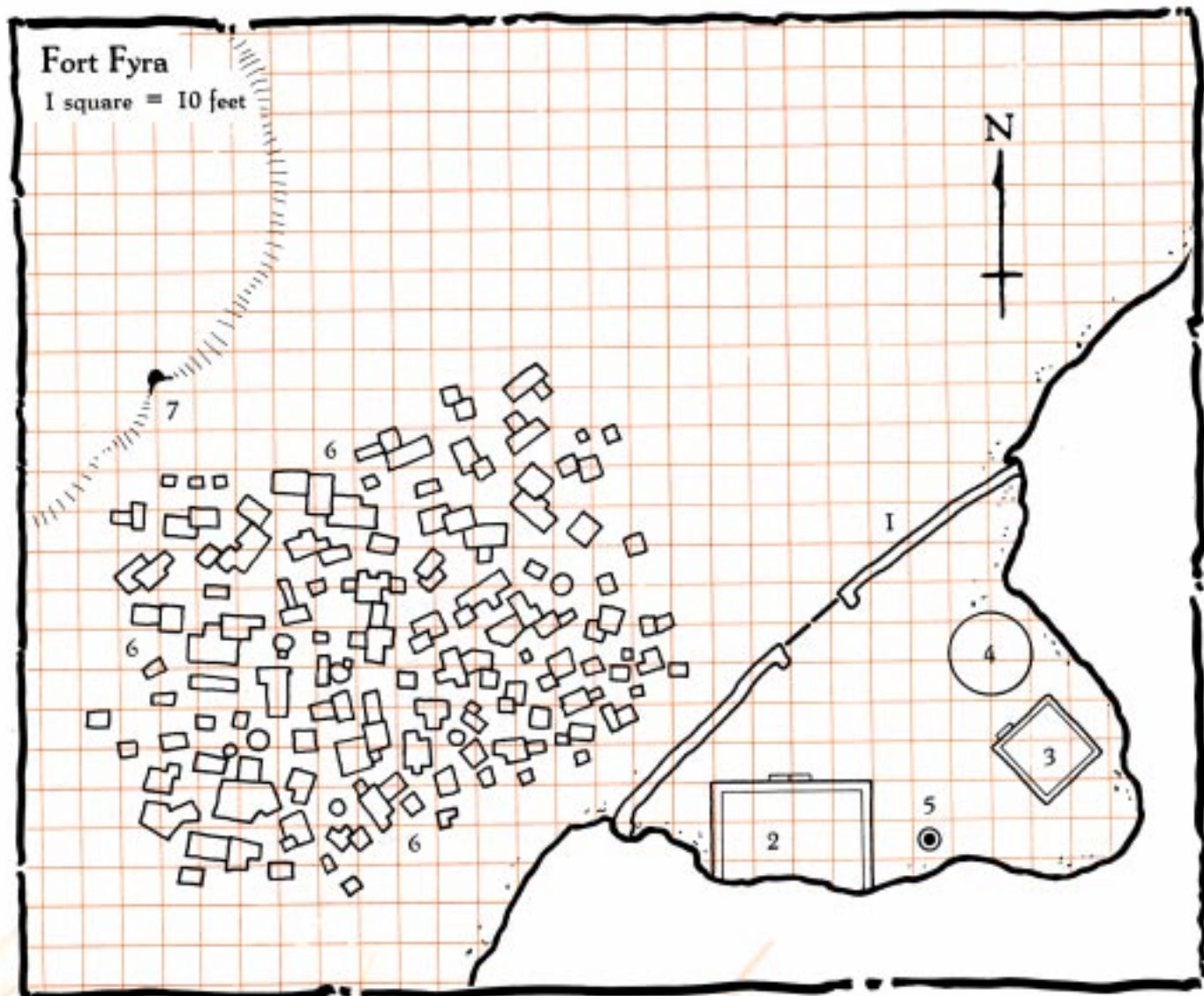
Spells: (1st) *cure light wounds* (x4), *endure heat* (x2), *sanctuary*, (2nd) *barkskin*, *flame blade* (x2), *hold person* (x2), (3rd) *hold animal*, *prayer*, *summon insects* (x2), (4th) *produce flame* (x4), (5th) *conjure elemental (earth)*, *flame strike*

Psionic Summary: PSPs 69; Wild Talent-dream travel (PS 15; Cost: 1/25 miles/person), ectoplasmic form (PS 7; Cost: 9+9/round), psychic messenger (PS 7; Cost: 4+3/round)

Lestria first met with Xaynon's band before the founding of Salt View. The druid had resided in this area for years



# Merchant Forts



before Fort Fyra was founded, serving as a protector of the region. When it became apparent that Xaynon was founding a permanent base here, Lestria contacted him to determine his intent.

Periodically the druid and the raiders crossed paths; in each case the result was a careful avoidance of hostilities on both sides. Over the years, the druid became less aloof toward Xaynon and Fyra although no one would ever describe Lestria as friendly.

Lestria's *guarded land* includes Fort Fyra, but not Salt View itself. As a result, she is virtually unknown in the slave

village. Even in Fort Fyra, she is a mysterious figure. She has been friendly to the fort, and has even allowed the mine to be established, but has placed some restrictions on how the mine is constructed which are slowing construction. Even Fyra knows better than to challenge the druid on this; her magical abilities could destroy the entire fortress.

There is little danger of Lestria becoming involved in the impending political disputes. She has shown absolutely no interest in the affairs of the community beyond the extent to which they affect the surroundings.



## Merchant Forts

### Fort Fyra Map

**1) Walls.** These 15-foot walls protect the salt mill and the garrison in the event of attack. The gates are generally left open, and the walls manned only by lookouts. In time of attack, however, the walls provide cover for more than 100 soldiers.

The fortress is not large enough to support the full complement of people who live here. In case of attack, the full garrison could be brought inside the walls, but would run out of supplies in a few days. The intent is for the fortress to hold until reinforcements can be brought from Salt View.

In addition to the soldiers, Fyra has devised a unique way to repel defenders. In digging the mine, literally tons of stone fragments have been hauled from the mine entrance: Fyra has bundled the sharpest of these in sacks with ground salt; these are poured down upon attackers climbing the wall. The stone shards cut the attacker's skin and the salt causes such pain that the attacker is essentially out of the fight

**2) Soldier's Hall.** This administrative building is the marshaling point for each shift of soldiers. Fyra maintains an office here, as does the watch commander. Aside from the change of shift, this building is relatively idle.

**3) Salt Mill.** This building houses the huge salt mill which is the source of House Fyra's trade. The salt mill is made of two stone wheels, one laying flat and the other rolled in circles atop the first and around its circumference. Rock salt is laid on the lower millstone and crushed by the upper stone until it is a fine powder; it is then transferred to sacks in which the salt is stored.

The millstone is moved by manual labor. Six muls must work the millstone at all times; getting the mill started and stopped is difficult, so it is generally run constantly. Each mul can work a shift of approximately 10 hours before tiring. There are always at least three muls actually pushing the millstone. Those not driving the millstone are sweeping the finely-crushed salt (which makes its way to the outermost part of the mill) into channels which lead to the sacks. This task is somewhat dangerous. The miller, Praxtra, is skilled at knowing just how much salt the mill can handle at any one time. Visitors to the mill are sometimes startled by the sudden smash as he uses his hammer to crush a particularly large crystal into millable size.

The mill is also used as a trading hall, since salt is House

Fyra's primary export. It is only moderately satisfactory, as the constant sound of the millstone makes conversation difficult. Fyra has discussed constructing a true Trader's Hall, but thus far no work has begun.

**4) Salt Silo.** This 20-foot silo contains the accumulated rock-salt brought in by the salt-gatherers. The salt is kept here until it is milled. Generally, the silo is about half-full; this varies by the amount of salt gathered recently and the efficiency of the mill.

Fyra has condemned traitors or others who threatened Fort Fyra to death in the silo. The condemned are hurled in from above, and allowed to die of thirst, the moisture in their bodies leached out by the salt. By the time the bodies make their way out at the base, they are mummified. While this punishment has only rarely been implemented, it is a memorable threat. Praxtra, the salt miller, has decried the practice, saying that it spoils the salt.

**5) Well.** This well has stood for many years, and was one of the things that attracted Xaynon and his band to this site. The well is deep, but water can be found in it year round. As a result, Fyra has seen no need to construct a cistern.

**6) Residences.** This area is dotted with various homes for the fortress garrison. These range from tattered tents to strong mud-brick buildings, and are distributed in an unruly pattern. There are footpaths running between the buildings, but most of the "streets" in this section are too narrow even for a small wagon. The tents and temporary buildings are constantly appearing, disappearing and moving as the population evolves, which makes finding anything in this section a bewildering task.

The area is roughly divided into quarters, based on the preferences of the inhabitants. The soldiers in the garrison occupy much of the eastern zone, while the northern part contains the homes of many traders. The western zone is primarily the province of the miners, while the rest of the residential area is a mix of mill workers and artisans.

**7) Mine.** This is the entrance to the new salt mine. To date, most of the work has been expended in breaking through the stone which surrounds the salt deposit. For all his desire to establish a salt mine, Fyra would have been unable to locate the rich deposit which lies under the stone without the help of the druid Lestria.

According to Lestria's information, the miners are almost through the stone cap. If all is as she says, beyond lies a huge deposit of high quality salt. Since no salt has yet





been uncovered more factions are pushing to abandon the mine attempt.

At Fyra's direction, the miners have constructed a small breastwork in front of the entrance to the mine. The breastwork is a low wall, 4 to 5 feet high, made of loose rock excavated from the mine. This fortification is not designed to withstand a prolonged assault; it is intended to buy time until the garrison in the fortress can counter-attack. The breastworks are manned by five soldiers from the fortress during daylight hours; these soldiers are there to repel any attackers, and to assist the miners in the event of an emergency.

## The Cache

### Esreva's Journal

*The elven nomads of the Ivory Triangle are surely the most independent people I have ever seen. As a young slave, I envied their freedom: the way they wandered the desert seemingly uncaring of the route they chose or their final destination.*

*As I grew older, they continued to fascinate me. I watched their caravans, their bazaar stands, their raids and their city homes with equal attention, hoping to somehow comprehend their way of life and the qualities I found so appealing.*

*It was this fascination that led me to discover what few non-elves have ever seen: a trading cache in the desert. Many have observed that elven caravans travel light and swiftly, yet others have seen elven raiders fleeing into the darkness, carrying sacks laden with booty, their kanks loaded just to the point where they can still run. Since the elves have no villages to speak of, many have wondered at where their raiding goods go. Some believe that the elves only steal what they need today, but I bear witness to the truth. Only my infirmity and knowledge of my coming death allows me to speak of this even now.*

*I discovered this truth while traveling with my master in the Mekillot Mountains. I was still a young man, having seen only 43 summers, and my master and his entourage were using a high pass through the Mekillots to return to the city of Gulg. It was near sunset, and the path was treacherous, with many twists and precipitous cliffs. My master had given the order to camp.*

*Night had not yet fallen, and my duties were light.*

*Looking out in to the dimming twilight, I saw an elven tribe, its kanks loaded with goods and its runners flagging. They were a great distance from us and the face of the mountain concealed our camp from their eyes. I sat to watch them.*

*The leading kank brought the caravan to the face of a distant cliff. I could see the rider approach the cliff face. Whether he operated some mechanism, cast a magical spell, or simply communicated with someone unseen I could not say, but they disappeared into a cave en trance I had not previously seen.*

*At last, I felt I had uncovered a true secret of the elves. Telling no one of my discovery, I returned to my master's camp and contemplated how I would use this knowledge.*

*When we returned to Gulg, I decided I would use this knowledge to force an elven tribe to aid me in escaping. Although I had been a slave for more than two decades at this point, I still sought my freedom. Upon my next visit alone to the market in Gulg (a task I was allowed as a trusted slave of my master), I sought out an elven trader and convinced her to see me alone to discuss a private trade. Once safe from prying eyes and ears, I told her that I knew of the cache, and demanded that she immediately aid my escape, threatening to reveal its existence and location to my master if the elves did not help me.*

*Looking back now, I wonder what I was thinking. I knew that elves rarely trusted outsiders, and threatening them with exposure was foolish.*

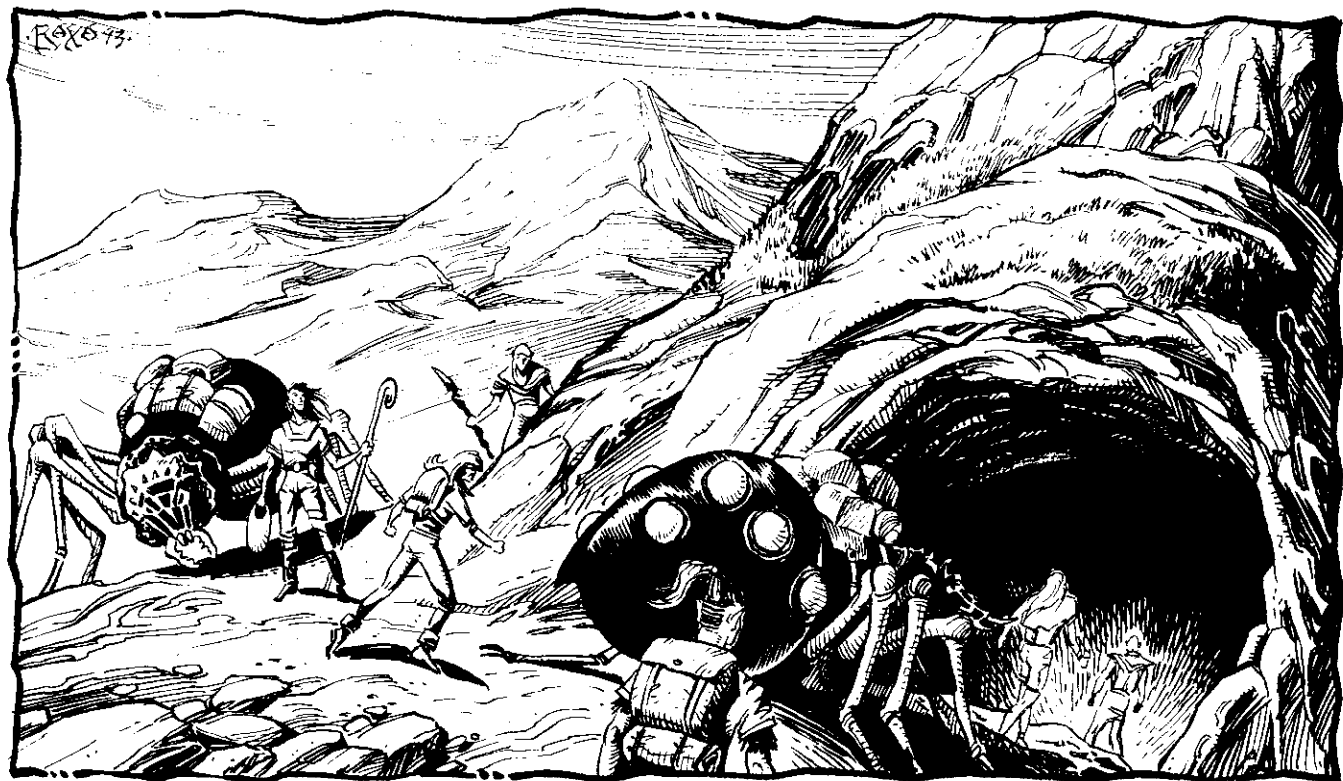
*The elven trader responded to my threat by swinging a dagger at my neck. Her first swipe was so fast I barely saw it; the sharp blade cut a deep score in my left shoulder. We scuffled briefly, but in the close confines of the trading room she could not use her greater speed to advantage, and I was much stronger. I was forced to kill her, although she wounded me more than once before our struggle ended.*

*Terrified and bleeding, I fled. I managed to return to my master's house, where I invented a story about being robbed to explain my numerous wounds. My master ordered my treatment, then promptly forgot the matter.*

*. . . I have never again spoken of what I saw in the desert to another living creature. Moreover, I have avoided elves and elven traders, afraid that they will somehow know I slew one of theirs, and that I carry one of their secrets.*



## Merchant Forts



The elven base known only as the Cache is not (as Esreva believed) a storehouse of elven goods. It is, in fact, the headquarters of the talon-master of Gulg, the secret domicile of one of the two heads of the Shadows in the Ivory Triangle region.

The Shadows are a vast, secretive group of elves, specializing in assassination, theft, extortion, espionage, and a host of other illegal activities. They have existed in the Ivory Triangle region since before anyone (except possibly the Shadow King) was born. Many children's tales that have been passed down from generation to generation contain references to the mysterious elf tribe. The Shadows are described in more detail in the DARK SUN™ *Dune Trader* accessory.

### History

The Cache was first constructed over 600 years ago. The oba had declared war on the Shadows, seeking to eliminate them entirely from the city. The talon-master of that time, Prezas, defended herself and her talon as well as she could,

but even the Shadows found it difficult to survive in the face of the power of the forest goddess Lalali-Puy and her Templar servants.

Prezas ordered that a secure fortress be built in the Mekillot Mountains. She originally intended to use the base only until the oba stopped persecuting the Shadows. However, her battle against the elven assassins escalated, and soon the base became the only safe haven for most of the Shadows in the region.

No one knows why the oba eventually stopped her war on the shadows. Some speculate that they performed some service that appeased the queen's wrath. In any event, with the queen's attention elsewhere, the Shadows returned to Gulg. However, Prezas chose to keep the headquarters of the talon in the Mekillot Mountains, where it has remained ever since.

As indicated in Esreva's tale on the preceding page, the location of the Cache is known to few outside the Shadows. Non-Shadows who somehow stumble across the location of the site will be killed immediately and without hesitation.





## The Fort Today

Today, as for the last 600 years, the primary purpose of the Cache is to train Shadows. Much of the talon leadership, including the talon-master Vollen, can be found here, imparting wisdom to younger, less experienced members and administering the Shadows' many affairs. The Cache is also a resting place for the elves who are often forced to live within human society; when they have tired of life within the city they can remove themselves to an entirely elven environment once again.

Once the isolated fortress of the head of assassins, the Cache is changing. It is transforming more and more into a merchant's fortress. The merchant claw (the portion of the Shadows' organization involved in trade) has burgeoned with the growth in legal trade in the Tyr region. Trade in the illegal goods with which the Shadows deal has been further boosted by the revolt in Tyr and the unrest in Raam. While both of these cities are far from the Ivory Triangle, the effects of the changes there can be felt throughout the entire Tyr region.

Today, the clash of weapons and calm words of the teachers have been augmented with the calls of inventory counts and the scratching of the record-keepers' tablets. While the Cache sees no regular trade (its location is far too secret to allow outsiders to visit), the volume of trade done in elven markets throughout the Ivory Triangle region has pushed the elves into running occasional caravans to the Cache to store goods. Vollen, the current talon-master, is concerned by the increased traffic to the Cache, and is afraid that this will lead to its discovery, but thus far no one has come up with a better alternative.

There is some discussion among the leadership of the talon that the best thing to do would be to move the talon back into the city. After 600 years, however, the desire to remain is strong, and no real threat has arisen to force the Shadows to act. Business is good enough that the current leadership feels they have time to deal with the problem; the elven tendency to resolve a problem tomorrow instead of today may ill serve them in this.

## The Garrison

The exact population of the Cache varies over time. Agents and trainees arrive and leave, caravans bring new members,

and special operations may deplete the garrison by as much as half. However, the following generalizations may be made.

The mercenary and raiding claws (which offer mercenary and raiding services to outside groups) are responsible for providing the first line of defense for the Cache. There are at least 100 warriors of 5th to 10th level from various mercenary and raiding groups here, some recovering from injuries, others in training. They are organized in a rough command, but as most of them are here only temporarily, there is little troop cohesion. In case of attack, however, they will rapidly become a formidable force.

The magical claw is also comprised primarily of temporary visitors. At any one time, roughly a dozen defilers of 4th to 12th level can be found here. Most are studying magical fundamentals or new spells, and are not likely to have a wide variety of offensive magic available in case of a surprise attack. However, four of the visiting mages (including at least one of 9th level or greater) are assigned to garrison duty on a daily basis, and are required to be fully prepared with offensive and defensive magics.

In addition to the visiting mages, there are a half-dozen experienced wizards who are teachers. One teacher is assigned to lead the magical contingent of the garrison each week; the teachers are each 12th to 17th level.

The thieving, espionage, and merchant claws operate a training center for rogues. (Illusionists in the thieving claw are assigned to the magical claw for training.) Perhaps a dozen students (of 4th to 8th level) and three teachers (of 10th to 14th level) can be found here at any one time; in an emergency they can be called upon to defend the Cache, but in general they are typically held as a reserve or surprise force.

In addition to the trainees and their teachers, there are approximately 40 "staff" members who are permanent residents of the Cache. These include the talon-master, his immediate assistants, and various members of the claws assigned to administrative duties. Each of these are fighter/thieves are at least of 8th level; some (including the personalities below) are considerably more powerful.

In short, while the Cache has no formal garrison of troops, it is not an easily conquered site. It would require a significant portion of the military forces of a sorcerer-king to dislodge the Shadows from the Cache. Assuming, of course, that they could find it.



## Merchant Forts

### Personalities

#### Vollen

Male Elf Fighter/Thief, Neutral (Lawful)

Armor Class 2 (studded leather+shield+Dex)	Str 15
Movement 16 (race)	Dex 17
Level 15/14	Con 14
Hit Points: 51	Int 16
THAC0 6 (4 long sword)	Wis 16
No. of Attacks 5/2 (long sword), 2 (other)	Cha 15

Damage/Attack: 1d8+2 (long sword), 1d8 (bow)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 126; Wild Talent-Sciences: banishment (PS 15; Cost: 30+10/round), life draining (PS 11; Cost: 11+5/round), mindlink (PS: 11; Cost: contact+8/round), teleport (PS 16; Cost: 10+); *Devotions*: contact (PS 16; Cost: varies+1/round), false sensory input (PS 13; Cost: contact+4/round)

Thieving Abilities (in armor): PP 30 (60), OL 90 (80), FT 30 (80), MS 90 (70), HS 90 (70), DN 90 (80), CW 90 (60), RL 15

Vollen is the current talon-master of the Shadow talon of Gulg. A skilled and ruthless leader, he has led the talon for over 70 years. He began his career in the mercenary and raiding claws, then transferred to the thieving claw. He spent several years in Gulg as an elven trader, and considers the merchant claw to be the future of the Shadows.

While Vollen is a capable (and occasionally even brilliant) administrator, the Shadows have been erratic under his leadership. Vollen distrusts mages, and himself has no magical talent; this has caused him considerable friction with Mistella, leader of the magical claw, so that group operates with more than usual independence from the talon-master. He has pressed the merchant claw to increase activity some say at the risk of revealing the true extent of the Shadows' power. On the other hand, he has been indifferent to the operation of the other claws, which has led to errors and misjudgments.

In combat, Vollen is a terror. He has fought hundreds of

battles. He has no code of honor when fighting and believes the purpose of a battle is to kill your enemy. He will show no mercy to those who oppose him with force. His favored tactics include backstabbing with his long sword (THAC0 0 for 5d8+10 damage). In a fight, he will wade into the melee, select the single most powerful opponent, *banish* him (using his psionic abilities) until the remainder of the opposition has been killed, then bring him back to face Vollen's entire force alone. He is not above *life-draining* his own troops, although he will stop at killing his own elven warriors to ensure his survival.

#### Mistella

Female Elf Defiler, Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 7 (none)	Str 15
Movement 16 (race)	Dex 17
Level 17	Con 12
Hit Points 27	Int 18
THAC0	Wis 16
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 15

Damage/Attack: 1d4 (dagger)

Spells: (1st) *change self, enlarge, shocking grasp, spider climb, shield*, (2nd) *forget, improved phantasmal force (x2), mirror image, Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter, wizard lock*, (3rd) *clairvoyance, non-detection, protection from normal missiles, tongues, vampiric touch*, (4th) *ice storm, Otiluke's resilient sphere, polymorph other, stonewall, wall of ice*, (5th) *demi-shadow monsters, hold monster, magic jar, shadow magic, seeming*, (6th) *conjure animals, extension III, guards and wards*, (7th) *delayed blast fireball, finger of death, teleport without error*, (8th) *mass charm, monster summoning VI*

Mistella is the head of the magical claw of the Shadow talon of Gulg. A fiercely independent woman and a powerful sorcerer, she is often single-minded to the point of being stubborn (a very non-elven trait).

Mistella spent her younger years as a slave-courtesan to a defiler in the chaotic courts of Raam. Her experiences have left her with a dislike of cities and anything human.

Mistella is a believer in the power of magic. When pre-





sented with a problem, she will use magic first, even if a non-magical solution presents itself. Thus, she will often waste magical energy rather than involve those outside her claw in her missions. The magical claw of Gulg is known for performing most of its missions without any warrior support: an idea most think is unwise.

Mistella would have been faced with the consequences of this strategy long ago were it not for the fact that she disdains any but the most difficult missions. She will not provide "support" mages to the other claws, believing that if the problem is one of brawn, she need not risk her mages.

This magical claw employs only single-class defiler. Mistella will not accept a dual-class defiler, regardless of level, as she sees such characters as dilettantes. Mistella despises preservers as being lazy mages who are weaklings, and has been known to take a detour in another mission to execute a preserver. This has not endeared her to the magical claws of the talons of Nibenay and the other cities, who think the deaths may attract unwanted attention.

## Ruvella

Female Elven Cleric of Fire/Psionist, Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 6 (Dex)	Str 11
Movement 17 (race)	Dex 18
Level 15/15	Con 13
Hit Points 55	Int 16
THAC0 14	Wis 17
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 15

Damage/Attack: 1d4-1 (obsidian dagger)

Spells: (1st) *command* (x2), *cure light wounds* (x2), *faerie fire*, *invisibility to undead*, *pass without trace*, *remove fear*, *sanctuary*, (2nd) *charm person or mammal*, *flame blade*, *heat metal*, *know alignment*, *produce flame*, *silence 15' radius*, *spiritual hammer*, *withdraw*, (3rd) *dispel magic* (x2), *flame walk*, *prayer*, *pyrotechnics*, *speak with dead*, *summon insects*, (4th) *produce fire* (x8), (5th) *conjure fire elemental*, *flame strike* (x2), *wall of fire* (x2), (6th) *fire seeds* (x2), (7th) *chariot of Sustarre*

Psionic Summary: PSPs 225

Psionic Defense Modes: intellect fortress (PS 16; Cost: 4), mental barrier (PS 17; Cost: 3), mind blank (PS 12; Cost: 0), thought shield (PS 16; Cost: 1), tower of iron will (PS 17; Cost: 6)

Telepath-Sciences: domination (PS 15; Cost: contact+varies), mass domination (PS 13; Cost: contact+tvaries), mindlink (PS 14; Cost: contact+8/round), probe (PS 14; Cost: contact+9/round); *Devotions*: contact (PS 19; Cost: varies+ 1/round), conceal thoughts (PS 17; Cost: 5+3/round), daydream (PS 13; Cost: contact+3/round), ego whip (PS 16; Cost: 4), ESP (PS 15; Cost: contact+6/round), identity penetration (PS 16; Cost: contact+6/round), inflict pain (PS 9; Cost: contact+2/round), invisibility (PS 11; Cost: contact+2/round/creature), life detection (PS 14; Cost: 3+3/round), mind thrust (PS 17; Cost: 2), post-hypnotic suggestion (PS 13; Cost: contact+ 1 /level or hit die), truthhear (PS 19; cost: 4+2/round)

Clairsentience - *Sciences*: clairvoyance (PS 15; Cost: 7+4/round), precognition (PS 14; Cost: 24); *Devotions*: all-round vision (PS 16; Cost: 6+4/round), danger sense (PS 16; Cost: 4+3/turn), poison sense (PS 17; Cost: 1), radial navigation (PS 13; Cost: 4+7/hour)

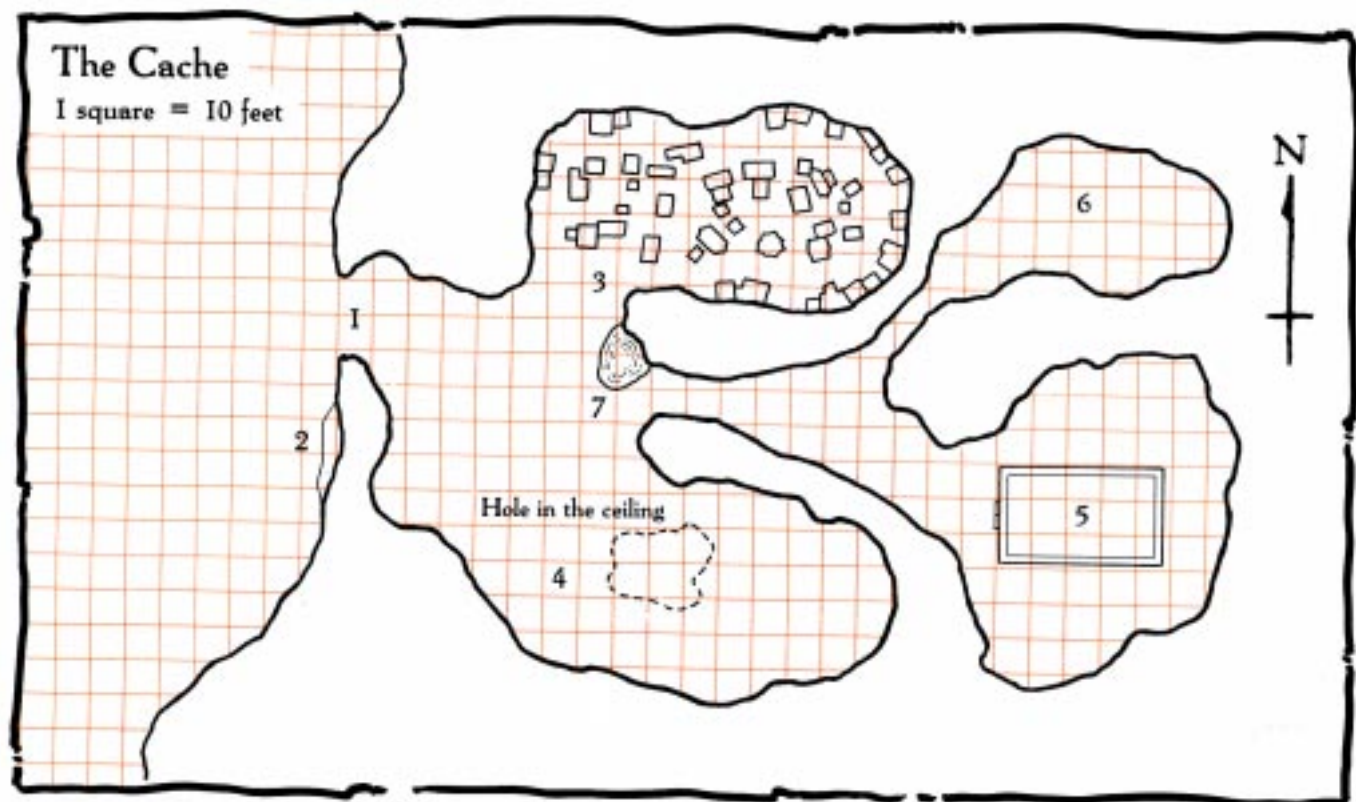
Psychometabolism - *Sciences*: complete healing (PS 13; Cost: 30); *Devotions*: chameleon power (PS 12; cost: 6+3/round), flesh armor (PS 10; cost: 8+4/round)

Metapsionics - *Sciences*: split personality (PS 14; Cost: 40+6/round), *Devotions*: psionic sense (PS 16; Cost: 4+1/round), receptacle (PS 14; Cost: 0)

Ruvella is a powerful cleric/psionist who for many years was the head of the espionage claw in the talon of Tyr. Her anonymity was lost during the recent rebellion there, and she was forced to flee the city. She is here partially to hide, and partially as an observer for the current grand shadow master, Thus far her style of work, which includes close coordination between the various claws and an extreme focus on secrecy, has not meshed well with Vollon's more independent, freewheeling style. Ruvella's reports reflect this, and they are beginning to sway the grand shadow master toward replacing Vollon, perhaps with Ruvella herself



## Merchant Forts



### The Cache Map

**1) Cave Entrance.** This natural cave entrance is often covered with brush to obscure it from sight.

**2) Balconies.** Walkways along the inside of the cliff face lead to these carefully concealed balconies set 30 feet above the desert floor. In times of attack, archers can man these balconies, raining arrows down on besiegers without risk of return fire. Other balconies lead to escape routes, so that scouts, assassins, and other small parties can come in and out without being seen.

**3) Residences.** This area, a separate chamber nearly 25 feet high, is where most of the inhabitants of the cave live. Temporary residents pitch tents or bedrolls here; more permanent residents have lean-tos and huts. In general, the longest residents live closer to the cave wall, and the most senior inhabitants of the Cache incorporate the wall into their residences.

**4) Training Ground.** This large (30 feet high) cavern is used for training warriors and thieves from the raiding, mercenary, and thieving clans. Pells, blunted weapons, weighted

shields and other training equipment are stored at the edges.

The training ground is lit and ventilated by a large hole in the top of the cavern. The hole is in a depression on the top of the massif in which the cave is built, but no one has yet found a safe exterior route to the top. In time of attack, lookouts climb up through the hole (using ropes attached by *levitating* mages). A sentry posted atop the mesa can see a large force coming for several miles.

When training is not going on, this chamber also acts as a recreation and dining area. The elves congregate here because it affords them a clear view of the sky.

**5) Mage's Hall.** The only real building in the cavern complex, this structure houses the magical library and practice chambers for the mages. It is under the control of the magical clan, and is off limits to nonmages by Mistella's order.

The library has a wide variety of magical texts carved on clay tablets and is rumored to be among the finest libraries outside the city-states. The chance that the library has a particular spell is  $100-1 (10 \times \text{spell level}) = \%$ . For example, the





chance that the library has *magic mirror* (a 4th-level spell) is 60%. You should feel free to exclude any spell you think inappropriate to the campaign.

Unfortunately, the library is not well organized. To find a spell in the library, a mage must make an Intelligence check. If it is successful, the search will take the number of days equal to the number rolled on the check; if it fails, the mage will search for a number of days equal to his Intelligence before giving up.

In addition to housing the magical library, the mage's hall is also where visiting mages (of the magical claw) reside. Mistella forbids her people to go to the common residential cavern without an explicit mission from her.

**6) Storage area.** This cavern is devoted to storing mercantile supplies, weapons, and other goods. Things are piled haphazardly here; there is no one individual responsible for caring for this area, and as a result it is impossible to find any but the largest and most plentiful items.

**7) Spring.** This spring provides water for all the inhabitants of the cavern. Water from the spring pools in a natural grotto below, which the inhabitants use as a cistern.



# Merchant Forts



## Chapter 2: Raiding Tribes

Not everyone roaming the Ivory Triangle is there in the interest of legitimate trade. Many tribes of elves, slaves, and brigands survive by raiding the caravan routes and client villages of the city-states. This section describes two of the more prominent slave tribes of the Ivory Triangle region as well as one unusual raiding tribe that is not made up of slaves at all. It details the manner in which each group survives, its leadership, and its prospects for the future. We will begin with an examination of the slave tribes.

Many escaped slaves roam the Ivory Triangle, fleeing the life imposed upon them by their masters. These ex-slaves believe that freedom is worth any sacrifice, and they flee to the protection of the wilderness to save themselves from the pursuit of the Templars and their masters.

Once these slaves reach the shelter of the wilderness, they are often horrified to find out how truly difficult life outside the city-states is. To survive in the barren wilderness, escaped slaves band together into *tribes*, raiding bands or even villages filled with refugees from the slave system of the city-states.

Slave tribes are ephemeral. Some thrive for years, even decades, while others appear and vanish in a matter of weeks, as a new leader foolishly leads his people into the arms of Templars or the jaws of some horrible desert creature.

### Salt View

#### Ezreva's Journal

*My only meeting with Xaynon, the reputed leader of the slave village of Salt View, occurred at the time of his escape from the city of Raam. I was visiting Raam with my master, who had come to arrange a purchase of rare silk for the oba Lalali-Puy. We were in the palace of the Great Vizier Abalach-Re, bickering with one of her templars over the trade, when guards flooded in to the room, shouting about a slave revolt. Before I could react, I was seized and thrown among many other slaves, who were being herded in to the prison beneath the palace.*

*For a number of hours we waited there in the darkness, while the sounds of battle clashed above us. Then, we heard the sound of running feet; a group of slaves, led by a mul and a dwarf, tore between the cells, closely followed by Templar-soldiers. At the far end of the passage-*

*way lay a cistern. The dwarf and the mul turned to hold off the soldiers while their companions dove in to the cistern below. They too dove in, leaving the soldiers bewildered. A single brave trooper followed the slaves but his body quickly rose to the surface in a cloud of inky blood. No other followed.*

*I later learned that the mul was Xaynon, future founder of Salt View, and the dwarf his long associate Fyra. While I never saw either again, the prowess and bravery these two warriors showed was an inspiration to all who answer to the name "slave."*

No discussion of raiding tribes in the Ivory Triangle region would be complete without mentioning the famous slave village of Salt View. This village, one of the three corners of the Ivory Triangle, is one of the most successful ex-slave endeavors in the Tyr region.

The village was originally founded as a raider's hideaway by a band of ex-slaves from the Raam region. Led by Xaynon, a mul ex-gladiator, this village makes its living raiding and performing plays for the villages and cities of the Ivory Triangle region. Its population has grown to more than 500 ex-slaves, including the traveling bands of players.

A detailed view of the village of Salt View can be found in the DARK SUN™ game product *Slave Tribes*. That description includes statistics for Xaynon and the other leaders, a map of the cavern which encloses the city, and many other details. This entry covers the relationship between Salt View and the other inhabitants of the Ivory Triangle, the leaders of the artistic movement burgeoning in Salt View, and more details of the village. If you are intending to run extended activities in the village of Salt View, look at *Slave Tribes* for more information.

### Organization

Salt View is led by Xaynon, a mul ex-gladiator from the city of Raam, and his advisor, the preserver Arya. This leadership is not one of a dictatorial ruler; Xaynon is much more of a father-figure than a real chieftain of the slaves.

The population is divided into a number of classes. While in theory each member of the tribe has the same political power, in practice there is a clear (if informal) hierarchy of leadership.

At the top of this hierarchy is Xaynon himself. Xaynon





## Raiding Tribes



feels that the less the ex-slaves are directly governed, the better that government will be. In times of emergency, however, he quickly assumes the mantle of leadership. His authority is ultimately based upon his strength and fighting ability and those ex-slaves who he sees as jeopardizing the interests of the community in an emergency, may find themselves quickly dispatched at the end of Xaynon's sword.

Arya, a preserver, serves as Xaynon's closest advisor. Some villagers are uncomfortable with the wizard. Consequently, she does not necessarily lead raids or give orders to other villagers. It is clear, however, that she has more direct influence on Xaynon's rule than any other tribe member. Xaynon makes few important decisions without consulting Arya.

The raid commanders report to Xaynon. These people are Xaynon's trusted lieutenants, and speak (within limits) in Xaynon's own voice. In raids, the raid commanders have military control over their people, and a raider who would publicly challenge his commander's judgment in Salt View will obey without question under the pressure of a raid. In times of emergency, the commanders act as rallying points for the populace, and their orders are unquestioned.

While raiding parties were originally assembled on an ad-hoc basis, over time, certain commanders began to request the same raiders for their missions. These groups also associated together socially and became the basis of informal political factions and cliques.

Raiders report formally to the raid commanders only during actually raiding operations. Most raiders have some military skills, either from being in the slave-armies or gladiatorial ranks of the city-states or by virtue of the training they have received in Salt View. In the rough-and-tumble existence of Salt View, where disputes are settled as often by blades as any other way, fighting prowess is an important measure of status.

A growing political faction in Salt View is represented by the artisans and craftsmen of the village. Fort Fyra has provided a viable market for their work and the additional revenue generated by the artisans is strengthening Fyra's political hand. Many of the artisans are at best indifferent warriors, and their skills have benefited Salt View only indirectly in the past. The distribution of goods had always been the responsibility of the raiders. Naturally, beyond the allo-



cation of food and water, such distributions have not always been equitable. The artisans solidly support Fyra's efforts to move Salt View's operations away from raiding.

While every tribe member generally has some raiding and performing ability, the dedicated actors of Salt View command a significant amount of influence within the community. The first troupes of Salt View performers who travelled across the Ivory Triangle region were considered both a source of ancillary income for the community and an intelligence network for the raiders. The performers make up an unpredictable political faction within the village. Popular performers can often rally villagers with compelling oratory, creating mobs that are difficult for even Xaynon to control. Fortunately, the performers, on the whole, do not have a vested interest in the outcome of the current struggle between the raiders and the traders. There will be plenty of opportunities for the actors to perform regardless of the means by which the community survives. Consequently, leaders of opposing factions often lobby popular actors for support. The actors are, as a rule, easily flattered and while articulate, are not nearly as bright as they think they are.

The lowest status members of the Salt View community are the refugees. These include those who are undergoing the trial period (see *Joining the Tribe*, below) and those who have been admitted to the tribe, but whose skills are not vital to Salt View's survival. While these people are given food, water, and shelter, they are not influential in the political debates. Most in this class try to gain fighting prowess or performing skill, so that they will be respected by the more established inhabitants of Salt View.

## Operation and Means of Existence

Salt View survives on the strength of three industries, which combined provide sufficient support to allow Salt View to prosper. Raiding has traditionally been Salt View's core means of acquiring resources. The performing troupes have supplemented the village's income as well as provided valuable information regarding caravan activity. Lastly, Fort Fyra has begun to introduce the benefits of legitimate trade to the small village.

Since Salt View's founding, the goods from raiding have been distributed evenly among the village's population, with rarer goods going to those with the greatest influence. However, while this system worked well when Salt View had

200 inhabitants, the village has grown too large for this to satisfy everyone.

Thus, there is a substantial trade economy which operates after the official "fair" disbursement. This is primarily barter, with artisans adding their own works to the goods which come from caravans. There is some currency (primarily coming from the artisan troupes and the salt miners of Fort Fyra); coinage from Gulg and Nibenay is most common, but there are even a few coins from far-off Balic.

The slaves of Salt View are skilled raiders, and have often been able to capture (or at least threaten) caravans with many more troops and weapons. They are masters of subtle strategies to slow caravans and force them to abandon valuable cargo.

As Salt View has become more securely established, its raiding bands have traveled further afield. Salt View raiders (or those claiming to be from Salt View) have been encountered on the trade route between Gulg and Altaruk, on the road between Nibenay and Raam, and even in the village of North Ledopolus. The raids are causing prices of many goods in the area to rise. This is hitting the small client-villages of Gulg and Nibenay particularly hard, as they do not have the capital required to pay the higher prices. They are willing, however, to pay for the heads of dead raiders.

While Xaynon's band has always been strict about killing victims only in self-defense, many other raiders in the area are less concerned with the survival of their prey. More than one caravan near the Crescent Forest has been lost entirely to other slave tribes. The merchant houses have no way of distinguishing between raiding parties and any retaliation is likely to be targeted at Salt View. Unless Xaynon can somehow drive off the competing slave tribes, Salt View could be in danger.

The second major industry is the theater. The actors and singers of Salt View present plays throughout the Ivory Triangle. These troupes of artists travel throughout the area as wandering freemen, with no hint that they are really from Salt View. They supplement the earnings from their plays with an occasional theft (usually from the local templar or noble). They also gather information about caravan routes and planned dates for the raiders.

Initially, the performing troupes were an escape; an opportunity for the tribe to forget about the difficulties of their fugitive life. Over time, however, the actors began to take touring companies out on the road. The plays have



## Raiding Tribes

become more and more profitable, and their legitimate visits to traders, villages, and cities allow them to acquire some items (such as spices) which are too difficult to stumble onto in a caravan raid.

The third and final industry is the salt-mine and artisan market supported by Fort Fyra. Most salt-miners live at or near Fort Fyra, rather than in Salt View proper, but their revenue (when the salt business makes a profit) goes to support Salt View. The artisans have increased their production in order to sell goods through the merchant fort. For more information on the mining activity and marketplace, see Fort Fyra in the Trader Forts chapter of this book.

### Origin

Salt View was founded by Xaynon and his band more than 15 years ago. When the band discovered an abandoned salt mine, Xaynon announced that this would be the band's permanent home.

The portion of Xaynon's original band that stayed to help him numbered around 200, including both warriors and artisans-and a few who were both. The artisans saw the cavernous salt mine as an opportunity to build a city of their dreams; Xaynon's warriors saw it as a shelter secure from the reprisals of the city-states. The salt mine hid the village from the prying eyes of Templars, and its only entrances were narrow tunnels which could easily be sealed should the village's location somehow be revealed. Further, the ready supply of stone discarded around the mine provided all the materials needed to build a defensive wall within the cavern itself.

The warriors raided caravans for the other materials needed to make the cavern livable; the artisans used these materials to build the small village filled with theaters, taverns, and artisan's workrooms. One ex-slave had wanted to mount torches on the walls of the cavern surrounding the village. "Toward what end?" asked Xaynon. "So you can have a better view of the salt?" With this joke Xaynon had coined the name of their newly constructed home.

During the caravan raids, Xaynon's band sometimes freed slaves. Those slaves who seemed to have the spirit and talent were given a choice: make your own way among the desert, or join Xaynon's band. Preference was given to slaves who were skilled warriors or artisans; the village had little need for laborers and bearers.

Slaves who had turned them down (or even those who had never been asked) began to spread the word of Xaynon's band and the mysterious village of Salt View. Soon the raiders were encountering lone ex-slaves (or even small groups) who were interested in joining with Salt View.

The new slaves quickly began to outnumber Xaynon's original band. Salt View, which had been constructed as a lovely village for 200, was becoming an overcrowded village of 400. Furthermore, some of the new members were of a violent temperament, and the ills of the city-states were beginning to develop in this village of hope.

Xaynon stepped in to reestablish his leadership. He executed the most severe troublemakers and established the main law of Salt View: no one in Salt View shall limit the freedom of another, unless the survival of Salt View is at stake. As the leaders of Salt View, Xaynon and his raiding commanders are the arbiters of when Salt View's survival warrants the loss of some freedom. Finally, he established the trial period system which determines who will and will not be accepted into the community.

Xaynon's law did not result in a utopia. The ex-slaves had too varied a background (and too great a desire for freedom) to work together in perfect harmony. The village's layout quickly deviated from the idealized plans of the original artisans, as more and more people added their own touches to the village design. Disputes arose, settled by violence as often as reasoned debate.

Since that time, the village has continued to grow. Over 500 people of all races now inhabit the village, and the artisans work feverishly to extend the facilities to support them all. Raids have increased to support the increasing population. With the raids comes more notoriety and more recruits.

### Location and Defenses

As mentioned, the village of Salt View lies within a huge cavern of salt, with great salt pillars supporting its ceiling. The cavern is concealed against the eastern face of the Mekillot Mountains, and can be accessed only through a circuitous series of high passes, winding trails, and tunnels. These trails are laid out to confuse any pursuers looking for the village, and they are defended by deadfalls, rock slides, and guards to ensure no one gets in uninvited.

The village itself occupies only a sixth of the interior of





the cavern, and is laid out in a rough hexagonal shape. The walls are 8 feet high and constructed of rough-hewn stones mortared together with a salt paste. While this mortar is not as strong as that defending the walls of the city-states, it has held up fairly well. The wall is wide enough to allow a man to walk along the top. Under siege, ladders would be laid against the inner wall to allow the warriors of Salt View to repel attackers.

Every inhabitant of Salt View is given some training with weapons. At any one time, at least half the raiders are in the village, providing a garrison of 150 trained warriors of levels 3-7 plus 200 levies from the artisan class (treat each as THAC0 20, 1d6 hit points). Xaynon's raiders have made an extra effort to collect the weapons from the caravans they have captured, and the market section of the village has a near-inexhaustible supply of melee weapons, bows, and arrows.

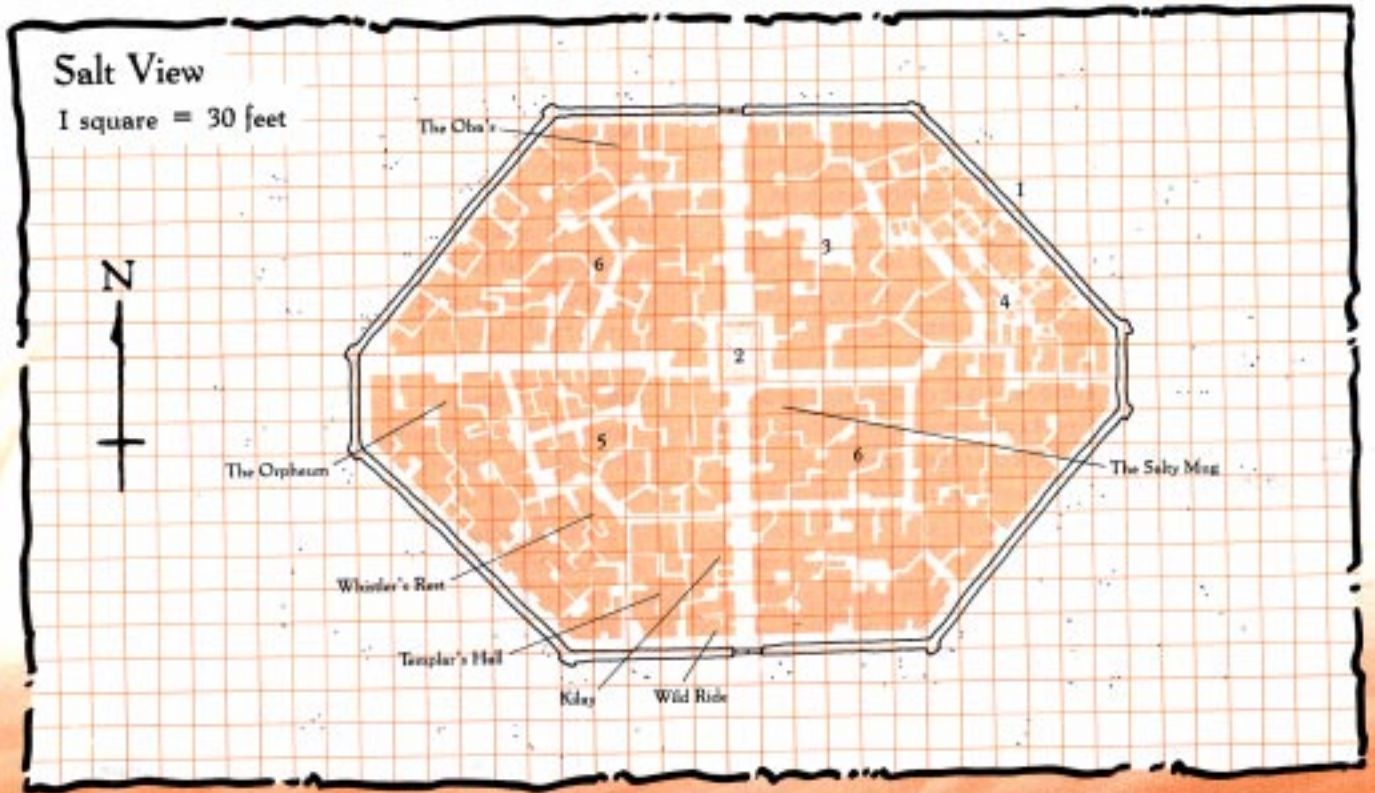
If the cavern is attacked, deadfalls within the tunnels can be dropped to seal the invaders out. A secondary tunnel is blocked by a makeshift rock wall; this tunnel is intended as an escape route if the other tunnels are collapsed.

## Salt View Map

Salt View Village is divided into four major quarters. The northeastern and southwestern sections are residential, with some taverns scattered throughout. The southeastern section holds the marketplace, where the items gathered in raids are distributed to the inhabitants. The northwestern section is the theater district, and contains many theaters of various sizes and types.

**1) Stone Wall.** This rough wall is the final line of defense for the village. To reach it, invaders would have had to pass the external deadfalls and sentries and successfully get through the tunnels before they were collapsed. The wall is 8 feet high and made of stones mortared by a salt paste.

The wall is not smooth. Should someone attempt to climb it, treat it as a rough face as defined in the *Player's Handbook*. The outer edge of the top of the wall is lined with glass shards embedded in the mortar. These glass shards are not visible from below; climbers who are unaware of them must make a Dexterity check or take 1d2 damage.





## Raiding Tribes

**2) The Theater Arena.** This large amphitheater is the center of public life in Salt View. It consists of a number of concentric squares dug into the floor of the cavern; each square is topped by a series of wooden planks that are used as seats. The central square, which occupies about half of the area of the theater overall, is raised to provide a platform for performers. This is theater-in-the-round; there are no wings or other areas for actors to use to leave the stage. Instead, they access the stage by passing through the audience.

Kilay, the master playwright of Salt View, has been pushing to have a framework constructed over the stage, so that magical flight and other special effects can be included in his plays. Thus far he has not convinced enough of the building artisans to take time away from their work for this project.

**3) Marketplace.** This section of the city is used to distribute the goods taken from caravans by the raiders. Food and water are distributed as fairly as possible. Rarer items are distributed in a manner that best serves the interests of the person distributing them.

Each member of the raiding parties in turn takes on the task of distributing goods. Xaynon perceives this as the most equitable solution. The people who are risking their lives for the community should have some say in how the fruits of their labor are distributed. He will sometimes intervene, however, if a dispute arises. After distribution there is usually quite a bit of bartering. Artisans usually introduce their goods into this aftermarket as well.

Excess goods (when there are any) are stored here. This section of the village is also used as an armory, holding a storehouse of weapons capable of arming nearly 1,000 warriors.

**4) Artisan's Camp.** This section of the city is brightly lit with torches at any hour, as it contains the workshops and studios of the artisan class. Now that Fort Fyra has created a viable outlet for their work, the craftsmen in this area can be found laboring day and night.

**5) Theater District.** This section of the city is home to many smaller theaters. Nearly 40 theaters can be found in this section, with varying layouts, stage sizes, and audience capacities. It is here that the traveling troupes and new plays are given a chance to develop and become ready or performance.

Many of the theaters were constructed for a single play, and have unusual stage shapes or other features. Others

with more traditional structure are used regularly. Perhaps a dozen of these theaters are in use at any one time, with half of those being occupied by artisans who are building sets. Dancers and singers can be seen everywhere, practicing in rehearsal halls and taverns throughout the district.

Particularly popular theaters include the Orpheum (a flat-stage theater with a structure designed to amplify the voice of anyone on stage), Templar's Hall (a theater in the round specializing in satirical plays about the templars and the sorcerer-kings), and the Kilay (the theater of choice of Salt View's chief playwright).

The theater district is also the site of Salt View's more lively taverns. Each of the two-dozen taverns in this district offers some kind of entertainment, generally musicians or singers, to go with the broy. More famous (or infamous) places include the Whistler's Rest (a musician's tavern where on any given evening you may hear the finest musicians in Salt View) and the Wild Ride (a tavern catering to returning raiders).

**6) Residences.** The residential quarters are the most unruly portion of Salt View. While originally these sections were laid out in a series of spoke-like roads running from the Theater Arena to the outer wall, the rapid growth of Salt View's population has demolished any hope of an orderly development. Buildings abut one another haphazardly, and more than once Xaynon has had to be called in to resolve a dispute over rights of way. (One case involved a homebuilder who had inadvertently sealed off the last access to more than 30 existing homes. Before the case could be resolved, the foundation and walls of the house had been constructed. Xaynon's solution was to require the owner of the new building to provide a public corridor through the center of his home.)

Individual residences grow in stages in these areas. Initially, a new prospective inhabitant stakes out an unoccupied section of the residential district and pitches a temporary structure or large tent there. After the inhabitant has passed the trial period and has been confirmed as a permanent resident, he builds himself a hut of stones with a thatch roof. Village artisans are ready to assist homebuilders and bricks may be cut from the cavern walls, and thus provide an inexpensive and ready source of building materials. Not all the huts even have roofs. The only benefit they bring is to reduce the sounds of revelers when a homesteader is trying to sleep.



The residential area is also home to a number of taverns. The taverns in these sections are quieter than those in the theater district, with families and friends gathering to eat, drink, and have a pleasant evening. Popular taverns include The Oba's (primarily a dining tavern specializing in Gulg cuisine) and the Salty Mug (run by Velin, a dwarf who brews his own ale).

## Relations with Others

As Salt View grows, it becomes more integrated with the Ivory Triangle region. While Xaynon would like to keep Salt View totally independent (except for raiding caravans), in practice some connections have developed.

First, Salt View is the primary means of support for Fort Fyra, the salt-trading house described in the chapter on Trader Forts. The details of the relationship can be found there, but a fair amount of Salt View's resources go to supporting Fyra's salt trade. The trade from the fort has also begun to create indirect relationships between Salt View and some of the merchant houses that conduct caravans through the area.

Second, Salt View has begun trading with some of the client villages in the Verdant Belt. This trade began as a side activity of the traveling performing troupes, who use the smaller villages as shakedown performances before taking their shows to the larger markets. They have taken the opportunity to exchange the currency their shows bring for useful goods. This activity bolsters the Fort Fyra faction's contention that legitimate trade is the only course that Salt View should pursue.

Third, Salt View's acting troupes are now a sufficiently common sight that they are themselves subject to raiding. Most slave-tribe raiders receive a terrible shock when they discover that the defenseless troupe of actors is actually comprised of battle-hardened warriors. Nevertheless, the troupes are earning enough to make them a tempting target to more aggressive groups (such as the elven raiders).

Moreover, other raiding activities threaten the economic lifeline which the performers represent. The advance of the gith hordes from the Blackspine Mountains in the north and the corresponding forays of giants from Ledo Island in the south have begun to pinch at Salt View's lifeline to the economy of the city-states.

Thus far, Xaynon and his lieutenants have done nothing

except advise the troupes to use caution. However, if the raids continue to intensify, he may have no choice but to guard the troupes like a caravan, or abandon them altogether.

Not all Salt View's relationships are positive. Gulg and Nibenay have forbidden trade with the raiders, and the dwarves of North Ledopolus despise the ex-slaves. The merchant houses do not particularly like the raids, but as Salt View has shown some restraint (and low propensity to kill merchants) they view the raids as a cost of business, and raise prices accordingly. To preserve its reputation for raiding without murder, Salt View raiders often find themselves in conflict with other raiders (particularly the Swiftwing elves) who work the same territory as Salt View's raiders.

## Joining the Tribe

As mentioned in the *Origin* section above, all new inhabitants of Salt View must undergo a trial period before being accepted as full members of the community.

Before the trial period begins, any potential inhabitant of Salt View is warned of the details. Xaynon does not relish the occasional refusal he must make, as he feels there has been enough death in his life, so he gives a prospect the maximum opportunity to turn away before drastic measures must be taken.

A potential member of the Salt View community is usually found as part of a raid, or by a traveling acting troupe. When freed, a potential candidate is told that they may be able to join the community of Salt View. The basics of how the society operates are sketched out, but the location of the village is kept secret at this stage. The new prospect is then warned that there is a trial period, and that those who are judged not to fit into the community are not permitted to survive. The prospect is then asked if they are willing to try.

If the prospect declines, then he or she is let free, and no more is said. There are no hard feelings, and more than once someone who turned down an opportunity to join the tribe later came back to find some representatives and petition to join.

If the prospect accepts, they are taken to the village. When the prospect reaches the village, he or she is assisted in finding a place to live and assigned duties in the village. Any task is allowed to the prospect, and tasks are chosen for them in the same way as any permanent resident.





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The prospect is permitted to remain in Salt View for up to three months before a judgment is passed. Particularly heroic or heinous acts will accelerate this time. If, at the end of the trial period, the prospect has demonstrated an ability to get along in Salt View, and has shown skills which the community needs or can use, he or she is accepted as a permanent inhabitant of Salt View. If, on the other hand, the prospect has shown himself to be violent, cowardly, untrustworthy, or unwilling to fit in, Xaynon denies the petition, and the now-failed prospect is taken to the Sea of Silt to die.

### Important Tribe Members

This section is normally used to detail the characteristics of the leader of a slave tribe (Xaynon, in this case) and his or her chief lieutenants. In the case of Salt View, this has already been done in *Slave Tribes*. Therefore, this book presents other key inhabitants of Salt View.

#### Veeshte

Female Human Templar, Neutral Evil

Armor Class 9 (Dex)	Str 10
Movement 12	Dex 15
Level 4	Con 15
Hit Points 23	Int 17
THAC0 17	Wis 11
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 20

Damage/Attack: 1d8-1 (stone club; -2 to hit)

Spells: (1st) *command* (x2), (2nd) *flame blade*

Psionic Summary: PSPs 29; Wild Talent – *Sciences* conceal thoughts (PS 11; Cost: 5)

Veeshte is a Templar of the Shadow King. She is masquerading as an escaped slave, and is attempting to infiltrate Salt View. She has been accepted as a prospective villager, but is not yet through her time of trials. She has kept her magical and psionic abilities hidden, and most believe her to be an ex-seraglio-slave.

Her aim is to get out of the village as soon as possible and return to Nibenay with the location of Salt View. She feels

that this information is the key to her rapid promotion in the ranks of the Templars.

Xaynon admires Veeshte's confident bearing and is somewhat taken with her charismatic personality. Arya is suspicious of Veeshte, but Xaynon dismisses her concerns as jealousy. Unfortunately, Salt View has never found a psionicist to help verify the claims of prospective tribe members, and it is unlikely that Xaynon will discover Veeshte's deception.

Having to treat these slaves as equals irritates her, and sometimes that irritation shows through, but she has shown tremendous enthusiasm for joining a raiding party. Xaynon will not approve this until she has had sufficient training, but that time is soon approaching. Veeshte is waiting for that opportunity to sneak off back to Nibenay. Should she escape, the information she carries could mean the end of Salt View.





## Wheetan

Male Half-Elven Illusionist (Preserver), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 3 (Dex)	Str 14
Movement 12	Dex 15
Level 5	Con 16
Hit Points 20	Int 18
THAC0 17	Wis 16
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 14

Damage/Attack: 1d4-2 (stone dagger; -2 to hit)

Spells: (1st) *affect normal fires, audible glamor, can trip, dancing lights, unseen servant*, (2nd) *improved phantasmal force, pyrotechnics, rope trick*, (3rd) *invisibility, 10' radius, fly*

Psionic Summary: PSPs 39; Wild Talent-body weaponry (PS 13; Cost: 9+4/round)



Wheetan is the current darling of the playwrights of Salt View. Recently escaped from Nibenay, Wheetan is working in Salt View as a magical enhancer of plays. He uses his magic from behind the scenes to allow playwrights to present more spectacular effects.

Wheetan is very shy, and refuses to work visibly on stage. However, the playwrights have found a number of uses of his magical talents. The above spell list is the one selected for Kilay's play "The Mul's Escape"; for other plays he is able to select a different variety of spells.

Unfortunately, Wheetan is not powerful enough to sustain more than one performance a night. Moreover, as magic is banned in the city-states and their villages, none of the plays which use Wheetan's talents can be shown outside of Salt View. Nevertheless, the people of Salt View have begun to appreciate Wheetan's talents.

Most other mages in Salt View, notably Xavnon's lieutenant Ayla, disdain Wheetan's work, saying that magic is not a tool for entertainment. The shy young mage does not mind; he receives so much praise from the theatrical community that he is unconcerned with the opinions of the other mages.

## Losthome

### Esreva's Journal

*Of all the demihuman races of the Tyr region, it is surely the halflings that are the most bizarre. Few of these creatures ever reach the Ivory Triangle, as they rarely travel far from their homes beyond in the Forest Ridge. Slavers avoid them for they do not survive long in captivity.*

*Nevertheless, over the years the oba Lalali-Puy has sought the creatures as scouts in hopes of augmenting her forces in the Crescent Forest. The halflings could serve as an additional weapon against the machinations of the Shadow King. The oba successfully negotiated a deal with the halfling chieftain Mogg-lul to provide a contingent of scouts, much in the way that chief Urga-Zoltapl's warriors support King Hamanu's troops in Urik. Shortly after the arrival of the halflings in Gulg, Mogg-lul died. The tiny warriors no longer considered the agreement binding, and while some prepared to leave, others roamed freely in to the Crescent Forest. The oba ordered her templars to imprison the halflings until*



## Raiding Tribes

a new pact could be made with Mogg-lul's successor. Although the oba had been warned against trying to coerce the halflings one of her templars suggested that it is enforced living outside their wooded homes, rather than any constitutional predilection for freedom, which causes the halflings to wither and die if held in captivity. He advised her to forego the formalities of negotiating binding agreements with these feral people and to simply force them to serve her.

There may be something to this templar's theory for fewer than half the tiny slaves of Gulg have died in captivity. Many more have escaped in to the forest.

While surveying a portion of the Crescent Forest with my master in preparation for building a new tree-road deeper in to the forest, I learned more. While staring out in to the forest I observed a feral pair of eyes staring back at me from the nearby brush. Making an effort not to show any reaction, I continued to observe the forest, and realized that I (and the entire surveying team) was being watched by a half-dozen motionless halflings, each concealed in the surrounding foliage. I observed them for as

long as I dared, noting that they remained totally immobile. I returned to my master's side, and watched carefully for the remainder of the day, but I saw no other sign of the feral people.

That night, three human laborer-slaves vanished from our camp. My master and the overseer assumed they had fled into the forest, and made a cursory search for them before giving them up for lost. I do not know their true fate- but I fear that the halflings feasted when we left.

The halfling slave village of Losthome is a relatively recent addition to the Crescent Forest. The oba's halfling-slave project is less than five years old, and the majority of the inhabitants of Losthome are escapees from this program. Despite its relative youth, it has become a sizable community, with over 50 halflings living in the central portion of the Crescent Forest. While many of the halflings wish to return to their home in the jungles beyond the Ringing Mountains, thus far none have made the terrible journey across the Tablelands. Slowly the Crescent Forest, and Losthome, is becoming their true home.







## Organization

The halfling clan of Losthome is organized like a typical halfling clan of the jungles beyond the Ringing Mountains. There is a clan-head (Zivlil) who leads the clan on their hunts, decides where the clan will travel, and otherwise rules over the halfling band, but there is no tribe chieftain for the clan to turn to in times of difficulty. Zivlil does not believe himself to have the power or experience to become a tribe-chieftain and remains loyal to the unknown successor of Mogg-lul, somewhere beyond the Ringing Mountains. Zivlil is a consensus builder who tries to achieve a harmonious compromise among his band.

Zivlil's status comes from his magical and psionic ability as much as his age. He is a competent and rather active leader (from a halfling perspective). Emergencies have forced him to direct his band more firmly than halflings would normally tolerate. His quick thinking, however, has more than once saved the entire band, so the halflings continue to support his rule.

There is little more of a hierarchy. Halflings try to support one another, believing that building a community and individual spiritual growth is more important than achieving worldly dominance of any sort. Thus, there are few struggles for status within the halfling hierarchy. New slaves are quietly integrated into the clan, provided a fair share of the clan's goods, and made a part of the community.

However, leaders are often selected for specific tasks. These leaders are either appointed by Zivlil or selected by a consensus of the group which must accomplish the task. Such leadership positions are transient, lasting only as long as the task at hand, and leaders are selected for their applicable knowledge and skill rather than any formal hierarchy. When the task is complete, the leader returns to being a simple member of the clan.

Thus far, there are only enough halflings to form a single clan (albeit a large one), but there has been some discussion of founding a true halfling village and promoting Zivlil to chief.

## Operation and Means of Existence

The halflings of Losthome are primarily hunter-gatherers, searching the forest for food, shelter, and the necessities of life. The Crescent Forest is not as fertile as their homeland

jungle, so the halflings are forced to travel over a wider area (covering over 40 square miles). They are careful not to remain in one place for very long, and they restrict their hunting to avoid depleting the population of the forest. With the clan getting larger, they have begun to strain the ability of a given area to support them. The halflings are forced to migrate on a regular basis to avoid depleting the resources of any particular area and to reduce the risk of being captured by templars.

Zivlil has proposed that the clan turn to raiding to supplement the food provided by the forest. While it is true that the halflings see no harm in robbing a group that intrudes on their territory, they live in an isolated area of the forest and such intrusions are rare. Thus, to raid the clan must leave its normal foraging area, go into the desert, and raid a caravan.

This suggestion has met with some resistance. In halfling society, raids are undertaken by clans of halflings who have offended their chief or another clan. The halflings of Losthome do not wish to stoop to behavior seen as punishment in their homeland just to survive. The reality of their situation has allowed this idea to gain some acceptance, however, and the clan has conducted an occasional raid.

Halfling caravan raids are an amazingly wild affair. The halflings always strike from concealed positions—a hidden canyon, a copse of trees, or simply from holes where the halflings have buried themselves in the sand. They attack from several directions at once on a signal from the clan leader. They focus on stealing animals (and people), but they will take nearly anything in the caravan until the leader calls off the raid.

Zivlil has ruled that no nonhalfling should know of their existence, so each time they raid they strive to kill or capture all of the intelligent beings in the caravan. These they eat, either immediately or over time. Generally, the caravan warriors are killed during the raid while the rest are kept alive to provide fresh meat for later. Thus far no one has escaped to tell the true identity of the raiders; the city-states note the absence of slave bodies in the remains of the caravan and blame Salt View.

## Origin

Losthome's origins begin in the city-state of Gulg and the oba Lalali-Puy. In an effort to expand her control of the



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Crescent Forest, Lalali-Puy sought to develop a corps of forest raiders who could assault the lumberjacks and settlers of Nibenay, blunting the Shadow King's advance into the forest and allowing her forces to work unseen.

While her templars were certainly up to the task, she wanted a new weapon to strengthen her hand against the Shadow King's army. She therefore struck a deal with Mogg-lul, to provide scouts and guides in exchange for obsidian, which she planned to purchase from the mines of Urik. When Mogg-lul died, the scouts who had arrived in Gulg saw no point in continuing this effort. They could not see how their sacrifice benefitted their chief if he was dead. The oba imprisoned the halflings while she attempted to forge a new pact with Alu, a charismatic shaman who had assumed leadership of the tribe. Alu had advised against the agreement in the first place and was certainly not about to support it now.

The oba decided her only alternative was to invite her captives to aid her. Those who volunteered would be given their freedom and the rest would serve her in captivity. The plan was doomed to failure. While several of the halflings agreed to assist the oba, most just wanted to return home. The captive halflings were stealthy enough to easily evade their templar handlers.

One of the first escapees was Zivlil. In early trials of the halfling-slaves, Zivlil psionically overwhelmed his handler, fled into the forest, and slew a half-dozen templars with a sling before vanishing into the wilderness forever.

As the trials continued and more halflings fled into the Crescent Forest, Zivlil offered them traditional halfling hospitality, sharing his food, water, and knowledge of the Crescent Forest with them as he would with members of his own tribe. Soon he had accumulated a following of nearly 20 halflings, and the refugees began to form a clan.

The clan has continued to grow. Thus far, the templars have tried hobbles, bribery, threats, and many other methods for controlling the halflings, but to no avail. Recently they have begun a new approach, striking off one of the halfling's feet before releasing it into the wilderness. This slows the halfling sufficiently to ensure that the templar can keep up, but halflings so treated soon die in Gulg captivity. Should Zivlil hear of this practice, the full force of the anger of the clan may be turned toward Gulg.

## Location and Defenses

The halflings of Losthome have no permanent settlement. Their current hunting range is a rough forested circle some 15 miles north of Gulg, nestled against the eastern slopes of the Windbreak Mountains. This region is well watered with springs and runoff from water sources high in the mountains, and it is among the thickest and most impenetrable timber in the Crescent Forest.

The halflings wander their hunting range, camping wherever they are when night falls, taking only minimal precautions to defend the camp. However, their natural ability to conceal themselves and their arboreal skills make it possible for a platoon of templars to pass right through such a camp without ever knowing the halflings are there.

Each night, the clan hides high in the trees, resting in nooks and the forks of branches. They huddle in groups of three to four in each tree, and they are nimble enough to move directly from tree to tree if they are in danger.

To protect the clan, a half-dozen halflings take guard duty, stalking about the perimeter of the camp and watching for intruders. This duty is often accepted by the younger halflings, as it gives them a chance to improve their hunting skills. Intruders or other events are announced through bird calls.

During the day, this scouting system is also used as a perimeter watch for the clan. As the clan moves, the main body of the clan is surrounded by a ring of scouts that alerts the leaders to anything the clan encounters. Raiding and foraging groups use a similar structure, although there are fewer group members, so the scouts maintain a narrower perimeter. As a result, it is virtually impossible to surprise the halflings of Losthome.

If attacked, the halflings fight primarily with bows, slings, and other range weapons. Some use wooden clubs spiked with obsidian (treat as a footman's mace, -3 to attack rolls, -1 damage), others have bone weapons, and a few have metal weapons taken from caravans. If the enemy has not yet closed, the bowmen will attack while the other halflings fade into the forest. If the enemy gets too close before it is discovered, the halflings fight furiously. If the halflings outnumber their attackers, they will gang up on individuals; if they are outnumbered, they will fight only until they can flee.





## Camp Description

The halfling clan usually searches for a defensible hollow in which to camp. The primary features sought are a thick copse of trees, a source of water, and at least two escape routes. Over the years, Zivlil has found a number of such places, and at each the halflings have constructed a number of traps and signals to help defend them. The following map key shows a typical site; other sites may have a different mix of traps and a different layout.

## Losthome Map

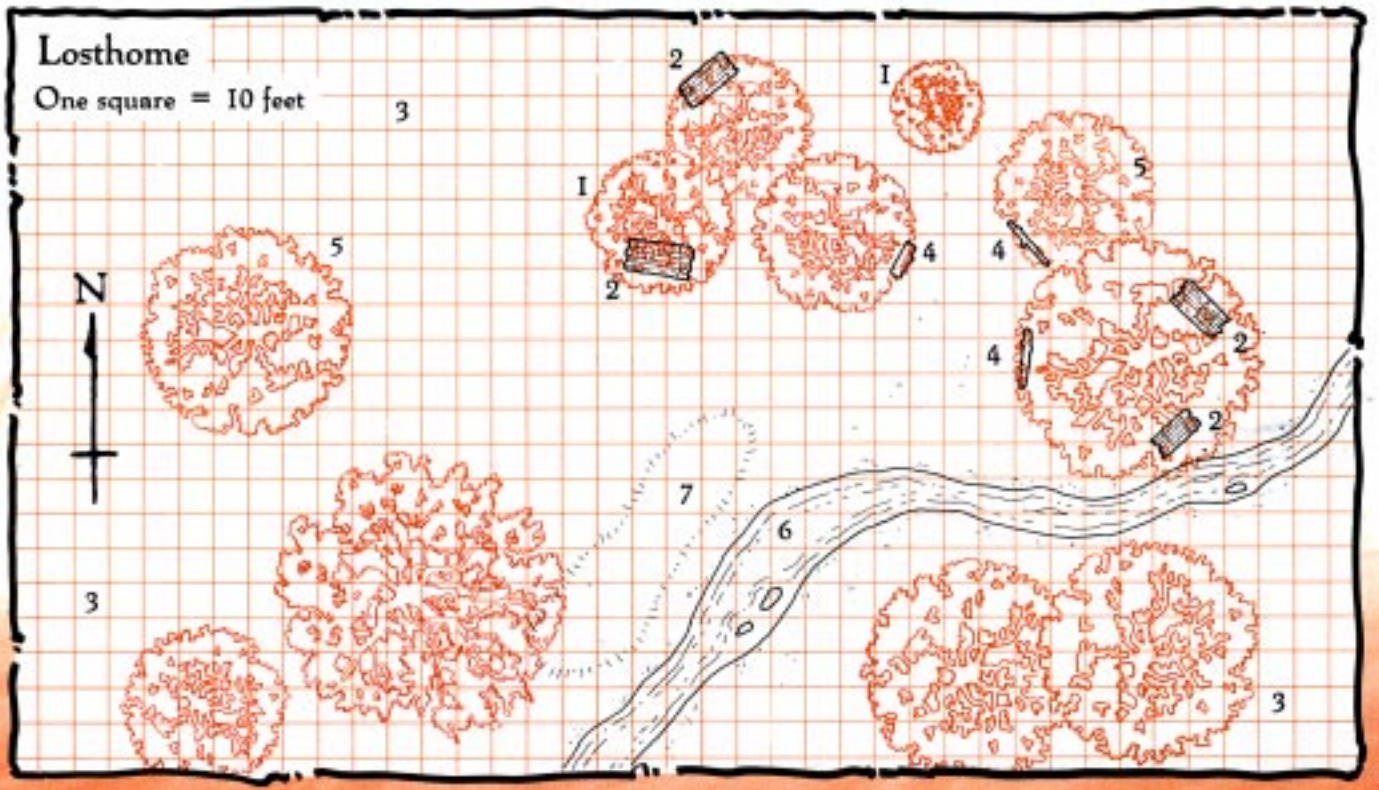
**1) Sleeping Trees.** These trees are used as sleeping quarters by the halfling clan. Those halflings not on sentry duty climb one of these trees and nestle into the forks of branches high above. Most of the sleeping places are 15 to 20 feet above the forest floor. The older, more established sites have small hammocks woven of vines and leaves to provide a more comfortable resting place. These are carefully woven to resemble natural foliage when viewed from below.

An observer on the ground suffers a -2 penalty to surprise rolls when passing beneath the halflings hidden in the trees. This is in addition to the normal -4 penalty on surprise rolls that opponents suffer when trying to detect halflings. A party that fails surprise roll passes through the halfling camp without ever noticing the halflings were there, unless the halflings choose to attack.

The sleeping supports are designed for comfort and concealment, not protection. They provide no Armor Class bonus once spotted.

**2) Observation Posts.** These small wooden platforms stand high in the trees, carefully hidden from view by branches. From these posts, the halfling sentries can survey the forest for several hundred yards. Halflings traditionally do not make use of such structures in the Forest Ridge, but prefer to rest among the branches of the trees. This new innovation was an idea learned in Gulg.

Each sentry is responsible for watching a specific section of the camp's perimeter. The platforms have been placed to ensure that no one can approach undetected from any direction. The sentries are armed with slings or bows, and







## Raiding Tribes

most platforms hold a stockpile of spears that can be thrown at any attackers below. Sentries concealed on the platforms are considered to be Armor Class 2 for the purposes of attack.

**3) Foot Sentries.** To supplement the sentries posted in the trees above, these three sentries wander the forest below. They remain at the edge of the tree sentries' vision and signal with bird calls when an intruder or predator approaches. The map shows likely hiding places for these sentries. However, they roam the perimeter and can be encountered at any point.

**4) Deadfalls.** Each of these points on the map shows where a large tree trunk has been hung by vines in the upper reaches of the tree. A halfling can cut the vines on the one round, dropping it to the forest floor. If a target is walking below, the halfling must make an attack roll with a -2 penalty, but if the roll succeeds the falling wood inflicts 3d6 points of damage upon the target. Shields are not taken into account for the purposes of determining the target's Armor Class, nor is Dexterity if the target is unaware of the danger. The target will be unaware if surprised or if no deadfall has fallen in any previous round.

**5) Trapped Tree.** This particular tree has been cut by the halflings to make it very climbable. If a human (or anyone who weighs more than a halfling) tries to climb the tree, however, the branches will snap off 20 feet above the ground, dropping the climber to the forest floor for 2d6 damage unless a successful saving throw vs. breath weapon is made. A successful save indicates that the target kept his grip on the tree and may climb further, but no other climber may follow. (Nonhalflings suffer a -2 on their attack rolls due to the precarious balance in the high branches, and receive no Armor Class bonus for Dexterity.)

**6) Stream.** This fast-moving, 2-foot-deep stream carries water down from the Windbreak Mountains, into the forest. The water is clean and cool. There is a ford, but the water rushes fast enough to knock people off their feet (Dexterity check to avoid falling). The halflings cross the stream by climbing in the trees and swinging from branch to branch, rather than by wading.

**7) Strange Ridge.** This unusually-shaped ridge conceals the buried form of an ankheg. The halflings are unaware of the creature, and if they knew about it would avoid it. The ankheg is a moderate-sized creature (5 HD), and it will come out if it hears a lot of movement (such as the sound of

combat or the thud of deadfalls). It is hungry and will consume humans and halflings with equal relish. It is just tall enough to reach the halfling sleeping and sentry platforms, but must pull itself up the side of a tree, exposing its soft underbelly.

### Relations with Others

The halflings of Losthome are strangers trapped in a strange land. They are unfamiliar with the world they find themselves in. As a result, they are secretive to the point of slaying anyone who discovers them in the Crescent Forest. Esreva, our storyteller, survived only because he gave no sign that he had seen the halflings. Even then he may have wound up the victim of the halfling raid.

The oba Lalali-Puy and her templars know about the halfling escapees. They feel the diminutive people must be falling prey to predators, and they have not realized that the halflings are banding together. The general populace of Gulg, however, is unaware that the halflings were even in the city, much less that they escaped.

Nibenay also knows nothing of the escapees. There is some evidence in the caravans the halflings have raided (wounds on some of the bodies, gnaw-marks on the bones, etc.), but the templars and merchant houses have not yet realized what is going on. Should the Shadow King discover such a large slave community so close to his city, it is sure that a body of templars will be sent into the forest to get them out and bring them back to Nibenay—to become slaves again.

The halflings have little contact with the other peoples of the Ivory Triangle region. They rarely leave their forest home and few people travel deep into the forest. They have occasionally sighted human raiders and thri-kreen packs on the edge of their territory. With the exception of some druids, the halflings have remained unobserved by all known peoples.

Should they be discovered, most within the Ivory Triangle would have little concern for them. The city-states would feel that the halflings were a danger and try to drive them off. The slave tribes and elven nomads would view the halflings as simply one more reason to avoid the Crescent Forest. The gith of the Blackspine Mountains might view them as tempting victims, but that is quite a distance to travel for such a "paltry meal."



## Joining the Tribe

Losthorne is open only to halflings. No other race may join the tribe, as the halflings trust only their own kind.

Any halfling who approaches, however, is welcomed. The halfling is informed of the status of the clan and is given a fair share of its goods. There are no initiation ceremonies or trial periods required of new members. The halflings trust one another, and even if a halfling is a wanderer in human lands, the halflings consider him one of their own.

There is a period of adjustment, however, while the halfling establishes himself in the clan. During this time, the other clan members watch the newcomer carefully, assessing his skills and measuring him against themselves and the other members of the clan. This is not out of any sense of rivalry. Instead, it is a way for the clan members to make an unbiased appraisal of who is the appropriate halfling to assay any particular task. Skilled halflings may immediately find themselves in charge of one of the many projects which the clan must undertake to survive.

## Important Tribe Members

### Zivlil

Male Halfling Illusionist (Preserver)/Psionicist, Neutral

Armor Class 5 (leather+Dex)	Str 11
Movement 6	Dex 20
Level 8/8	Con 11
Hit Points 29	Int 18
THAC0 17	
(14 with missile weapons, 13 with sling)	Wis 18
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 14

Damage/Attack: 1d4 (sling)

Spells: (1st) *armor, burning hands, dancing lights, spook, taunt* (2nd) *blindness, blur, fog cloud, stinking cloud*, (3rd) *fly, invisibility 10' radius lightning bolt, monster summoning I*, (4th) *confusion, hallucinatory terrain, stonewalk*

Psionic Summary: PSPs 120

Defense Modes: intellect fortress, mental barrier, mind blank, thought shield

Clairsentience – *Sciences*: precognition (PS 13; Cost: 24); *Devotions*: all-round vision (PS 15; Cost: 6+4/round), combat mind (PS 14; Cost: 5+4/round), danger sense (PS 17; Cost: 4+3/turn)

Psychokinesis – *Sciences*: telekinesis (PS 15; Cost: 3+1/round); *Devotions*: animate object (PS 15; Cost: 8+3/round), animate shadow (PS 15; Cost: 7+3/round), control light (PS 18; Cost: 12+4/round), control sound (PS 13; Cost: 5+2/round), levitation (PS 15; Cost: 12+2/round)

Telepathy – *Sciences*: ejection (PS 14; Cost: varies), probe (PS 13; Cost: contact+9/round); *Devotions*: contact (PS 18; Cost: varies+1/round), ESP (PS 14; Cost: contact+6/round), life detection (PS 16; Cost: 3+3/round), mind bar (PS 16; Cost: 6+4/round), psionic blast (PS 13; cost: 10)

Zivlil was a talented psionicist and mage in the forests beyond the Ringing Mountains. He was not only a respected clan leader, but there was even talk that one day he might become a tribal chieftain.





## Raiding Tribes

That all changed one day when Mogg-lul announced that 100 warriors would be traveling across the world to find paths in the forest of a queen of the flatlanders. Zivlil was chosen to lead the expedition, and members of each clan volunteered for the opportunity to serve their chief and the forest. The journey was difficult and Zivlil's party was forced to eat the oba's templars who had been sent to accompany them. They arrived unescorted in the forest-city of Gulg and awaited the oba's instructions. Lalali-Puy was surprised and pleased with the compliance of the halflings and with the curiosity they displayed for her forest home. The visitors had been in Gulg three nights when Zivlil heard the thoughts of Alu, the shaman of his tribe. "Mogg-lul is done, Zivlil. Return to your home," came the message.

Zivlil told the other halflings that they were free to return to the Forest Ridge. It was a great surprise when the oba had him and his companions imprisoned as they attempted to leave the city. He was further surprised by the fact that the oba could not understand that an agreement lasted only as long as the person who made it. After several days of detention, the oba extended an invitation to Zivlil and his friends. She invited them to stay in her forest-city and explore the surrounding trees with her templars. While the offer would have piqued the curiosity of virtually any halfling, the period of incarceration had been extremely upsetting to the feral warriors, and only three accepted. The rest were locked up for a full cycle of Guthay. Several halflings had already weakened and died when a human adorned with necklaces retrieved Zivlil from his cell.

Zivlil presumed that the human wanted a snack, but by words and gestures he made it clear that he wanted Zivlil to lead him through their strange forest. To Zivlil this was a stupid request. He had only just arrived while they had lived here their whole lives. He would not expect to be asked this in another halfling clan's territory, so the human request bewildered him.

As he watched, however, he realized that the humans were clumsy and ungainly in the forest. They sought the halfling secrets of stealthy hunting, and they were far too large and boorish to ever succeed at them. When the humans released him, he seized upon the moment. He bounded into the forest, running as swiftly as his legs would carry him. The humans were faster, but not nearly as nimble, and he quickly made his way into the new forest.

Zivlil spent several days surveying the new domain. He

watched as they brought others of his hunting band and repeated their bizarre request. Some of his brothers and sisters fled successfully while others were cut down by arrows or magic. Soon the survivors of his band had either escaped or been slain. Zivlil took his band deeper into the woods, far from the prying eyes of humans, and tried to resume a normal life. He declared them a new clan, the clan of Losthome, until such time as they could be reunited with their new tribal chieftain.

Over the last several years, the band has slowly grown. Now, a few of the younger couples are even having children. Zivlil knows that as the clan grows, the chances of returning home diminish. In his heart he thinks that they will never return home and that the best thing for his people is to make a permanent life here. Nevertheless, in honor of the old ways, he continues to offer hospitality to all halflings who enter his domain—and death to humans who stumble upon his clan.

### Pletaw

Male Halfling Ranger, Chaotic Good

Armor Class 4 (bone studded leather +Dex)	Str 15
Movement 6	Dex 16
Level 4	Con 14
Hit Points 28	Int 15
THAC0 17	Wis 14
No. of Attacks 2 (two-handed weapon use)	Cha 15

Damage/Attack: 1d8-1 (bone long sword)

Special Abilities: Move Silently 43, Hide in Shadows 40

Species Enemy: Human

Psionic Summary: PSPs 37; Wild Talent-combat mind (PS 11; Cost: 5+4/round)

Pletaw is one of Zivlil's original compatriots. Zivlil had taken the younger, less-experienced halfling under his wing and was thrilled to see the young halfling evade his human captors.

Unfortunately, the experience of slavery has embittered the young halfling. He feels that the humans were exceed-





## Grelzen

Female Halfling Shaman Witch Doctor of Earth, Lawful Neutral

Armor Class 5 (studded leather+Dex)	Str 10
Movement 6	Dex 15
Level 5	Con 11
Hit Points 28	Int 16
THAC0 18	Wis 17
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 13

Damage/Attack: 1d4 (obsidian dagger)

Spells: (1st) *animal friendship*, *cure light wounds* (x2), *magical stone*, *pass without trace*, (2nd) *dust devil*, *hold person*, *slow poison*, *warp wood*, *wyvern watch*, (3rd) *prayer*, *summon insects*

Psionic Summary: PSPs 21; Wild Talent—poison sense (PS 17; cost: 1)

ingly cruel in keeping them captive for so long, and that their promises of not eating the halflings were insults.

Pletaw is still striving to be a better forest warrior and has come along well in the years since the founding of Losthome. His hatred of humans has made him difficult to deal with when humans are nearby, and he has demonstrated a savage bloodthirstiness in raids. Zivlil fears his unresolved anger may overtake him.





## Raiding Tribes

Grelzen is another of the halflings brought in from the Ringing Mountains by the oba's scouting program. She too managed to escape and find her way to Zivlil's growing clan.

While Zivlil is the political leader of the halfling clan, Grelzen is the community's spiritual leader. Like Zivlil, she realizes that the larger the band gets, the less likely they will be able to travel back to their forest homes. Her solution, however, is to leave now, before the clan gets any larger.

Grelzen feels that the Crescent Forest is not large enough to conceal the band for long, and she fears recapture by the humans. More fundamentally, though, Grelzen sees the mixture of halfling from different clans as diluting the spiritual purity which in her mind makes halfling life worth living. She sees the nomadic life of the "clan" of Losthome, without a village and without a chief, as a descent into barbarism. Finally, she sees Zivlil's willingness to take up raiding as a tool for survival as a severe wound in the spiritual fabric of the halflings of the band.

Grelzen's words have considerable weight in the halfling community. In their jungle homes, the shaman witch doctors are the custodians of halfling culture, the settlers of disputes, and the historians. While Zivlil is revered for his magical and psionic abilities, Grelzen represents spiritual authority.

Grelzen has publicly suggested (which is as close as halflings come to demanding anything in their tribe) that the departure be made soon, and she has taken a number of steps to make that possible. She and her handful of supporters have spent their time building extra baskets and skins to carry the food and water they will need for the trek across the desert.

Grelzen has also conversed at length with captured humans brought back from raids. She tries to find out as much as possible about the route back to the Ringing Mountains. She has shown amazing patience in listening to rambling human tales about their lives, their homelands, and their culture, searching for any hint of how to ease the journey home. Even the most loquacious source of information, however, eventually enters the stewpot.

### Fullgrin

Male Halfling Thief, Neutral Evil

Armor Class 2 (studded leather+Dex)	Str 10
Movement	Dex 18
Level 6	Con 11
Hit Points 22	Int 15
THAC0 18 (14 backstab)	Wis 11
No. of Attacks	Cha 10

Damage/Attack: 1d8-1 (bone long sword, -1 hit probability)

Special Abilities (in armor) PP 40 (10), OL 70 (60), FT 60 (50), MS 60 (40), HS 70 (50), DN 60 (50), CW 50 (20), RL 0

Psionic Summary: PSPs 32; Wild Talent-dimensional door (PS 10; Cost: 4+2/round)





Fullgrin (a human nickname) is an unusual halfling, well traveled in human cities and a thief of considerable talent. He began his career in Urik as one of the two hundred halflings sent by Chief Urga-Zoltapl of Ogo in a bargain for obsidian. When his duty was complete he moved to Raam, where he became an accomplished burglar, using his psionic ability of *dimensional door* to evade many of the most sophisticated traps in the city.

His exploits in Raam eventually brought him unwanted notoriety, so he moved along to Nibenay. But where the Templars of Raam had been lax and fearful, the Templars of Nibenay are frighteningly efficient. In a matter of weeks Fullgrin had to flee again—this time into the Crescent Forest—until pursuit for him died down.

Thus he was greatly surprised to find a thriving community of halflings in the Crescent Forest. As is halfling custom, they offered him hospitality and protection from the humand. He accepted and for the last several months he has resided with the halflings of Losthome. His skills of stealth and combat were quickly recognized, and he has been placed in charge of a number of important raids and missions for the clan.

But forest life is not for Fullgrin. Had he wanted to live the life of the halfling clans, he would have returned home from Urik rather than heading deeper into human territory. And therein lies the problem.

Zivlil thinks Fullgrin is a very strange halfling. While it is not in halfling nature to do violence to one another, nor to hold one another in captivity, Zivlil fears that if he allows Fullgrin to return to human society, the secret of Losthome will be lost and the humans will come to hunt them once again. Fullgrin and Zivlil are both aware of the dilemma, and are both moving circumspectly to accomplish their goals without offending the other. But a conflict is arising, and the halflings must decide what to do about it.

## Poortool's Horde

### Esreva's Journal

*I should not speak of the day my master and I happened upon the grave of the Nightfire elves. A client village had complained to the oba of nearby raiders. My master traveled to the village to investigate. The villagers claimed that a small band of elves had camped in a*

*nearby clearing. As we moved through the high grasses we suddenly came upon the site of a massacre. If there had been an elf band camping here, they were no more. Smoking bodies sprawled across the matted grass. Tents had been torn and burned. My master and I stood and stared, when a tall pale man with a wide straw hat strode toward us from the field. My master leveled a hand at the stranger and prepared to petition the oba for the power to destroy an enemy.*

*The stranger paused and said, "The surviving Nightfire elves may try to enter the city through a smuggler's tunnel beneath the Mopti Wall. The tunnel surfaces behind the Hunter's Well." With that, he vanished.*

*I have no idea who the stranger was, but my master and a pack of templars trapped the elves in the tunnel and sealed them in alive. My master received another necklace for this service to the oba.*

A young candidate of the veiled alliance suddenly runs away into the desert, templars burst through the door just as a sale of magic components is completed, an elf tribe is attacked by gith who strip the elves bare and leave them in the desert—a bizarre and seemingly unrelated series of events.

It is actually the activity of a small but increasingly influential raiding tribe of the Ivory Triangle. Poortool's Horde is a tribe of mages tended to by slaves and defended by gith. This bizarre confederation is the result of Poortool's desire to create a place where he could pursue magic openly and in the company of other mages. A place where he was not beholden to the suffocating secrecy of the Veiled Alliance, nor subservient to the will of the king in the ranks of the city's defilers. The pursuit of this goal has led the ruthless preserver to found the most unlikely raiding tribe in the Ivory Triangle region.

## Organization

An extraordinarily dispassionate man, Poortool runs his tribe as an even-handed autocrat. He is willing to hear out the opinions of even his gith sentries and scullery slaves. He believes that anyone may have valuable information to contribute to his decision making. He does not suppose, however, that everyone is equally qualified to make decisions and disdains the time-wasting, consensus-building





## Raiding Tribes

processes of democracy. He has at times, reversed a decision in response to dissension. He does not see this as a sign of weakness, but rather as proof that he is open-minded and dedicated to the best interests of the community.

Poortool leaves the day to day administration of village affairs to Tordos, his second in command. Tordos tracks inventory of dry goods as well as magic components. He also directs the staff of slaves that the village has acquired both through raids and the slave markets of the city-states. The slaves are employed in all aspects of life in the village. The mages need only get involved in the mundane tasks of day to day life to the extent that it interests them.

The security of the village is the responsibility of Garreth, a human soldier who escaped the prisons of Gulg on a Red Moon Hunt and sought asylum in Poortool's village. He commands the gith warriors who protect the community, and he coordinates their raids. Poortool himself decides who will comprise the parties that are sent on various missions required to advance the interest of the community and its allies.

There are currently eight mages between 3rd and 8th level in the tribe, in addition to Poortool and Tordos. They are encouraged to spend their time engaged in study and research and to leave the administration of day to day affairs with Poortool. Poortool arranges for the purchase of necessary goods through House Tsalaxa.

Poortool allows the members to pursue whatever interests they may have, but they must be prepared to leave at a moment's notice to undertake a mission for the community or of its allies. Poortool demands the unquestioning responsiveness of a military organization in all missions and raiding activity. At any given time, 1d6 mages are away from camp. They respect Poortool's vision and realize that he has only succeeded because of a willingness to make hard decisions. There are two young mages within the Gulg Veiled Alliance who are loyal to Poortool, and one in Nibenay.

There are 50 gith who serve as the camp garrison. The gith come from tribes who have been displaced by Blackspear's activity (see the section on the Blackspine Mountains). Their efforts are coordinated by Garreth, the garrison commander. They serve the tribe in exchange for the goods they steal in raids, as well as the aid Poortool offers in defending their own tribes against Blackspear. None of the warriors are psionicists.

Twenty slaves comprise Tordos' staff. Among these slaves are some artisans who maintain the buildings and fences, a kitchen staff, herders, and a few laborers. The slaves are treated well and not overworked. This is not because of any compassion on Poortool's part. But it simply reflects his idea of how to enhance the productivity of his property.

### Operations and Means of Existence

The tribe mounts two types of raids. The first are the shake-down raids and the second are raids in the service of their allies. The shakedown raids are used as part of Poortool's recruiting campaigns within the Veiled Alliance. They are attacks on elven tribes that are intended to drive the elves away from a particular city-state. This in turn drives up the cost of magic components and reduces their availability. The Veiled Alliance naturally feels the impact of such a change, and the first thing to suffer within the organization is the training of younger members. Poortool uses this tactic to heighten the discontent of the lower ranks of the secretive society and then uses his insiders to flush out potential tribe members.

Raids are also conducted for the benefit of Poortool's allies. These currently include the tribes of gith who serve him and the merchant House Tsalaxa of Draji. The tribe will send mages to support the gith as needed. Poortool has recently struck an alliance with House Tsalaxa, which hopes to increase its influence on both Gulg and Nibenay. The tribe is often requested to escort caravans carrying sensitive cargo. They are also hired to raid competitor's caravans or client villages. The tribe uses the revenue from their mercenary work to purchase goods directly from the merchant house. They also sell some of the magic components that they acquire through their shakedown raids to House Tsalaxa.

Poortool draws upon the gith tribes to supplement his garrison for particularly difficult attacks. He also dedicates at least two mid-level mages to each raiding party. He is currently looking for a few psionicists, particularly those with expertise in telepathy and psychoportation, to augment the mobility and communications capabilities of his raiding parties.

Daily living within the camp is attended by the staff of slaves. These slaves are fairly dedicated to the tribe, partly out of fear and partly because they are treated well and



know that their lives would be much more difficult back in the city-states or with the slave tribes in the wilderness. The slaves' activities include minding the camp's small erdlu herd and preparing meals.

## Origin

Poortool's intelligence showed as a child, and he was taken into the tutelage of the king's defilers in Nibenay. He had an insatiable appetite for knowledge, but little patience for discipline. His master recommended he be sent for psionic study to improve his concentration before he continue studying magic. He quit his magical studies and continued to serve as a clerk to the templars. His talent had not gone unnoticed, however, and he was soon recruited by the Veiled Alliance. Starting from scratch, he began his magical training as a preserve; Over time, however, he found the secretiveness of the organization that oppressed him and the structure stifled his growth. He eventually stole a contact's spellstring and set out into the scrubland.

He had been traveling for a week when he was set upon by a small pack of gith. He quickly disabled his attackers and decided to ransom them back to their tribe. The incident earned him the respect of the gith warriors, who admired his cunning. He offered to assist the gith in planning a raid and, while they were suspicious, the success of the raid confirmed the young half-elf's intelligence and formed the basis of his current relationship with them.

Poortool decided to establish a permanent base and called upon the gith to help him capture some slaves from the caravans traveling out of Nibenay. Once he had put the slaves to work building the small encampment, he set out to recruit some like-minded young mages. Through a series of clandestine meetings reinforced by a sudden scarcity of magic components, Poortool quickly-found a handful of initiates. It was the gith who named the tribe as they saw the young mage begin to collect adherents. Over the years, Poortool has expanded his small community. He hopes now to tap into the cities of Balic, Raam, and Dral for more tribe members.

## Location and Defenses

The encampment of Poortool's Horde lies about 20 miles due east of Nibenay. It lies at the edge of the scrub plains,

where the rocky badlands of the Blackspine Mountains begin to take shape to the northeast and the salt flats of the Great Ivory Plain spread out to the south. The camp consist of a small village with modest fortifications. There is a low earth wall topped with wooden spikes, built to discourage predators. A garrison of 50 gith maintain watch in three shifts. The sentries surround the village and maintain visual contact with one another. The area is gith territory and as a result few travelers or raiding bands pass by unmolested.

## Poortool's Horde Map

**1) Mage's Quarters.** These buildings are made of dirt brick and a sod roof. They are divided into a sleeping cell and a sitting room. The residents are prepared to abandon the village at a moment's notice. All the mages learn to store their spells in a series of intricate knots on strings which they wear as belts. Each mage's quarters contains a cabinet mounted with straps so that it can be carried on the back. These are used to store spell components and valuable objects. Beneath each of the mage's quarters is a cellar used for individual research.

**2) Slaves' Quarters.** This large single-room building contains thatch mats and small chests that contain the private effects of the slaves. The mages have magically warded the chests so that each slave can open only his or her own chest. This small recognition of privacy seems to please the slaves.

**3) Dining Hall.** This large hall holds several large tables flanked by benches. There is a large open fire pit at the north end of the hall where meals are prepared. Meat is cleaned and dressed in the adjacent smokehouse. All tribe members eat here, although the mages will sometimes take meals in their quarters.

**4) The Well.** This deep well provides water to the village year round.

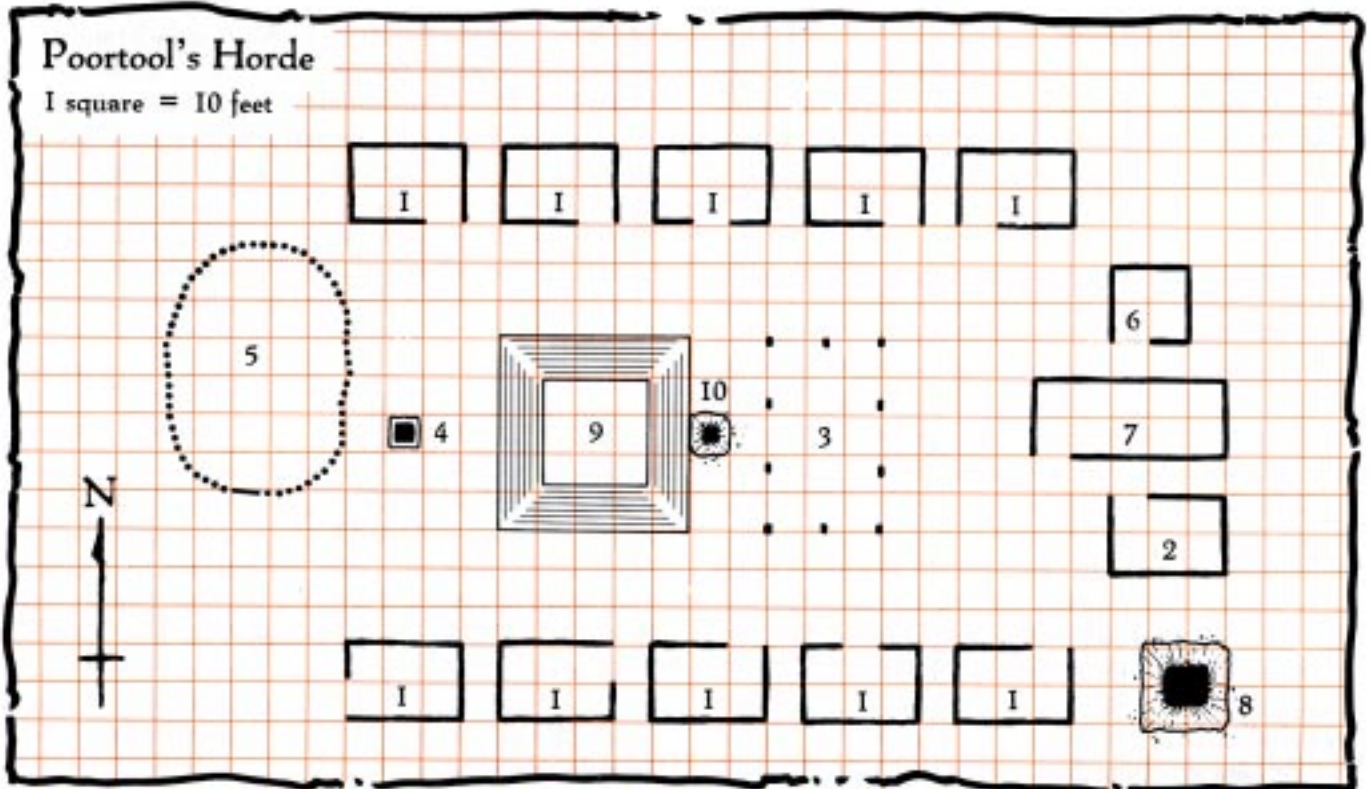
**5) The Corral.** This fenced area is used to contain the erdlu herd managed by the slaves.

**6) The Storehouse.** This room stores various dry goods used by the community. Items here are generally purchased from House Tsalaxa.

**7) The Barracks.** This building houses Garreth and the gith warriors. The gith prefer to sleep on the floor, on a nest of cloth. Garreth has taken to sleeping this way as well. The



## Raiding Tribes



warriors all chests warded as the slave's chests are. The warriors all sleep with their weapons. At any given time, one third of the garrison is sleeping here.

8) **The Pit.** This is a 40-foot-deep pit that has been dug to hold a so-ut that one of the mages plans to capture for purposes of research. So far he has been unsuccessful, and the pit is empty.

3) **The Amphitheater.** This is a 10-foot-deep pit with several tiers of benches leading to the floor. It is used for demonstrations and instruction. Thirty feet below the floor of this amphitheater is a room with a 20 foot ceiling and identical lateral dimensions. It is used for presentations, experimentation and testing.

10) **The Drop.** This is a 40 foot drop that opens up into the subterranean amphitheater. The pit has no handholds and has a hard stone floor. The mages can use any number of magical means to descend the tunnel and enter the room below. There is a rope in the storehouse in the event that a slave needs to gain access to the room for cleaning or for repairs.

### Relations with Others

Poortool fully recognizes that his tribe will remain fugitives from the law as long as the sorcerer-kings remain in power, or at least until his tribe can grow in strength to the point that they can defy the sorcerer-kings and conduct their affairs openly. That day, however, is unlikely to come to pass in this King's Age. Consequently, a strict policy of secrecy must be maintained outside the community.

Even the tribe's allies at House Tsalaxa know the tribe as a roving band of mercenaries. Only their gith allies of the Blackspine Mountains know of the encampment.

Poortool views the Veiled Alliance with disdain. While he recruits from their ranks, he tends to view them as a secret society of doddering old men and intriguers. He enjoys exposing their weaknesses and culling the most promising mages from their ranks. While they are not currently aware of his tribe, were an Alliance chapter to approach Poortool, he would entertain the value of an accord with them just as he would any other organization.





Poortool has no particular aversion to defiling magic, but he does not believe it is practical to allow defilers to join the community when there are so many mages working together in close proximity. He does occasionally provide a passing defiler with spell components or a place to hide. He reminds his preservers that all mages are fugitives and that such relationships may sometime prove valuable.

He sees the tribe's relationship with House Tsalaxa as a way of meeting the tribe's needs for various goods without exposing the group unnecessarily to the city-states and villages of the region. He would, however, gladly enter into a relationship with another merchant house if it served his interests. Presently, the availability of goods, combined with a single point of contact, make the House Tsalaxa relationship quite satisfactory.

To this point, the tribe has only maintained alliances with solitary gith tribes that have been displaced by Black-spear. Poortool is now preparing to establish an alliance with Black-spear himself. The mage believes that one day when his small tribe has become a nation, he will need an army to carve out its home.

Neither the elf tribes whom Poortool's gith harass, nor the templars whom he occasionally aids, are aware of the existence of the tribe. The mages generally remain concealed in the raids on the elf tribes. Consequently, the elves simply think the attacks are just the random strikes of roving gith tribes. The templars of the city-states believe that the tips they receive simply come from concerned citizens.

Poortool will strike a deal with anyone if he believes that it will serve the long-term interests of the community. He has hired small bands of mercenaries to find odd items for the tribe or to serve as escorts on Tsalaxa caravans.

## Joining the Tribe

Strangers happening upon the encampment are likely to wake up a distance away with no recollection of having ever seen the place. Poortool has no qualms about killing intruders if necessary. It would not attract undue attention for traveler's to fall prey to gith and disappear in the vicinity of the Blackspine Mountains. Poortool will, however, actually extend hospitality to mages and their traveling companions. His intention, of course, is to find new members for the tribe.

A mage expressing interest in joining the tribe is inter-

viewed by Poortool and Prasad, the tribe's psionist. They use magic and psionics to confirm the veracity of their candidate's answers. The candidate is permitted to remain in the community for a week, enjoying the open company of other mages. The candidate is then taken on a raid. If the mage proves him or herself, he or she is accepted into the tribe. Interestingly, only the gith are permitted to evaluate a candidate's performance on a raid.

Defilers are not permitted to practice in the community but will be shown hospitality.

## Important Tribe Members

### Poortool

Male Half-elf Preserver/Psionist, Neutral Lawful

Armor Class 8 (Dex)	Str 14
Movement 12	Dex 16
Level 10/10	Con 17
Hit Points 54	Int 20
THAC0 16	Wis 17
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 15

Damage/Attack: 1d6 (obsidian headed spear)

Spells: (1st) *color spray, comprehend languages, magic missile, sleep*; (2nd) *blindness, detect psionics, invisibility, web*; (3rd) *fireball, hold person, lightning bolt*; (4th) *dimension door, minor globe of invulnerability*; (5th) *cloudkill, magic jar*

Psionic Summary: PSPs 151; *Disciplines*: clairsentience, psychometabolism, psychoportation, telepathy; *Sciences*: banishment (PS 17; Cost: 30+10/round), life draining (PS 14; Cost: 11+5/round), mindlink (PS 11; Cost: contact+81round), teleport (PS 18; Cost: 10+); *Devotions*: contact (PS 16; Cost: varies+1/round), poison sense (PS 17; Cost: 1), send thoughts (PS 17; Cost: contact+2/round), taste link (PS 13; Cost: contact+4/turn)

Poortool is a tall, bald half-elf with extremely pale skin. He burns easily in the sun and always wears a wide, formless straw hat to shade his face. His taste in clothing is simple



## Raiding Tribes



and he favors a functional leather jerkin that he ties at the waist.

Poortool is in all ways a brutally pragmatic man. At times he exhibits the ruthless efficiency of the templars he once served. He is an excellent negotiator and always honors his agreements. He is dedicated to advancing his own knowledge of magic and psionics, and he believes that his community provides the best chance to accomplish this. While he would never voice such an ambition, he is establishing a power base that he believes may one day rival that of the sorcerer-kings.

He has, over the past few years, developed an increasing interest in the Way of the Unseen. The discipline that he lacked as a child has come in maturity threefold and has been fed by his continuing mastery of his innate psionic ability.

Poortool is not an emotional man. He has a talent for understanding what motivates individuals, and his tolerant manner is borne of political acumen rather than kindness. A natural leader, Poortool is a solid ally and a dangerous enemy.

### Tordos

Male Preserver, Neutral Good

Armor Class 3 (Dex)	Str 14
Movement 12	Dex 16
Level 8	con 15
Hit Points 18	Int 18
THAC0 18	Wis 12
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 13

Damage/Attack: 1d6 (quarterstaff)

Spells: (1st) *audible glamor, change self, dancing fights, detect magic*; (2nd) *flaming sphere, know alignment, stinking cloud*; (3rd) *fireball, lightning bolt, slow*; (4th) *dimension door, fire shield, hallucinatory terrain, polymorph self, wall of fire*

Psionic Summary: PSPs 48; Wild Talent—danger sense (PS Wis-3; Cost—4+3/turn)

Tordos is a middle-aged human with thick black hair and a neat beard. He wears a decorative pillbox hat and can usually be seen carrying a large wooden box on his back like a knapsack. The box has two doors which open like a cupboard and are held fast by a small loop of leather. When open, the box can be seen to house a countless array of tiny drawers, each with a small round handle. The drawers are used to store magic components as well as the herbs and powders with which Tordos experiments.

Tordos was the first mage to join Poortool's tribe and is undeniably the most dedicated. Tordos had been an innkeeper with a large family in Nibenay. He was an initiate of the Veiled Alliance in that city, and he allowed the group to use his inn as a contact point and meeting place for his cell. The pressure of all of his responsibilities had driven him to take a trip to visit a friend in South Ledopolus. Tordos was traveling with a caravan that was attacked by Poortool and his gith. Poortool mentally dominated the mage and used him to complete the violent attack. He then had his gith immobilize Tordos's hands, gag him, and lead him back to the village with a handful of slaves.

Through various magical and psionic means, Poortool completely controlled the older man for several days. Dur-



ing this time Poortool mulled over the best way to turn this puppet into a willing ally. Finally, Poortool took Tordos into a field and prepared to speak to him of his dream. He released his control of Tordos and waited for his reaction. Rather than anger or bitterness, the man seemed filled with almost childish wonder. He marveled at the death that had been caused by his hands in the caravan raid. Total enslavement for Tordos had been an invigorating release. He spoke of the thrill of abdicating all responsibility for his actions. Not since he was a child had he felt the freedom of knowing that someone else had to feed him, to clothe him, to decide how his magic would blind a man.

Poortool began to speak of his vision. "Why let a bunch of old men whom you don't even know decide what spells you should learn? Why take orders from people who hide in the shadows? Why is there no community where a man can choose his own path and where his acquisition of greater ability is limited only by his intelligence?" The discussion soon turned into a fascinating exchange on the techniques of somatic concealment. He enthusiastically agreed to join the young preserver and has proven to be Poortool's right arm. Tordos has never contacted his family, who believes that he was killed in a gith raid. The gentle man now administers the day-to-day affairs and directs the slaves.

## Garreth

Male Human Fighter, Neutral Evil

Armor Class 4 (studded leather+Dex)	Str 17
Movement 12	Dex 18
Level 7	Con 13
Hit Points 60	Int 7
THAC0 12	Wis 9
No. of Attacks 3/2	Cha 12

Damage/Attack: 1d8+3 (enchanted scimitar and Str)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 68; Wild Talent-radial navigation (PS Int, Cost: 4+7/hour)

Garreth is a warrior who joined the tribe as garrison commander after surviving an attack on a client village he was defending. Garreth had been hired as a mercenary to protect the village of the House Inika of Gulg. Poortool's Horde



descended on the community and rounded up the four slaves in the town, one of which was Garreth's. After the raiders left, Garreth set out to find his manservant. While he was uncertain whether the slave would still be alive, he was furious that someone would take his property.

Garreth, a stubborn man, tracked the gith party all the way back to Poortool's encampment. He lay in the scrub and watched the village for several days and was confused by what he saw there: humans and half-elf wizards milling about and casting spells, slaves tending an erdlu herd, gith sentries. On the third evening he resolved to steal into the camp and recapture his slave. The gith alerted Poortool when Garreth tripped an unseen magical alarm. Garreth was taken into custody, but his perseverance and skill had impressed the gith so much that Poortool returned his slave to him and extended the hospitality of the tribe. The difficult man soon found himself agreeing to serve as captain of the village garrison.

Garreth is a large, disagreeable man who wears black studded leather armor and pulls his long black hair back in a knot. His abrasive personality and vindictive manner have won him the comradery of the gith. He is something of a freebooter and is well suited to his task.





# Raiding Tribes





## Chapter 3: Lands of the Ivory Triangle

This chapter describes the major regions of the Ivory Triangle. Although the triangle comprises the area between Gulg, Nibenay, and Salt View, we will examine some of the surrounding regions as well. The chapter details each region's climate, its flora and fauna, its inhabitants, and the special features of the area. The regions are presented starting at the Windbreak Mountains and moving southeastward into the desert. This is followed by examinations of the Crescent Forest, the Verdant Belt, the Great Ivory Plain, the Mekillot Mountains, and finally the Blackspine Mountains.

### The Windbreak Mountains

The Windbreak Mountains mark the northwestern base of the Ivory Triangle region. This high mountain range juts abruptly from the sandy wastes at the edge of the Tablelands on its northwestern (windward) side. These mountains are called the Windbreak Mountains because they protect the Ivory Triangle region from the prevailing west winds blowing off the Tablelands, out to the Sea of Silt.

Travelers approaching the mountains through the sandy wastes first see them as a gray-brown haze on the horizon. Some claim to be able to see the peaks from as far off as Silver Spring. The canyons of the rocky badlands that abut the Windbreak Mountains are neither as long nor as twisted as those found at the edge of the Ringing Mountains. A day's journey through the badlands will usually bring a traveler to the base of the mountains.

Unfortunately, travel from this point forward is virtually impossible. The windward face of the mountains forms a nearly unscalable barrier. It looks more like the edge of some enormous broken mesa than a mountain range. Over the centuries, the wind and sand have worn away at the rock, making it slippery-smooth and relatively free of crevices and protuberances.

The canyon floors on the windward side are littered with rock and dust worn from the mountain face. Most of the pieces are pebbles, but some of the fallen boulders are twice the height of a man. Worse, these canyons are often filled with sand which has drifted into the region over the centuries. It is not uncommon to find sand dunes five times the height of a man piled against the mountainside. Often this sand has been piled to unstable heights by the wind. These drifts will collapse at the slightest disturbance. Some travel-

ers in the region describe hearing a loud rushing sound, like the wind in your ears. If this sound is very loud, flee—you may well be facing a sand slide.

A typical avalanche will not travel far, only perhaps twice the height of the dune. They are dangerous, however, and travelers caught in the dunes are likely to be buried so deep in the sand that their bodies will never be recovered.

Above the dunes, the mountains are dry and stony, with bare, windswept peaks vanishing upward in the haze. These slopes are nearly unscalable. They offer few footholds, and the gusty wind from the west can hurl a climber off the mountains and to his death.

A climber who somehow manages to scale the lower slopes will likely suffer the mysterious ennui which travelers suffer in the Ringing Mountains. The air gets colder, and unless the climber is careful, he or she will just sit down and freeze to death.

Fortunately, there is little need to climb these mountains. Most caravans travel around them to the south, along the Verdant Belt, or on the eastern side through the Blackspine Gap. Moreover, the Bremil Pass lies roughly in the center of the range, and provides access to the rocky badlands along the northern edge of the Crescent Forest. The canyons of this region run east to west, making this a natural alternate route to the city of Nibenay.

On the leeward side (away from the wind), the slopes are much gentler. Long ridges, like buttresses on ancient temples, provide easy climbing to the higher slopes of the mountain. The Crescent Forest extends about halfway up the slopes on the southern half of the range. Above the tree-line the mountains retain much of the barren, windswept condition seen on the windward side of the range. Where the Forest covers the slope, the ground is covered with a loamy soil held to the mountainside by moss and grass.

The northern leg of the mountains does not run directly against the forest. Enough dry, hot wind blows through the Bremil Pass to create a band of rocky badlands north of the forest, and even to thin the forest along its border.

### Flora and Fauna

The Windbreak Mountains appear barren and empty to the casual observer, yet even here life clings to the land. Cacti and desert flowers are scattered throughout the foothills. The serrated-leaf bush called silverknife, common



## Lands of the Ivory Triangle

to badlands all over the Tyr region, can be found in the foothills, as can the tall, thorny gray-yellow bushes known as wanderer's staff. The mountains themselves are almost barren, although here and there small flowers and mosses cling to life even in this dry, windswept place.

The very highest slopes, however, are not dry, but rather seem constantly damp. It is the runoff from these slopes that waters the Crescent Forest and the Verdant Belt. The streams tend to run down only on the leeward side. Wherever these clear and cold mountain streams can be found, there are mountain trees and shrubs in abundance.

The foothills hold a variety of animal life: fire lizards, rasclinn, tagsters, id fiends, cha'thrang, and packs of zhackals can be found here. There are herds of erdland here, but z'tal are the common omnivores at the bottom of the food chain. The more cunning predators of the region can cull out a few of these timid lizards from their herd without starting a stampede.

In the mountains, on the other hand, animal life is much more scarce. There are carnivores, to be sure, although they prey on each other as much as on the erdland herds that wander the middle slopes. Id fiends, mountain lions, and giant scorpions are the most prevalent of the carnivores, but bulettes and even an occasional earth drake may be encountered here. The highest slopes are the province of winged creatures or those with exceptional climbing ability: rocs, aarakocra, dragonnells, and giant spiders.

### Travel

Traveling in the foothills can be done by any normal means. There is a well-marked trail through the Bremil Pass which is wide enough and level enough to permit a mekillot wagon to pass. The rough surrounding terrain, however, makes the Bremil Pass an ideal place to ambush a caravan. For this reason, few merchant houses use this route. Kanks, crodlu, and foot travel provide the best means of finding a direct route through the canyons of these rocky badlands.

Traveling east and west with the direction of the canyons is airy easy, while traveling north and south requires crossing the walls between canyons. A human traveler can go perhaps eight miles in a day east-west through these canyons, by the time you account for following the twisting canyons instead of traveling in a straight line. By comparison, a north-south traveler can go perhaps our miles in that

same time. (Treat east-west travelers as if they were crossing through rocky badlands: 3 movement points per mile. North-south travelers pay a double cost of 6 movement points per mile and travel by mekillot wagon or inix is impossible.)

In the mountains themselves, the best choices are to travel by foot or kank. While crodlu have the stamina to climb the steep slopes, they are not as sure-footed as kanks, particularly if they are carrying kind of burden. Travelers with destinations in the high mountains have at times brought crodlu for pack animals, and have then been forced to slaughter and eat them when the going got too rough. This is one consideration that may make crodlu preferable to kanks for inexperienced travelers.

Travel in the mountains is extremely slow. There are no clear pathways to reach most high destinations. The traveler is relegated to slowly inching across the stone. Crodlu and kank can also maneuver slowly through this region, although there is no way for them to pull a vehicle. An unencumbered human can travel but three miles per day in the mountains, and bad weather or an accident can easily halve that. (Treat travel in the Windbreak Mountains like travel on any other mountain on Athas: 8 movement points per mile.)

The availability of water is much more a question of which side of the range one is on, rather than altitude. The windward side is dry, with very little water available anywhere. A careful search on the leeward side, however, may yield one of a number of clear mountain streams. Food is similarly distributed: plant life is much more abundant on the leeward side, while a traveler on the windward side may end up in battle with a carnivore to determine who shall dine on the other.

### Encounters

The tables below list encounters within the Windbreak Mountains. The monsters listed come from the *Wanderer's Journal*, the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™* DARK SUN™ appendix, the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM* volumes I and II and this book. When encounters should occur should be determined using the Frequency & Chances of Wilderness Encounters Table on the card provided with this set. Two tables are provided for the Windbreak Mountains: one for the foothills and one for the mountain peaks.



# Lands of the Ivory Triangle



## Windbreak Mountains Encounter Table

2d 10 Roll	Creature
2	arakocra
3	djinni
4	dragonnel or horgar
5	ant lion, giant
6	roc
7	mountain lion
8	snake, giant constrictor
7	beetle, fire
10	rat, giant
11	spider, giant
12	slig
13	erdland
14	scorpion, giant
15	banshee, dwarf
16	id fiend
17	rhambusun
18	skeleton
17	bulette
20	drake, air

## Windbreak Foothills Encounter Table

2d 10 Roll	Creature
2	drake, earth
3	spider, crystal
4	beetle, agony
5	id fiend or gal
6	zhackal
7	lizard, fire
8	dwarf, banshee
9	pterrax or silk wyrm
10	jankz (animal, herd)
11	escaped slave
12	b'rohng
13	erdland
14	scrab
15	tagster
16	rasclinn
17	cha'thrang
18	t'chowb
19	nightmare beast
20	cloud ray

## Inhabitants

The Windbreak Mountains are not heavily populated. Few humans and demi-humans bother trying to survive in the barren mountains when the Verdant Belt is just below. Nevertheless, there are a few races which make their homes here.

The arakocra have extensive nesting areas in the higher regions of the mountains. These creatures nest on inaccessible mountain peaks, keeping them safe from all but other winged predators. They have a terrible time with rots, however, which have come to view arakocra nests in the same way a woodpecker views an ant-riddled tree.

The foothills harbor other intelligent creatures. In addition to the small slave bands which hide in the many caves and canyons here, there are three intelligent races which inhabit the rocky barren foothills.

The first are the slig (see the DRAGONLANCE® appendix of the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™*). These hairless humanoids live in small clans of 6-36, generally inhabiting a cave or narrow canyon. They lay traps in nearby canyons by lining pits with sharpened stones and poisonous snakes. These traps are checked once or twice a week, and creatures caught in the traps are hauled up and brought back to the slig home to be eaten.

The slig participate in some trade, particularly with well-guarded merchant caravans and a few of the outlying villages. They purchase weapons and other manufactured goods, trading the hides of fire lizards and other creatures they have captured in their pits. They sell captured humans and demihumans into slavery.

There are also a number of b'rohng living in the canyons. These bestial creatures wander the canyons in small bands of 15-30, attacking any creature they think they can kill. They kill for food, and are just as willing to dine on human or demihuman as erdland. They fight with the slig who occasionally lay traps for the B'rohng and sell the captives as gladiators.

In addition to the roving bands, a few b'rohng who have actually escaped from the gladiatorial pits of Nibenay roam the rocky badlands. While they are no more articulate than their free cousins, and while they do not band together as the other b'rohng do, these creatures can be quite dangerous. Unlike the primitive tools of the b'rohng hunter-gatherer bands, they often have real weapons and armor.

The deadliest of the intelligent races residing in the bad-



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lands are the scrab. These highly intelligent insectoid creatures are not common in the badlands, but they make up for their numbers with their dangerous psionic abilities and their cunning minds. The less intelligent races who live in the badlands avoid the diminutive scrab as much as possible although they do occasionally pay tribute to the creatures. The slig and b'rohlg will stake captured elves to the ground near a scrab nest as a way of appeasing their deadly neighbors. The scrab seem to have an insatiable appetite for the suffering of elves. The slig will always consider an elf's value on the slave market and as a meal before making such a gesture. The b'rohlg, who picked up the habit by watching the Jig, do not really understand this very well and are likely to bring any tall humanoid to the scrabs.

## The Crescent Forest

The Crescent Forest lies along the southeastern edge of the Windbreak Mountains. This thickly forested zone is the most fertile and well-watered area in the Ivory Triangle.

The forest receives more water than any other section of the Ivory Triangle. Most of this is runoff from the Windbreak Mountains; the few clouds which pass through the Ringing Mountains release their rain when they hit this high mountain wall, and the water quickly runs down into the forest. This water is supplemented by a number of natural springs scattered throughout the forest.

The increased water does not make up for the intolerable heat which oppresses even this fertile zone. The forest is a little cooler than the surrounding desert, so that a character in the forest only needs as much water as a character who spends his entire day in the shade (see *Time and Movement* in the *DARK SUN™ Rules Book*.) Moreover, characters in metal armor suffer a -1 penalty to their THAC0 for every two rounds of combat, rather than for each round, and will collapse in a number of rounds equal to three times their Constitution score.

## History

The Crescent Forest maintains a precarious existence huddled against the slopes of the Windbreak Mountains. The forest is thickest in the south and center, and has thinned considerably in the north because of logging in Nibenay, the hot winds blowing through Bremil Pass, and the gradu-

ally decreasing rainfall throughout the Tyr region. Nevertheless, it seems that the forest—at least for now—is holding its own.

At one time, the Crescent Forest may have extended the entire length of the Verdant Belt, but no one can say with any certainty. The recent history of the forest has been the story of the centuries old rivalry between Nibenay and Gulg. The hunting culture of Gulg has put it at odds with Nibenay's heavy logging industry. Currently, the judaga head-hunters of Gulg have managed to keep Nibenay's lumber camps limited to the northern end of the forest. The lumberers worry that unless they are able to range more freely into the south, they may be forced to thin the northern end of the forest to a dangerous degree.

## Flora and Fauna

The plant life of the Crescent Forest has adapted well to this heat. Many of the segmented conifers that are found in the Forest Ridge are also found in the Crescent Forest. However, the enormous palm fronds which blanket the Forest Ridge are much less common here.

The fanna trees are tall and thin, with a dense network of leaves and branches only at the very top to catch the sunlight. The leaves are narrow even when open, and fold to thin slivers in the heat of midday. Beneath the canopy of thin leaves lies a scattered patchwork of smaller brush of a variety of species.

The soil is loamy and soft, and often carpeted with a blue-green moss called berill. This moss retains water and holds the soil together. In open clearings during the season of high sun, berill dries to a thin shell which crackles when stepped upon; in this state it is edible (with a flavor like dried tea leaves).

There are many species of plants found only within the Crescent Forest, so far as anyone of the Tyr region knows.

Travelers can find a number of wild fruits and nuts within the Crescent Forest. Welela plants provide a long, thin, prickly gourd whose meat is flavorful and contains a fair amount of water. Welela plants are cultivated outside of Gulg, but they can also be found throughout the Crescent Forest. Geja, on the other hand, is a soft-skinned fruit which is only ripe for a few days each year, and most of its fruit quickly falls prey to insects. If it can be picked and eaten fresh, however, it is sweet and delicate. Geja can be dried in

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the sun, in much the same way one can dry dates. Geja retains much of its sweetness when dried. The kola nut, which is heavily cultivated by the slaves of Gulg, is ground into a fine powder which, when steeped in water, creates a tasty beverage which stimulates the mind and wards off sleep.

The blue agafari tree is among the most striking of the plants in the Crescent Forest. Its spreading branches provide shade and shelter in the forest; indeed, the palace of the oba Lalali-Puy in Gulg rests upon the limbs of a huge agafari. Its wood is nearly as hard as bronze and makes excellent weapons and shields. In Nibenay, its straight limbs are sharpened and used as lances for the Shadow King's half-giant army. Agafari nuts are edible and its leaves may be used for ticking. The tree is incredibly hardy and its wide trunk can be hollowed out without killing the tree.

The only hazard one might encounter when traveling among agafari trees lies in the bloodvines which live on their bark. These vines are as thick as a man's finger and tightly root themselves to the bark of a tree. Sometimes they can coil themselves around the base of a tree, completely obscuring the trunk. In addition to being a physical nuisance, these vines can inject their roots into anything living which touches them. This causes intense pain and, if the contact is prolonged, even death. The slaves of Gulg spend much of their time keeping the bloodvines off the agafari trees in the city. The bloodvines are so common on agafari trees that some believe they are actually part of the tree, rather than a parasite living on it.

A more aggressive carnivorous vine is the strangling vine, which can be found in the more remote areas of the Crescent Forest. These plants are found draped between several trees, usually over a footpath or trail. The vine lays motionless until suitable prey passes beneath it. The vine then drops to its victim, buries its thorns deep the victim's neck, and then strangles the victim by yanking them off their feet, kicking and screaming. Travelers should also beware of the giant sundew, which is a creature with the appearance of a mound of ropes covered with gray-green tar. This plant can cast its tendrils several feet, burning its victim with an acidic touch. (For more on the strangling vine, see the "Plants, Carnivorous" entry of the DARK SUN™ appendix of the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM*™. The giant sundew is detailed in the "Plants, Carnivorous" entry of the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM II*.)

The forest is also home to the carnivorous plants found across the Tablelands. Blossomkiller, dew fronds, poisonweed, and zombie plants can all be found in the Crescent Forest. While none of these are common, travelers should be aware of the dangers which they present. (For more information on these plants, see the DARK SUN *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM*.)

The fauna of the Crescent Forest is as varied as the plant life. There are a number of large carnivores, including crystal spiders, tembo, zhackal, and even the occasional gaj.

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of the wildlife within the Crescent Forest is the wide variety of birds. There are hundreds of species, each brightly plumed and with its own distinctive call. Some birds in the Crescent Forest, like the yellow-plumed rhoss, can be trained to mimic the speech of humans. The red and green kvale, can actually recall melodies that it hears. Many of the children's songs of Gulg imitate the call and response of the kvale.

The lumber camps of Nibenay have recently reported sighting a behir in the forest. It will not be the first time that the woodcutters have had to deal with a predator whose territory they have encroached upon. Based upon description, it seems that the beast must have made its home in the Crescent Forest for centuries. The woodsmen have heard that behir have devastating psionic abilities. Templars assure them that a behir's low intelligence would not allow it to use such abilities very effectively. Some templars have suggested that the sightings may just be the result of a druid causing trouble.

## Travel

Travel through the Crescent Forest is easiest by foot or by crodlu. Mekillots and inix are unable to penetrate the denser portions of woods, and there are no roads through the forest (except to the logging camps of Nibenay). An unencumbered human can travel eight miles in a day through the Crescent Forest. Crodlu can also be ridden through the forest, but not as rapidly as a man can travel on foot: a normal human riding a crodlu can travel only four miles a day through the Crescent Forest. (Treat travel through the Central Forest as travel in medium forest without trails: 3 movement points per mile.)

Travelers should have no difficulty finding water in the forest, and even a moderate knowledge of the plants in the





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forest or a modicum of hunting skill should assure plenty of food for a small party. Large groups (more than 20 individuals) should bring at least some of their own food, as such a large group can easily scare off all the game in an area.

### Encounters

The table below lists encounters within the Crescent Forest. Monsters listed here come from the *Wanderer's Journal*, the *DARK SUN™ MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM*, *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM I* and *II*, and this book. When encounters should occur should be determined using the Frequency & Chances of Wilderness Encounters table provided on the card in this set.

### Crescent Forest Encounter Table

2d10 Roll	Creature
2	treant, Athasian
3	gaj
4	halfling, renegade
5	ankheg
6	braxat
7	blossomkiller or poisonweed
8	sundew, giant
9	tembo
10	rat, giant
11	wild erdlu or z'tal
12	demihuman
13	beetle, stag
14	bat, giant
15	demihuman
16	wasp, giant
17	dew frond or strangling vine
18	cloud ray or giant dragonfly
19	spider, crystal
20	behir

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## Inhabitants

Few of the intelligent races of Athas make their homes within the Crescent Forest. While the region is well-watered and fertile, the presence of large carnivores and the natural difficulty of the terrain keep most of the peoples of Athas to the more hospitable Verdant Belt.

Two of the city-states of Athas depend on the Crescent Forest for their survival. The city-state of Gulg actually lies within the forest and depends upon the forest to support its hunting and foraging, while much of the economy of Nibenay depends upon the lumber they extract from the northern end of the forest. There is a fair amount of human and demihuman traffic through the forest from these cities. Gulg's slaves range far into the forest to gather nuts and berries. The judaga head-hunters stalk prey throughout the forest and occasionally return to Gulg with the head of a Nibenay woodsman. Parties of half-giants commanded by Nibenay's wife-templars patrol the outer reaches of their city's interests. More than once tensions have increased to the point of war. For more on the relationship between the Crescent Forest and the city states of Gulg and Nibenay, see the booklets on each city-state found in this boxed set.

There is a ruin deep within the the Crescent Forest that is heavily guarded by Nibenay's templars. Well defended trains of slaves carry stone reliefs from the ruin to Naggaramakam, the sorcerer's palace. Travelers who happen upon this excavation are killed on sight.

As mentioned in the Raiding Tribes chapter, there is a small clan of halflings inhabiting the central regions of the forest. While this clan has avoided contact with humans traveling through the wood, it is only a matter of time before they are discovered by the city-state's inhabitants.

The halflings, however, have not gone entirely unnoticed. The druids of the Crescent Forest know of their presence, but since the halflings present no threat to the forest the druids have left them alone. There are roughly 15 druids of 4th to 12th level guarding various features of the Crescent Forest, but unlike their desert counterparts these druids have banded together into a simple hierarchy underneath the druid Brazin (see below). While the druids are not formally obligated to obey Brazin, he acts as a coordinator for their efforts and as a source of information about travelers through the wood. In time of crisis, Brazin becomes an active leader. Unless there is an emergency, however, he lim-

its his efforts to pointing out problems and to advising his fellow druids on how to solve them.

The heart of druidic power in the Crescent Forest is a grove of *trees of life* nestled deep in the forest. This grove predates any living druid, but legends tell of a powerful druid who founded the grove when the Crescent Forest still stretched wide across the Tyr region. In truth the grove was created by Lalali-Puy, the oba of Gulg, as a reservoir of magical power for use by her defilers in an advance on Nibenay. This grove contains 50 of the precious trees and is tended by an Athasian treant (see the Monsters of the Ivory Triangle chapter). This treant was created by the first druid the oba had coerced into tending her grove. The spirit of the land of the water of the aquifer which supports the Crescent Forest was bound into a *tree of life* to create this guardian. The water of the aquifer has been slowly depleting since then. The treant has been living in this grove for over 1,000 years, and it is specifically tasked by the oba with protecting it from any danger that invades. Some druids believe that it is the mystical influence of this treant that has maintained the spring water which allows the forest to survive.

Brazin tells the younger druids that any druid who adds a tree to the grove becomes a spirit of the land upon his or her death; moreover, that druid gains contact with all of the other spirits in the Forest and can call upon them in time of need. Brazin made up the story to inspire his young acolytes, but the tale is gaining credence among the entire druidic community. Of the living druids, only Brazin has added to the grove.

## Brazin

Male Half-Elven Druid of Water and Earth, Neutral

Armor Class 6 (braxat hide armor)	Str 13
Movement 24	Dex 14
Level 13	Con 12
Hit Points 58	Int 17
THAC0 12	Wis 17
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 17

Damage/Attack: 1d6 (quarterstaff)

Spells: (1st) *animal friendship, combine, cure light wounds, detect magic, detect poison, entangle, invisibility to*



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*undead, protection from evil, shillelagh, (2nd) aid, bark-skin, charm person or mammal, dust devil, goodberry, know alignment, withdraw, wyvern watch, (3rd) cure disease, dispel magic, hold animal, meld in to stone, plant growth, spike growth, summon insects, (4th) cure serious wounds, detect lie, reflecting pool, speak with plants, tongues, (6th) animal summoning II, conjure elemental (water), (6th) create tree of life, transport via plants*

Psionic Summary: PSPs 60; Wild Talent-dimensional door (PS 11; Cost: 4+2/round)

Brazin has lived in the Crescent Forest almost continuously for the last 20 years. He has spent much of his time observing the forest and becoming familiar with it. Brazin believes that the forest, unique as it is within the Tyr region, is crucial to the life of the entire region. He has consistently demonstrated his love for the forest.

Shortly after discovering the oba's grove, Brazin was visited by the forest goddess herself. She chose not to kill the druid outright, and in her characteristically cunning manner turned the druid into a puppet of the crown.

Over a series of several discussions which took place over the period of a year, the oba convinced the druid that their goals were complementary. She convinced Brazin that Gulg's interests were best served by maintaining the balance within the forest. The city was a community of hunters and gatherers. Nibenay's logging, however, was a threat to both Gulg's future and to the forest itself. She did not mention that it was Gulg's judaga who had hunted the kirre to extinction within the Crescent Forest.

Brazin found himself forming one of the most unlikely alliances on Athas. Lalali-Puy advised Brazin to form the hierarchy of druids in order to better advance their interests, rather than operating independently and less effectively. She also encouraged him to range more broadly and take a more direct hand in druidic activity across the forest. She sealed their arrangement by insisting that Brazin add a *tree of life* to her grove.

The oba believes that she is creating a specialist military unit that will serve her in a final confrontation with Nibenay and will not compete with her for resources. Brazin's druids can also serve the sorcerer-queen as an intelligence network, providing information to Brazin on Nibenay's activity within the Crescent Forest. The oba will

allow the druids to operate in the forest as long as they continue to serve her interests. She keeps a careful eye to their numbers and their ability to be certain that they do not become unmanageably powerful.

Brazin does not suspect the oba's motives beyond what she has explained to him. However, he cannot bring himself to reveal the truth of his pact with the queen to his fellow druids. To ally with a defiler, let alone the savage oba of Gulg, would be considered sedition by the druids of the Crescent Forest.

Brazin's guarded land is the aquifer that supports life within the Crescent Forest. As a result, his span of control is both broader and more limited than his fellow druids within the forest. Brazin has, at the encouragement of the oba, become a sort of custodian to the entire forest. He gets along well with the other druids, and he has taken a very broad view of his responsibility to the guardian lands. Thus, while one could argue that the Nibenay lumber camps are no threat to the aquifer, Brazin is able to justify his involvement by arguing that the fair use of the aquifer is being denied by overlogging. As a result, he makes the loggers (and the consequences of their actions) his business. Brazin does not realize that much of the difficulty he has had slowing the decline of the aquifer is attributable to the fact that its *spirit of the land* is bound into the Athasian treant, which he reveres. Someday the druid may be forced to kill the treant to save the aquifer.

Brazin spends much of his time in the shape of a rross, as this shape affords him the mobility of a bird but allows him to speak with travelers and fellow druids without changing shape.

## The Verdant Belt

The Verdant Belt is a fertile zone lying between the thick Crescent Forest and the barren Great Ivory Plain. It is filled with springs, grasslands, and groves of trees. It is the Verdant Belt which holds the farms and homesteads of the client villages of Gulg and Nibenay, and which acts as the trade route between these two hostile cities.

The Verdant Belt starts at the northern end of the Crescent Forest, near the city of Nibenay. It continues southwestward past the city of Gulg, then turns west, extending in a gentle curve to the south until it almost reaches the Estuary of the Forked Tongue. For much of its length it is sur-



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rounded by scrub plains, although it is partially bounded on its northern edge by the Crescent Forest and the foothills of the Windbreak Mountains. The narrow band of scrub plains represents a reduction in arable land as one travels further away from the water sources of the Verdant Belt.

## Flora and Fauna

The Verdant Belt is the most lush area of the Tyr Region outside the Crescent Forest and the forests of the Ringing Mountains. The ground is covered with tall, luxuriant grasses, and sections of the region are dotted with smaller wood and thick copses of trees. Water in this region comes from springs as well as streams that carry runoff water through the Crescent Forest and out into the Tablelands. These streams eventually pool into bogs, creating oasislike areas within the Belt.

The vegetation thins somewhat as the Belt leaves the protection of the Windbreak Mountains. The southern half of the Verdant Belt is made up almost entirely of high grassland, well watered by a series of runoff streams from the Windbreak Mountains.

While the number of animal species living in the Verdant Belt does not approach the variety in the Crescent Forest, there are still many animals who reside here. First and most common are the herd animals: erdlu, erdland, and z'tal. Kip are discouraged in the Verdant Belt because their rooting can destroy whole groves of trees.) Large hives of kank are also raised in the Verdant Belt.

There is considerable conflict between the herders (who must move regularly to avoid overgrazing) and the farmers (who are bound to the land for their survival). The herders feel that the farmers are taking too much from the land and that their claim to ownership interferes with the herders' natural rights. The farmers, on the other hand, see the herders as stealing the life from the land without putting anything back. At times these conflicts turn violent, particularly when the herders are not citizens of a city-state, or when herders from one city encounter farmers from another.

Wild herds also wander the Verdant Belt. These herds shy away from the inhabited portions of the Belt, but more than one farmer has had to drive a herd of kip out of his field. Jankz communities also build their underground colonies in the drier portions of the belt, generally far from human habitation.

Despite the herding and the farming, the Verdant Belt is not entirely tame. The bogs at the ends of the runoff streams attract bog waders to the region. Braxat and b'rohng hunt the wandering herds, making little distinction between the wild herds, the tended herds, and the livestock of farmers.

The southernmost portions of the Belt suffer from the depredations of giants from the islands in the Forked Tongue Estuary. Giants wade over to the Belt to hunt and attack caravans. Travelers should beware.

## Travel

The Verdant Belt is one of the most well-traveled portions of the Ivory Triangle region. A major caravan route runs along the length of the Belt from Gulg to the Forked Tongue Estuary, then turns north toward Altaruk. A stretch of this road, beginning just south of the Crescent Forest and running all the way to the Forked Tongue Estuary, is paved with ancient stone bricks, providing a smooth surface for wagons and riders. The stone road, referred to as the Road of Roshott, actually continues all the way into the Estuary and beneath the silt; but caravans turn off a few miles from the shore to avoid attracting the attention of the giants on nearby islands. Even a slow mekillot wagon can travel nearly 18 miles in a day along this fine road. (Treat movement along the caravan road as movement along a road in rolling terrain:  $\frac{1}{2}$  movement points per mile.) No one knows who built this road—it certainly does not seem like a civic project of the oba.

The stone road through the verdant belt is one of the most pleasant caravan journeys in the Tablelands. It enjoys a number of water sources and many villages. The road is patrolled by soldiers from the various merchant houses and less frequently by templar bands from Gulg. However, the region closest to the Estuary is not well protected.

In addition to the main road, there is a network of less well-protected and less well-constructed trails. Trails run from the road to farms and villages. While not made of the superior stone of the main caravan road, traveling along these trails is much faster than going overland. There is a solid network of trails running between Gulg and Nibenay. (Treat movement along the trails as movement along a trail in light woods: 1 movement point per mile.)

The Verdant Belt represents the largest stretch of arable soil in the Tablelands. This natural wealth, as well as its cen-



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tral location, makes the area one of the most attractive routes for traders. The southern end of the belt also offers one of the few verdant regions not under the direct sway of one of the city-states. This makes Fort Kalvis of the merchant house Tsalaxa (see *Dune Trader*, p. 26) the center of trade and security for the homesteaders who have built their lives here.

While templar patrols are fairly heavy in the region between Nibenay and Gulg, protection usually only comes at the request of a client village leader. Templars are often called upon to drive off bandits and elven raiders. The templars are sometimes slow to respond to requests for help, so even the weakest bandits have learned that they may remain a few weeks with impunity before moving on.

For those who must travel to the uncivilized portions of the Belt (or those who wish to avoid the attention of templars and law-abiding citizens), travel overland in the Belt is possible, but comparatively slow. There are many small valleys, groves of trees, streams, and other barriers which prevent easy progress, but it is still much quicker to travel through any portion of the Belt than it would be to cross the

sandy wastes or rocky badlands in the more isolated portions of the Ivory Triangle region. (Treat overland movement through the Verdant Belt as movement through light forest: 2 movement points per mile.)

Throughout the Verdant Belt, water is generally available. Much of it is run into irrigation channels for crops. There is enough water available that a small group of travelers can usually find some water, except in the hottest part of the high sun season when the runoff streams dry up. During this time travelers are advised to bring their own water or be prepared to buy water at local farms.

Food is scarce. Farmers of the region are not tolerant of travelers who pillage their crops and are likely to meet a lone traveler with cudgel and spear. Larger groups will be reported to the templars as bandits. Most farmers are willing to sell a small portion of their crops to travelers, but unless the traveler is a templar or a member of a recognized merchant house, the farmers are likely to be suspicious. Templars have the right to demand food, water, and lodging from any client village or farm. The cost of the goods consumed is just considered a part of the host's normal burden of taxes.

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## Encounters

The encounter tables in the DARK SUN™ appendix of the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™* detail general encounters in the Verdant Belt. However, the specific mix of encounters likely to occur along the road differs considerably from those likely to happen to a wanderer in the wilds of the Verdant Belt. You should use the base Verdant Belt table for encounters on the road while using the Verdant Belt, First Alternative table for encounters in a wilderness setting.

## Inhabitants

The Verdant Belt is one of the most heavily populated regions outside the city-states themselves. Hundreds of farms dot the landscape, all providing their crops to their city-states and merchant caravans. Herders move thousands of animals across the Belt, taking them to feed the people of the cities. Templars march the length and breadth of the Belt, keeping the peace and enforcing the will of their rulers.

The Belt is actually divided into three inhabited regions. The northern portion (running from Nibenay halfway to Gulg) consists of client villages of the Shadow King. The people of these villages are subservient to the templars, who (with such a small area to patrol) are a very visible force among the Nibenay client villages.

This is the most developed of the three regions, with almost no territory remaining that has not been converted into farms or restricted grazeland. Slave escapes in this region are common, and the templars responsible for guarding the roads use trained cilops to hunt down escaped slaves.

The central portion (centered roughly at the city of Gulg) represents the portion controlled by the oba Lalali-Puy. This region is much less thoroughly settled and much of it is still untouched wilderness. The hunters of Gulg can often be encountered stalking the grasslands here. The area is less heavily patrolled by Gulg's templars, in part because the inhabitants are more loyal to the oba than the Shadow King's farmers and herders are to him. Templars do patrol the area, however; here they are viewed less as oppressors than as guardians, but they have much the same authority here as Nibenay's wives do in the most dominated village of his lands.

The border between these first two regions is constantly in dispute. According to Gulg, the border stands at the Verehan Mud Run. Nibenay, however, claims a zone 20 miles wide on the southern side of the river. Farmers in the disputed zone find themselves alternatively beset by templars from Nibenay and templars from Gulg. Each demands a portion of the farm's output, as the farm is presumed to be part of the domains of both sorcerer-kings. The result is inevitable: the farmer is unable to pay one templar or the other. The family is enslaved for failure to pay taxes and a new subject is given responsibility for the farm. This cycle has become so common in this border zone that most farmers consider being sent here punishment for acts of disloyalty to the templars.

The third portion of the Verdant Belt runs from the edge of Gulg's area of control, down to the Forked Tongue Estuary. This area is outside the control of the city-states and is inhabited by slave tribes, raiders, nomads, and small frontier villages. The communities here do not benefit from the protection extended to the client villages of the city-states and merchant houses. For this reason, each community must provide for its own security. This can either take the form of a citizen's militia or a hired band of mercenaries. Some bandits hire themselves out to villages to provide protection one week and then loot the village the next. Trustworthy mercenaries are a precious commodity in the southern end of the Verdant Belt. Communities are willing to pay well for security. Some villages demand that such mercenaries make a long term investment in the community by taking a mate in the village.

Fort Kalvis of House Tsalaxa is the most secure site in the southern end of the Verdant Belt. Surrounding communities often take refuge in the shelter of the fortress in times of difficulty. While not humanitarian by any means, House Tsalaxa recognizes that the key to power in any relationship is dependency, and they are more than happy to let the villages depend upon them for security. This has already paid off in favorable trade arrangements with the small towns.

All three regions of the Belt suffer from the attacks of raiders. The fertile lands provide many havens for raiders and ex-slaves. Templars and bounty hunters are constantly searching for renegades throughout these lands. A number of smaller slave tribes also wander this area, but the templar patrols are aggressive enough (and the slave tribes poorly enough led) that most fleeing slaves are recaptured within a





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matter of weeks.

In addition to human raiders, hunting bands of thri-kreen also wander this area. These hunters are so efficient, however, that even at a distance they trouble the sorcerings. The oba Lalali-Puy has put up a bounty of 100 cp for the heads of thri-kreen raiders. The hunters of Gulg relish the challenge of tracking the mantis warriors and this new policy has led to the deaths of not a few citizen thri-kreen whose heads have been turned in for ransom. The few thri-kreen have protested this policy to the templars, but to no avail.

## Battlefields

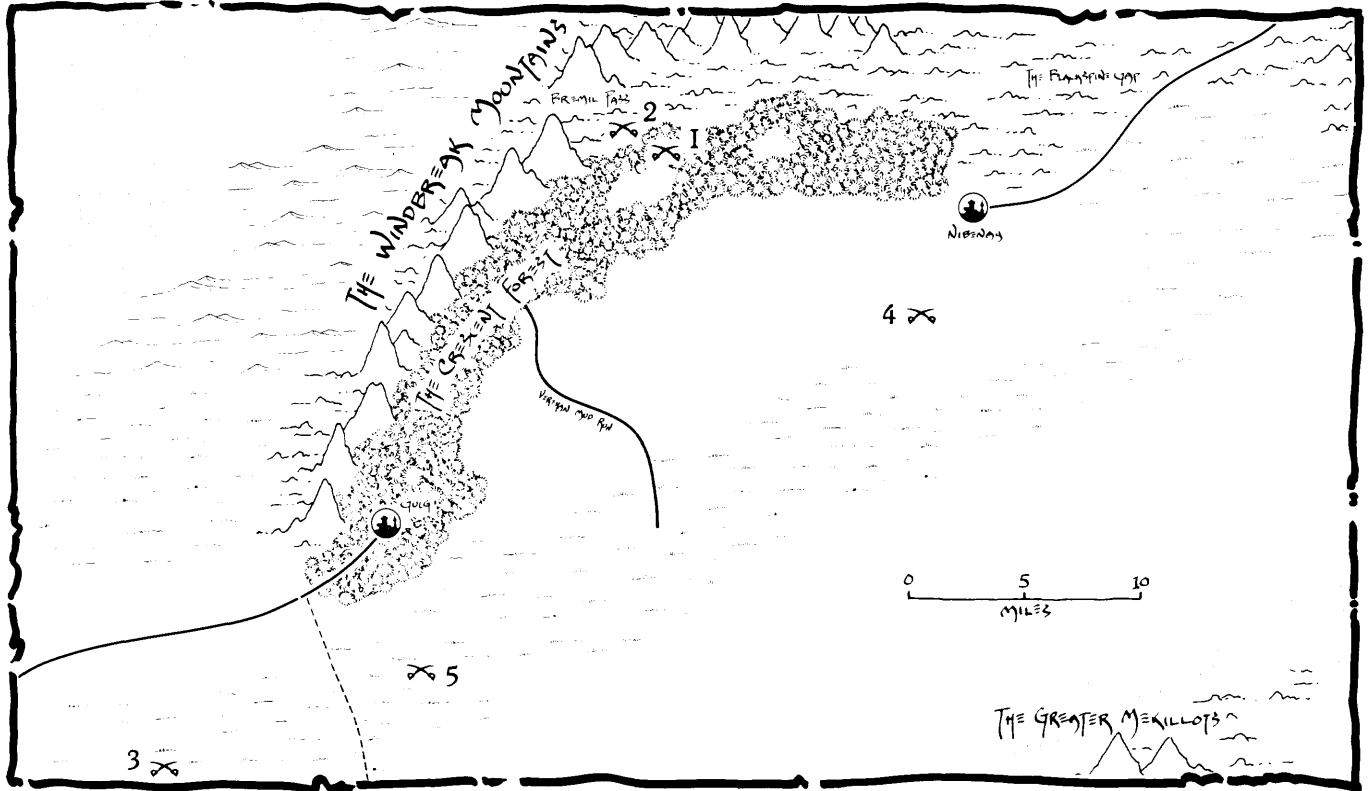
The history of the Verdant Belt is not a peaceful one. There have been a number of battles between the forces of Gulg and Nibenay. The centuries-old conflict between the hunting culture of Gulg and the expansive lumber industry in Nibenay has set the two cities at odds over the precious resources of the Crescent Forest. Both have had their share of victories, and the rivalry between the two city-states con-

tinues to this day. This section lists a few of the major battles that have occurred in recent history and shows where they occurred on the map of the region.

### 1. The Battle of Red Moon Hunt— Year Unknown

In Nibenay this incident is referred to as the Lumbercamp Massacre. The story may or may not be apocryphal, but the tale is able to inflame the righteous indignation of the citizens in both cities. According to the tale, Gulg was celebrating a traditional rite of the Red Moon Hunt. On these nights, Gulg's prisons are emptied into the Crescent Forest. Would-be nobles give chase to the fugitives, and those returning with the heads of their quarry are admitted into the ranks of the nobility. Prisoners who survive the night are considered free.

On such a night, a young hunter tracked his prey into the camp of some Nibenay woodsmen. The young man took the heads of six woodcutters and a fugitive from Gulg. One woodsman escaped to alert Nibenay's templars, who assem-



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bled squads of half-giants and spellcasters and swept deep into the forest. The following morning, only 10 of the 30 hunters returned alive. In the version told in Gulg, Gab-al, a young thief who had been released into the forest as a fugitive the night before, returned to the bramble wall of the forest city bearing the heads of two of Nibenay's wives on a spear. The oba granted him his freedom and elevated him to the circle of nobility.

In Nibenay, the hero of the story is a young templar named Althera. According to their version, the young woman rallied the fleeing prisoners of Gulg to capture the oba's hunters. They say that with their help she caught all 30. She then turned 20 over to the prisoners to be killed and told the remaining 10 to return to Gulg and tell the oba what they had seen.

## 2. The Clearing War—Year of Dragon's Slumber, 184th King's Age

Historically, the armies of the oba fought at tremendous advantage in the Crescent Forest while the Shadow King's army have demonstrated a mastery of combat in the open fields of the Verdant Belt. One battle did, however, result in a devastating victory for Nibenay deep within the Crescent Forest.

A forester from Nibenay had uncovered a buried ruin in the forest and led the Shadow King's templars to the site. The templars began an excavation of the site, but began to suffer from intermittent attacks by Gulg's hunters. The king sent a force of 1,500 soldiers to secure the site and protect his servants from further attack. The huge force which the king had sent raised the oba's curiosity about their activity in the forest. The soldiers of Nibenay woke one morning to find themselves surrounded by 5,000 warriors from Gulg. The commander of the oba's army announced that she would extend safe passage to Nibenay's citizens if they left the site immediately. After several hours a reply of acceptance came and the forces of Nibenay prepared to return to their city. The line of soldiers left the protection of the encampment and were still passing through the enemy line when the Gulg warriors let loose their spears. Only 150 footmen returned to Nibenay to report the slaughter.

The Shadow King himself emerged from his palace to lead an army of 2,000 soldiers and templars into the woods. By the break of dawn 3,000 of Gulg's hunters lay dead in the

ruins. Nibenay then raised the dead warriors of Gulg and led the undead force against the survivors of the oba's army. The hunters fled back to Gulg. The devastation wrought by the defiling magic of the Shadow King destroyed a swath of forest more than a mile across. This clearing remained ashen for centuries and has only in the past few decades begun to take seed. It is not known if anything of value was excavated from the ruin, but the site was abandoned by Nibenay's templars several months after the battle.

## 3. Battle of the Stones— Year of the Mountain's Contemplation, 189th King's Age

This battle began with a raid by two dozen giants from the Estuary of the Forked Tongue upon some of the villages and herders in the southern portion of the Verdant Belt. The people called upon Gulg to defend them, and the oba, seeing a chance to increase her influence in the south, sent a body of 200 troops including a force of skilled judaga) to defend the southern farms. These forces had no experience fighting giants and had been trained to combat the armies of Nibenay.

The bestial creatures which had been raiding the southern farms were made up of unorganized clans from the islands in the estuary. Equal numbers of powerful beast-headed giants and their humanoid cousins crossed the silt to meet the forces of Gulg. The giants did not fight using the structured formations of the Nibenay army, but instead literally waded into the Gulg forces (the tallest of which barely reached their knees) and flailed about with their huge clubs, each blow killing two or three Gulg soldiers. The judaga were virtually helpless in the open fields where the army met the giants, their naturally stealthy attacks and movement being useless in the light of day, and within an hour half of the original Gulg force lay on the battlefield. The army retreated having slain only two of the invading giants.

The giants could have continued forward unchecked, as there was no way for organized word to get back to Gulg about the rout before the giants themselves would have arrived. For whatever reason, however, the giants quickly tired of raiding and waded back to their islands. While Gulg's military was not seriously damaged by such a small loss of troops, their prestige in the south was badly diminished.



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### 4. The Greshak Uprising—Year of Ral's Reverance, 189th King's Age

This battle began as a slave uprising in the farming village of Greshak, on the eastern border of the lands claimed by Nibenay. The templars moved in quickly to try to douse the fires of rebellion, but before the uprising could be suppressed it had spread to a half-dozen villages. Nearly 200 slaves had to be executed to restore order, and to this day the region is a hotbed of dissidence inside Nibenay's borders.

### 5. The Fence War—Year of Priest's Fury, 190th King's Age

This recent regional conflict was entirely within the confines of Gulg, and it reflects a tension between herders and farmers in the Verdant Belt that continues to this day.

The conflict began when herders striving to move their beasts to new grazing lands began pulling up farm fences to allow their herds to move more easily. Farmers, enraged at the destruction of their property, began arming themselves and their slaves to defend their fields.

A number of minor conflicts ended in the deaths of herders in some instances, farmers in others. Tensions increased and the local templars were not able to settle the matter. The templars responsible for collecting taxes from the farmers considered the herders to be interfering with the legitimate business of the city-state. Templars assigned to the herders felt the same way about the farmers. Before long, templars were embroiled on both sides of the conflict, and the sound of templar magic was added to the clash of bone weapons in the conflict.

In one of her few trips outside her palace, the oba Lalali-Puy intervened directly in the Fence War. She cut off all magic from templars embroiled in either side, and ordered all concerned to return to their tasks. She directed the confiscation of certain farms and herds she judged to have been especially culpable in the matter. She also enslaved those responsible for the violence. In her wisdom, the confiscated farms were then transformed into a herding corridor, allowing the herders to pass through the farming region. The oba ordered that no farm be built to block the herder's path, and that the herders never again move their herds across the farms.

The oba's draconian solution removed the immediate

need for violence, but satisfied neither side. Both groups considered themselves to have been wrongfully judged at fault. Tensions remain high in the region, and it may only be a matter of time before violence breaks out again.

## The Great Ivory Plain

Ancient dwarven sagas tell of the heroes Jo'orsh and Sa'ram traveling past the Great Lake of Salt in the region of what is today the Great Ivory Plain. While the claim may seem preposterous, the complete absence of ancient structures across the empty plain may lend some credence to the story.

The Great Ivory Plain is an enormous salt flat, one of the largest terrain features in the Tyr region. Extending from the dwarven village of North Ledopolus in the south to the Blackspine Mountains in the north, the Plain extends some 110 miles in its longest axis. At its narrowest point (from the foothills of the Mekillot Mountains to the edge of the silt estuaries near the ruined city of Bodach) it is a mere five miles across.

Travelers who have never seen the Plain may find its sheer size hard to imagine. It is said that the Dragon's Bowl could be placed inside the southern lobe of the Plain without touching its edge at any point. A journey from North Ledopolus to Nibenay (which runs the length of the Plain) is the same distance as a trip from Nibenay to Raam, Urik to Raam, or from Tyr to the oasis of Grak's Pool.

The region is characterized by the single unbroken plain of salt, sand, and silt which gives the area its name. Approaching the Plain, travelers first notice the blinding distant glare of the sun reflecting off the salt flat. They will then notice a sudden depletion in the scrub. Ahead, the dirt gives way to a featureless white plain virtually devoid of plant life. Nowhere in the Tyr region is there a stretch of land as lifeless and harsh as the Great Ivory Plain.

Most of the Plain is a hard crust of sand and silt with just enough salt to prevent virtually anything from growing. It is difficult to dig through this crust, but occasionally tenacious dwarves have managed to drill a deep well, only to find the water brackish and undrinkable. No oasis offers water to the thirsty traveler in the Great Ivory Plain and no date grove offers food. It is said that the glare from the salt flats will blind a traveler in a matter of hours, and that those who die here do not decay, but instead shrivel and mummify,



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perfectly preserved by the salt.

The region is not totally featureless, however. Ridges and strangely shaped rock formations dot the landscape. Some of these take the rough form of huge figures, and the nomads of the Plain believe it to be an ancient race of giants magically transformed to salt and stone. In the deepest portion of the Plain, these formations are huge, sometimes extending 40 feet into the air and 30 to 50 feet on a side. Some contend that these are the buildings of this ancient kingdom, transformed to stone along with the people.

There are also occasional stony regions where rocks extend up through the sand crust, exposed to the constant wind of the Plain. These outcroppings often mark water sources (see *Inhabitants*, below), and can also provide safe havens for travelers, offering both safety from the salt zombies (see below and shade from the merciless sun. They are not common, however, and more than one traveler across the plain has had to spend a day exposed.

The Great Ivory Plain is among the most inhospitable areas of the Tyr region. There is almost no rainfall, and what little falls rapidly seeps through the ground or evaporates.

## Flora and Fauna

As might well be understood, this barren landscape supports little life. The Great Ivory Plain is virtually devoid of plant life, although few in cacti struggle to survive, clinging to stony outcroppings out of reach of the moisture-leeching salt. Insects of all sizes (from tiny sand mites to giant ants, hornets, and huge scorpions) can be found in the Plain; many of these burrow deep under the salt to find moisture or range out into the more fertile regions. The cilops, the bizarre hunter insect that is often used by templars to track fugitives, is native to the Great Ivory Plain. Lizards (including id fiends and basilisks) also survive here, dining on the giant insects or on the small snakes found in the rocks. Earth drakes can occasionally be mistaken for rock outcroppings in this area. These patient creatures may wait many days for a meal, and they are a particular danger to travelers who use the rocks as safe havens during the day.

Almost no warm-blooded creatures can be found in the central portions of the Plain. There is not enough life to support such creatures, as they must feed too frequently to





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survive in this barren land. At the edges, however, one can find the occasional b'rohg or erdland herd. Most of these creatures do not survive in the Great Ivory Plain for long, and they either return to more fertile climes or die in the heat of midday.

Another hazard of travel on the salt flats are the flying predators. Such wide and clear lines of sight usually afford travelers a chance to evade many earth bound carnivores. Flying creatures who make their homes well beyond the borders of the salt flats can spot a group of travelers from miles away and descend for the kill. The salt flats offer few places to hide.

Wyverns, giant wasps, and even cloud rays will fly out across the Great Ivory Plain in search of prey. Groups traveling near the inland silt basins around Bodach should also keep an eye out for razorwings. They present a problem indeed.

Truly, the most fearsome creatures on the Great Ivory Plain are the megapedes. These 150-foot-long creatures often burrow through the ground, only surfacing to feed on unwary travelers. When close to the surface, a megapede's path can be detected by the splintering and cracking of the salt cover.

Oftentimes one will approach a victim out in the open and begin its attack by unleashing its powerful psionic abilities. In the face of this beast's fierce claws and poisonous bite, most merchant caravans will abandon their cargo and return for the salvage later, if they survive.

One last class of creature that wanders the Ivory Plain deserves special mention. The Ivory Plain is home to unintelligent undead—skeletons, zombies, animated animal skeletons, monster skeletons, and zombies created from b'rohg and even giants. These creatures wander the Plain, attacking any living creature.

Some believe that these creatures wandered here from the ruins of Bodach, while the nomads believe that those who die of thirst in the Great Ivory Plain return as zombies, adding to the undead population of the region. These salt zombies are described more completely in Chapter 4: Monsters of the Ivory Triangle.

Zombies in the Great Ivory Plain survive much longer than those in other parts of Athas. Their flesh mummifies rather than rotting, extending their useful life but making it very difficult to tell how old these particular zombies really are.

### Travel

The Great Ivory Plain is not a very hospitable region in which to travel. The heat of the sun is reflected off of the white salt, making this one of the hottest zones in the Tyr region. Moreover, the salt leeches moisture out of everything in the area, so travelers must consume more water than usual. You should double water requirements for animals and characters. (See Dehydration in the Time and Movement section of the DARK SUN™ Rules Book.) This unbearable heat makes traveling at night the preferred mode of travel within the region.

As with other terrain, however, traveling at night requires that some form of shelter be adopted during the day. Rock outcroppings are the best shelter, as they both protect the character from the sun and raise him above the level of the biting, dying sand. Tents, particularly those with full floors, may also be used, but they are avoided by the nomads, who believe that the rhythmic sounds of driving a tent spike attracts predators.

On the other hand, travel across the Great Ivory Plain is swift. The salt can generally support any type of transportation, from foot to mekillot wagon. Moreover, the plains are so smooth that there is little need to detour around terrain features, nor to slow progress for hills and slopes. A human can travel 24 miles in a night while a mekillot wagon can achieve 3 miles per day. (Treat overland movement across the Great Ivory Plain as travel over salt flats: 1 movement point per mile.)

Another advantage to traveling across the Great Ivory Plain is the wide open space. It is highly unlikely that any travelers will be surprised by marauding predators during the day. Except for the distorting shimmer of the heat in the air, there is virtually nothing to block the limits of vision.

The most common mode of travel is kank, as the hardy beasts can survive for a few days without food or water, and at the speed they are able to achieve on the salt flats, that is usually enough to make the journey. (A kank pushed to triple its normal movement rate can make a 45 mile journey in a single night and can run the length of the Great Ivory Plain in two nights.) Inix require too much forage to make any but the shortest trips across the Plain. Mekillot are slow enough and stubborn enough that they expose travelers to too much danger in crossing the plain. Some caravans drive mekillot wagons across the plain, but these are generally

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shorter journeys. One route for mekillot wagons runs east from Nibenay to Fort Inix; this exposes the mekillots to only one day's travel across the plain, but brings caravans dangerously close to the gith horde of the Blackspine Mountains.

Perhaps the most unusual form of vehicle in the Great Ivory Plain is the dwarven *wind wagon*, a small wagon with large wheels and a tarpaulin attached to a vertical spar, to act as a sail. These bizarre vehicles use the power of the wind to move them across the broad flat plain, requiring neither mekillot nor inix. They move most swiftly with the wind, but are able to travel in almost any direction (save directly into the wind) by skillful manipulation of the wagon's sail. Given the normal wind speed in the Great Ivory Plain, a wind wagon with a tail wind can travel as fast as a man can run. Moreover, the wind wagon can run night and day without stopping, although the driver must rest. These vehicles are not popular, as they leave the traveler to the mercy of the wind; one or two calm days and the wind wagon may well run out of food and water. Nevertheless, a few hardy explorers use them regularly to shorten journeys across the Plain and to move certain cargo too swiftly to be caught by desert raiders. See the *wind wagon driving* proficiency below for more information.

Getting water in the Great Ivory Plain is virtually impossible. There are no open bodies of water within the Plain, and any surface groundwater is brackish and undrinkable, but pockets of drinkable water can be found on rock outcroppings. Nomads carry long hollow poles which they use to drive through the salt cake into the water below; the water is then drawn up (as through a straw) and drunk. Locating such a water pocket requires a successful *survival (salt flats)* proficiency check and a roll of 5 or less on percentile dice.

Food is less difficult to find if you can hunt, although few of the creatures which inhabit the Great Ivory Plain are edible. A lone traveler may be able to make a meal of cacti and snake, but these meager resources are unable to support a group of any size. Travelers in the Great Ivory Plain are advised to bring an adequate food supply; kank honey is recommended, as it provides not only food but water as well. (This is another reason that kanks are preferred as mounts in this terrain.)

One hazard that can interfere with travel in the Great Ivory Plain is the salt storms which blast across the barren ground. These storms carry particles of salt encrusted sand that burn the skin. The storms generally last 2d12 hours

and will cause 1d6 damage to travelers for each hour that they are exposed to the storm. Shelter can be taken at rock outcroppings, but once a storm begins, the likelihood of finding one drops to 10% per hour spent searching because of severely reduced visibility.

## Wind Wagon Driving Proficiency

Dexterity -3  
2 slots

Those with this proficiency have mastered the difficult skill of driving the unstable and often dangerous dwarven wind wagons of the Great Ivory Plain. Any nondwarf acquiring this ability must dedicate four nonweapon proficiency slots to the skill. Characters with this proficiency can drive the wagon on salt flats in a favorable wind. A successful proficiency check will allow a character to drive the wind wagon in a gale or adverse winds. A wind wagon may be driven only in salt flats.

Each day of driving, the character must make a successful wind wagon proficiency check. Failure indicates that the wagon has been driven into terrain too rough to allow further wind travel and must be pushed to flat plains again (at a cost of half the wagon's movement for that day).

Treat a wind wagon as a mount with 24 movement. However, they are subject to the sailing movement modifiers of the Time and Movement section of the *DMG*. Use the Spring/Fall Weather Conditions Table to determine the wind conditions each day. Should a seaworthiness check be called for by a particular wind condition, the driver of the wind wagon must make a wind wagon driving proficiency check to avoid turning over the wagon.

## Encounters

There are two encounter tables provided in the *DARK SUN™ MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™* for salt flats. Use the primary table (or the one below) when characters are traveling in the Great Ivory Plain, reserving the alternate table for encounters either on the edge of the Plain or in the smaller salt flats on the map of the Tyr region.

The next table lists encounters within the Great Ivory Plain. Monsters listed come from the *Wanderer's Journal*, the





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DARK SUN™ MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™, the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM I and II, and this book. When encounters should occur should be determined using the Frequency & Chances of Wilderness Encounters table in the DMG.

### Great Ivory Plain Encounters Table

2d10 Roll	Creature
2	megapede
3	dune runner
4	wasp, giant
5	salt storm
6	skeleton, monster
7	basilisk, lesser
8	zombie, salt
9	skeleton, common or monster
10	spider, huge
11	horax
12	zombie
13	scorpion, giant
14	hornet, giant
15	bat, giant
16	cilops
17	behir
18	lizard, fire
17	drake, earth
20	dune trapper

### Inhabitants

The Great Ivory Plain is among the least populated portions of the Tyr region, much less the Ivory Triangle. Few beings are hardy enough or foolish enough to try to survive here for more than a few days. Escaped slaves who flee into this barren wasteland either die, are recaptured, or (if they are lucky) make their way to one of the slave tribes which wander the lands on the far side of the Plain.

Nevertheless, there are some more or less permanent residents of the region. Certain nomadic raiding tribes have bases deep within the Great Ivory Plain, supported by kank hives maintained in the stony barrens of the Mekillot Mountains. These tribes use the Great Ivory Plain's impassibility as cover for their activities, trusting the isolation of the region to protect them from reprisals by merchant

houses and templars.

There are also intelligent creatures found in the Great Ivory Plain who are not a regular part of Athasian society. Packs of thri-kreen range across the salt flats in search of prey. Solitary t'chowb can occasionally be encountered. These brutal little creatures often retreat here after having successfully drained the intelligence of their victims. Travelers may also occasionally also run into a solitary tohr-kreen. These thoughtful mantis nobles can be found ranging far into the uninhabited recesses of the wastelands. While somewhat reserved, these powerful but gentle creatures seem to have an insatiable thirst for knowledge.

There is one individual who makes his home at the edge of the Great Ivory Plain who may be of particular interest to travelers.

### The Poisoner's Pit

#### Esreva's Journal

*The single most frightening experience that I endured while in the service of my master had to be our journey to the poisoner Wheelock. My master had been assigned the mission of retrieving an antidote for a poison that had begun to appear on weapons of mercenaries from Nibenay. If the Shadow King was playing with poison, our oba planned to be prepared. While she gives many of the templars the power to make a poisoned man well again, it is helpful if the young hunters do not have to fear such attacks.*

*When the other slaves heard that I was to travel with my master in search of the poisoner Wheelock, many shook their heads and said goodbye to me as if it were our last farewell. Some of the slaves claimed that Wheelock was a man so riddled with poison that he walked on the threshold between life and death. They claimed that he was an undead ghoul of extraordinary cunning who always got the better end of any bargain, and that those who conducted business with him often wound up dead.*

*Our journey took us across the most remote reaches of the southern end of the Great Ivory Plain. We found an earthen mound with a tall pole rising from it. Crowning the pole we saw a human skull with the jaw knotted shut with leather thongs. Climbing the mound allowed us to*

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see another such pole at the limits of our vision. We followed this trail to a small stone portal next to brackish pond. The doorway led down beneath the earth into the darkness.

It was there that we met Wheelock. While I cannot say whether the man is living or dead, the stories are true that he seems to tread the border between the two. He wore a thick black robe that seemed to swallow his diminutive frame. The skin of his bald head and arms were wrapped with leather thongs—a few of which were knotted to tiny bells. They created a decorative lattice of thin lines across his skull. His complexion was chalky white and his lips had a bluish tint. His eyes were dull and milky and seemed unable to focus on anything. He sat with his head tilted to one side, almost as if he were listening to something, even when no one was talking.

He rarely responded to my master directly, but waited instead for his own assistant to repeat the question to him. He would then answer slowly in a weak and gentle voice. When my master showed him one of the poisoned daggers which he had brought with him, the decrepit creature ran the blade along his lizardlike tongue. He paused a moment as if listening again, and then identified all of the components poison. It was, he told us, extremely lethal.

Wheelock's young assistant provided my master with a small box containing a powder, that when administered properly would negate the effects of the poison. He then extended an invitation for us to spend the night in the shelter of their home. My master paid the young man for the package, thanked him, and we left. I believe that he was as glad as I to quit that place.

Wheelock is, perhaps, the greatest poisoner of the Tablelands. He makes his home at the oasis 35 miles northeast of North Ledopolus, on the edge of the Great Ivory Plain. He usually remains at home, but he does make occasional excursions to collect new strains of poisonous plants. Whenever he travels abroad, he always makes the journey in a brightly colored wagon drawn by six muls. The wagon has small curtained windows and an sloping roof.

When at home, audiences are received by his assistant Toth, who is a cleric of the earth. Toth is a simple and polite young man who conducts Wheelock's business affairs and determines who will gain access to the poisoner. True to the

chilling neutrality of Athasian bards, Wheelock does not discriminate among his clientele in terms the merit of their various causes. He does evaluate clients in terms of urgency and sheer desperation. He may at times end up selling one man a poison and his intended victim the antidote.

He has little use for gold, but he will charge exorbitant fees just to measure the desperation of an individual. Other times he will require a service be completed before providing a poison. He usually demands whatever the client has less of, whether it be time or money. Sometimes, if he takes a fancy to a person or dilemma, he will provide his services for free or for a small gift.

Wheelock always interprets people's requests *literally*—this sometimes ends up killing them.

## Wheelock

Male Human Bard, Neutral

Armor Class 8 (heavy robe)	Str 17
Movement 6	Dex 12
Level 16	Con 20
Hit Points 72	Int 17
THAC0 13	Wis 12
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 15

Damage/Attack: 1d6+1 (wrist razor with Type E poison, save at -4)

Psionic Summary: Wheelock can no longer use his wild talent. (See below for psionic immunities.)

Wheelock has, over the years, consumed so much poison that he is now completely immune to its effect. He can identify any poison by taste. There is a 70% chance that he can recreate any poison in his laboratory and an equal chance that he can create an antidote. In circumstances where he does not have the materials for such a task, he will be able to identify the components that he requires. If the materials he requests are brought to him, he will be able to produce the desired poison or antidote. This can sometimes involve extraordinary journeys to find the unusual items that he requires.

Due to the deterioration of his nervous system, Wheelock only takes half damage from any physical attack. A



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*neutralize poison* or *slow poison* spell will put him into system shock and leave him unconscious for 2d12 days.

Another peculiar side effect of his neurological damage is his complete immunity to telepathy. Wheelock can neither be contacted nor attacked telepathically. This protects the poisoner from adversaries, but it also requires friends to actually travel to see him if they need to communicate.

It is not clear how old Wheelock is, but the poisons coursing through his veins seem to have contributed to his longevity.

Wheelock has a number of odd idiosyncracies. He will not, for example, directly respond to questions. He will instead wait until Toth, his companion, repeats the question to him. This is because Wheelock hears voices. It is not clear whether this is some sort of psionic residue, voices from the lower planes, or simply the result of his deteriorating nervous system. He has, however, become so used to the constant whispering, that he ignores anyone who speaks to him. He makes an exception to this habit in the case of females.

Wheelock seems to have a gentle fondness for women, although he does not always seem to be able to distinguish between them. He will often seem to become lucid and begin to pepper a woman with questions just to listen to her voice. It seems to remind him of someone.

The poisoner has an insatiable appetite for riddles. His lair is often protected by riddles and he enjoys playing mental games. He has been known to forgo payment for his services when a client petitions him with a challenging riddle. He has also waived fees when particularly impressed with an individual's ability to solve a puzzle.

### Toth

Male Human Cleric of Earth, Neutral Good

Armor Class 6 (hide armor)	Str 14
Movement 12	Dex 12
Level 8	Con 13
Hit Points 31	Int 14
THAC0 16	Wis 17
No. of Attacks 1	Cha 12

Damage/Attack: 1d8-1 (obsidian bastard sword)

Psionic Summary: PSPs 40; Wild Talent—dimensional door (PS Con -1; Cost: 4+2/round)

Spells: (1st) *create water, detect poison, purify food and drink*; (2nd) *charm person, hold person, know alignment*; (3rd) *call lightning, meld into stone, prayer*; (4th) none. *Spells above 3rd level must be from the sphere of earth. There are no 4th-level spells from this sphere.*

Toth is Wheelock's personal assistant. He is deeply devoted to the poisoner and has taken care of him as the years of direct exposure to poison have reduced Wheelock's ability to take care of himself. Toth is kindhearted and nonjudgmental by nature. He has a gentle demeanor. He is scrupulously honest in business and extremely protective of Wheelock. He enjoys company, but he is not a very talkative young man.

Toth grew up in the village of Hadrass, at the nearby oasis. His father was an herbalist and farmer who grew a variety of odd plants for Wheelock. The boy met the poisoner one day while running an errand for his father. He had dropped off small bundles outside the poisoner's lair many times and had never caught sight of its inhabitant.

This day, he saw a frail figure collapsed on the ground, bleeding. The young boy drew upon the power of the earth to mend the man's wound and carried him inside to recover. Wheelock had actually inflicted the wound himself in an effort to measure the extent of his worsening neurological damage. The boy found the poisoner's quarters in disarray. He straightened up the rooms as he nursed the strange man back to health. While he went through the poisoner's effects, he uncovered some information that shed light on his patient's bizarre condition. Whatever he discovered there, together with his conversations with the half-lucid man, led him to feel that Wheelock needed him.

After the poisoner recovered, Toth continued to visit him whenever he had the chance. He spent long afternoons puzzling over one of the bard's riddles or listening to fascinating stories about the peculiar weapons that hung on the wall.

Toth eventually moved to North Ledopolus to continue his clerical studies. It was there that he met and married his wife Janelle, a barmaid. The marriage was difficult for Toth, as his wife had a tendency to take an interest in travelers who passed through the inn where she worked. Several years



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passed before Toth's father died and he returned home to take care of the arrangements. He stopped to visit Wheelock and found the poisoner's condition had worsened. The young cleric resolved to stay with his old friend and sent word to his wife in North Ledopolus. Toth now sends money to the dwarven village where Janelle still lives, enjoying the company of travelers.

## The Poisoner's Pit Map

1) **Entrance.** This entryway is a 10-foot-square room surrounded by 5-foot-thick stone walls. Outside the entrance is a small pond tainted with slow acting poison (treat as Type G, Ingested, 2-12 hours, Strength: 20/10). The absence of algae and the bones of animals on the floor of the pool usually deter travelers from drinking from it. The entryway is usually blocked with an enormous stone slab. Wheelock sometimes has the door warded with a riddle.

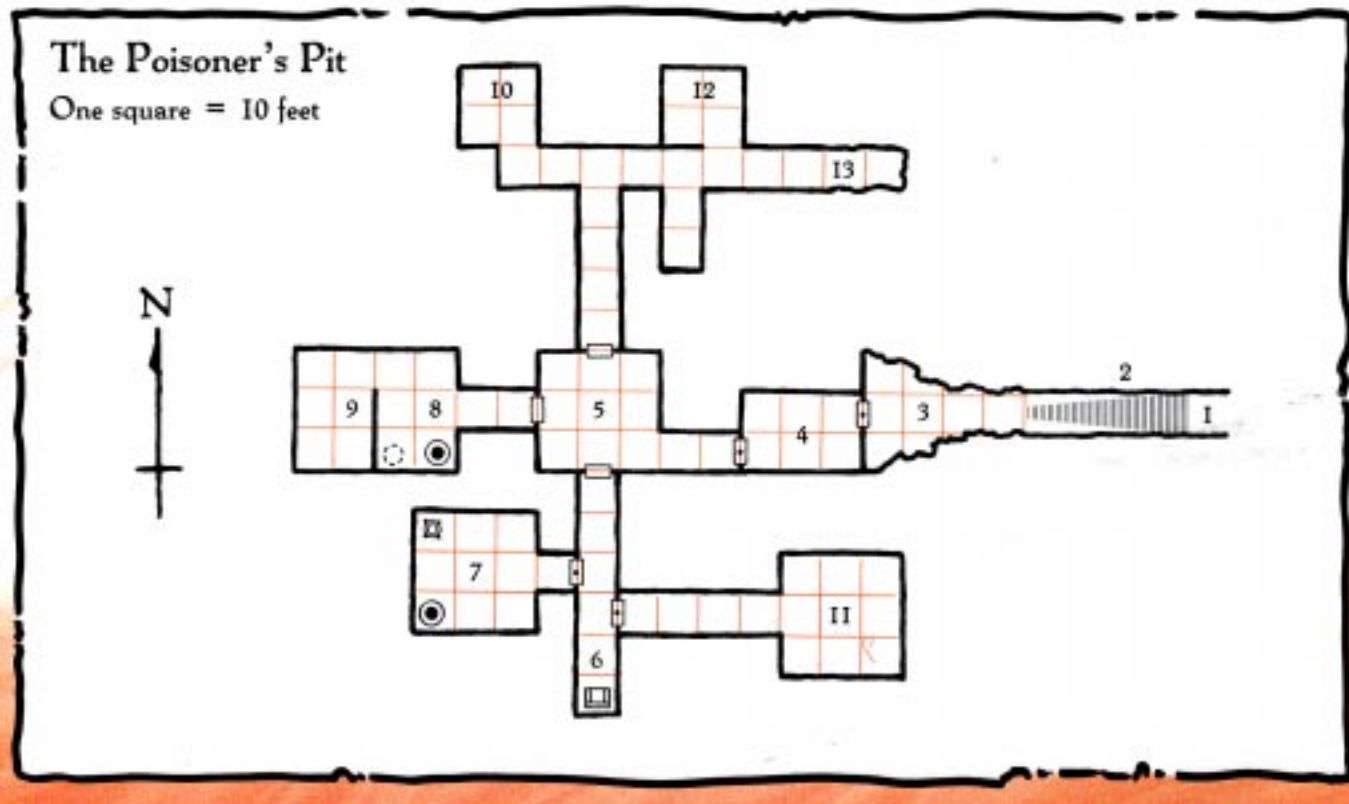
2) **Stairway.** This stairway descends 40 feet below the surface of the salt flats. The walls are marked by small nooks every 5 feet on either side of the stairs. Resting in each is a

humanoid skull that has had the cap carved off to make a bowl. The skulls are filled with lamp oil that burns to illuminate the stairway.

3) **The Wyvern's Gate.** The stairway leads to a rough hewn hallway that opens into this chamber. In the flickering firelight, visitors can discern an insubstantial haze. It appears to take the form of a large lizard with a long neck, bat wings, and a scorpion's tail. This gate has been warded by Toth with a *wyvern watch* spell.

4) **The Receiving Room.** An ornate wooden cask with a spout and a jewel-encrusted goblet are in this room. Written on the wall in the common trade language is a message: "Please drink from the barrel. It contains a slow-acting poison. The antidote will be provided upon the completion of business." Unfortunately, because reading and writing are illegal in the city-states, usually only templars, merchants, and bards get past this doorway. Toth will not open it unless a visitor drinks.

5) **Sitting Room.** This is a large room with decorative tapestries hung in the doorways and spread across the floor. A bench lines the walls, and many large pillows are strewn





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about in a manner of a wealthy nomad merchant's tent. There are several game boards with stones in the room as well as a dizzying array of ornamental weapons on the walls. There are also a variety of stringed instruments fashioned out of gourds.

**6) Wheelock's Chair.** This is a hall thick with smoke from incense. At the end of the corridor, two thick black curtains are drawn to the side, exposing a heavy wooden chair that sits on a dais. Wheelock receives his visitors in this chair. Toth must often bind the poisoner upright in the seat, to spare his master from losing his balance in a seizure.

**7) The Laboratory.** This room is full of small pottery jars containing various powders and ointments. A large brazier in the center of the room burns constantly. A chimney rises from the ceiling to the surface, where it looks like a gigantic ant hill.

Visitors are not permitted in this room. There is a 70% chance that someone sneaking in this room will accidentally touch something coated with contact poison. There is a well in this room which Toth created by locating an underground spring. The spring feeds the small pool by the entrance to the compound. It carries the waste from Wheelock's work up to the surface.

**8) Kitchen.** This room is where Toth prepares meals. There is a small vent leading into the chimney from the laboratory. There is a well in this room that draws clean water from the same spring that feeds the well in Wheelock's laboratory. There is also a large wooden cask that Toth uses for bathing.

**9) Storeroom.** This room contains various dry goods and miscellaneous supplies.

**10) Wheelock's Chamber.** The poisoner sleeps on a large bed with a delicately-wrought canopy draped from the ceiling.

**11) Library.** The walls of this room are lined with small cubbyholes carved in the stone. Paper and leather scrolls are tucked in each compartment. A large table in the center of the room is covered with clay tablets that have various inscriptions on them.

**12) Toth's Chamber.** Toth's room has a simple bed and an oil lamp.

**13) Temple of the Earth.** This small chamber is simply an alcove of exposed earth that Toth uses for votive ceremonies.

## The Mekillot Mountains

The Mekillot Mountains are an old, low-lying range in the center of the Great Ivory Plain. Like the creatures that are the mountains' namesake, the Mekillot Mountains are long, wide ridges, looking very much like a line of gargantuan mekillots. Some say that the mountain range was once a chain of islands in the center of a water-filled lake, but few believe such stories these days.

The mountain range is stratified into three concentric types of terrain. The outer zone is a ring of stony barrens which represent the outermost foothills of the range. These barrens stand on a rise marking the geologic foundation of the mountain range. The barrens are windswept and are often inundated with saltstorms from the surrounding salt flats.

Moreover, there are low-lying areas and caves within the badlands that are lined with salt. A number are the sites of salt mines, although most of these are abandoned. Indeed, it is just such a cavern that now houses the slave city of Salt View (see Chapter 2: Raiding Tribes).

Inside the ring of barrens lies a long band of rocky badlands. This band covers the entire interior space of the range, with the mountains themselves rising at either end. Like other rocky badlands, there are many canyons, caverns, and pillars of stone in this region.

Within the rocky badlands are the two mountain clusters. The northern cluster, known as the Greater Mekillots, are higher while the southern cluster—the Lesser Mekillots—consists of a number of smaller peaks. The highest of the Greater Mekillots is perhaps 3,000 feet, while the lowest of the Lesser Mekillots still stands over 1,500 feet. While these mountains are not as tall as others in the region, they are quite long and bulky. Each mountain is actually a ridge some 5 to 7 miles long and 1 to 2 miles wide. There are perhaps a dozen major mountains in each group, running through some 15 miles of mountain ridges, before descending into rocky badlands again. Even the highest of these peaks does not cause the nausea or dizziness one associates with scaling the Forest Ridge or the Windbreak Mountains.

The gap between the Greater and Lesser Mekillots is known as the Gaj, apparently because the gap is not unlike the space opened in a mekillot line when a predator lands among them. The area is not, however, well known for a large population of the insectoid predators.

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Like the remainder of the Great Ivory Plain, this area gets little rainfall. However, without the salt flats to absorb the water, there are a number of wells and underground springs in this region that make water available to travelers. Also, the darker stones of the rocky badlands diminish the heat slightly, so a traveler in these mountains suffers no more from the heat than one does elsewhere on Athas.

## Flora and Fauna

The Mekillot Mountains are a haven to many creatures who would find life on the Great Ivory Plain unpleasant. There are a number of flowering desert trees, cacti, and even a form of prickly pear. Small desert flowers dot the badlands in the season of sun ascending, and various forms of climbing vines are scattered across the badlands. The mekillots are essentially an island of life in the barren sea of the Great Ivory Plain.

The animal life is similarly diverse. Herds of erdland and hives of wild kank wander the lower sections of the mountains, grazing on the grasses and flowering plants found there. Predators of the region include giant lizards, leopards, tigones, and bulettes, who roam the mountains. Many of these creatures would be very dangerous in the nearby Verdant Belt, but the barrier of the Great Ivory Plain keeps them in the Mekillot Mountain region.

The Mekillot Mountains are occupied by a number of dwarf banshees. There are reputed to be as many as 40 of these fell creatures somewhere in this mountain range. Scholars in Nibenay speculate that there may have been some major dwarf project in the mountains centuries ago, and that the dwarf banshees were devoted to it as their focus. No one has ever returned with reports of a dwarven fortress in the mountains, but if it is infested with banshees, it isn't likely that they would.

## Travel

The stony barrens and rocky badlands of the Mekillot Mountains are fairly easy to navigate. Mekillots have difficulty pulling wagons in some of the badlands, but any of the usual Athasian beasts of burden may be used freely in these areas.

The mountains are another story. While these slopes are not as steep as those in the Windbreak Mountains, they still

require nimble climbers. Inix or crodlu may be used freely, except to reach a few extremely precarious places. Obviously, mekillots are too large to navigate the mountain trails, but a caravan trail does run from South Ledopolus, along the stony barrens on the southern side of the mountains, to regions beyond.

(Treat travel in these regions as described in the DARK SUN™ *Rules Book* for the appropriate terrain type: stony barrens, rocky badlands, and mountains, except that travel east-west through the Mekillot ranges should be treated as travel through rocky badlands.)

Finding water in this region requires a good deal of attention. A seasoned traveler may be able to find a spring or pool somewhere in the hills, but a careful traveler should carry enough water to make their trip. Water on the upper slopes is extremely scarce.

Food, however, is available, if not plentiful. A traveler planning an extended stay should plan on hunting for at least some meals, but nearly any area has enough edible nuts and berries to support a few people for a day or two. Travelers should watch out for the prentel plant, whose bright red berries taste sweet but produce illness (and even death). (Treat prentel as a type H ingested poison.)

Temperatures on the upper slopes are a bit cooler than elsewhere in the region. A traveler needs only  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the usual amount of water when spending an entire day on the upper slopes of the Mekillot Mountains.

## Encounters on the Road

The Mekillot Mountains have a fairly diverse population. There are many different kinds of creatures living here, and it is impossible to list all the significant encounters that could occur. You should use the second alternate Stony Barrens, primary Rocky Badlands, or the primary Mountains encounter charts (from the DARK SUN™ *Rules Book*), depending upon terrain, when determining the nature of encounters in this zone.

## Inhabitants

There are is a surprising population of creatures within the Mekillot Mountains. Each community is relatively isolated, as the terrain does not lend itself well to established trading, but in general each group is aware of the nature, condition,





## Lands of the Ivory Triangle

and disposition of its nearest neighbors.

The largest single enclave in the Mekillot Mountains is the slave village of Salt View. This village is detailed in Chapter 2: Raiding Tribes, as well as in the DARK SUN™ accessory *Slave Tribes*, and interested readers should consult those sources for more information.

The village of Salt View is located on the eastern face of the Greater Mekillots, in a salt mine near the edge of the rocky badlands. Its inhabitants have established trade with many of the client villages outside the Great Ivory Plain, and they have even made some overtures to the more friendly groups within the Mekillot Mountains. Salt View's jongleurs, in addition to providing entertainment for these isolated groups, act as the rumor and gossip network and as facilitators of trade.

There are a number of other slave tribes in the region, although none are as securely established as Salt View: Perhaps a half-dozen slave bands roam the Mekillot Mountains, generally on the western face. These tribes use the cover of the Great Ivory Plain to keep them safe from the templars of Gulg and Nibenay, and to cover their movements when they raid villages in the Verdant Belt. None of these slave groups are particularly powerful, and there tends to be a constant turnover in their composition, size, and leadership.

The upper slopes of the Lesser Mekillots are inhabited by a diffuse community of cyclopskin. These creatures live a solitary existence herding erdlu for food. There are about a dozen clans of cyclopskin within the range, and while they do cooperate on occasion, there is little contact between them (except for their traditional annual markets). Even within a clan the cyclopskin spend much of their time in solitude, tending their herds.

The Greater Mekillots, on the other hand, are inhabited by a number of ettin. These evil creatures raid the slave tribes and nomads of the region, stealing anything they can get their enormous hands on. They view the slave bands, erdland herds, and travelers equally: as sources of food or fodder.

### The Blackspine Mountains

The Blackspine Mountains lie to the north of the Ivory Triangle, east of the Windbreak Mountains. The main spine of this mountain range runs roughly east from the Black-

spine Gap toward the ruined city of Giustinal. A number of minor branches spread to the northeast and south, forming a natural barrier to travel in all directions. Some say that the mountain range shows the natural shape of a gith, its arms outstretched in battle, its tail forming the spine of the range.

The mountains are surrounded by rocky badlands, and these extend for over 10 miles from the mountains themselves. Travel through this region is rare, but the few travelers who have visited here describe the badlands as filled with twisting canyons, many of which are box canyons with only one way in or out. This is particularly true in the south, where the hot, dry winds of the Great Ivory Plain have worn the stone into magnificent monuments.

There is a large badlands region between the two northeast arms of the mountain range. This region, known as the Valley of Trevain, is among the most treacherous and isolated terrains in the entire Tyr region. The terrain is so treacherous that travelers traditionally come down to Nibenay and across the northern tip of the Great Ivory Plain to the Welcome Oasis rather than trying to traverse this difficult land. These lands are also reputed to be haunted; for more information, see "Inhabitants" on the following page.

The peaks of the Blackspine Mountains are a dark gray granite with few footholds to support a climber. The spires of these mountains tower above the Mekillot range, but they are not quite as high as those found in the Windbreak Mountains. Travelers in this range suffer the dizziness and ennui common to Ringing Mountains only on the tallest peaks of this range. The badlands that surround these mountains slope upward as if the Blackspine Mountains had thrust up violently from beneath the ground in the distant past.

On occasion one can still find places where the jagged edge of the badlands is split with the force of the protruding granite.

The Blackspine Mountain region receives considerably less rain than the Windbreak Mountains, but it is not entirely desert. Some moisture passes north of the Windbreak Mountains, watering the western slopes of this range. Winds are fairly strong, particularly in the highest peaks, and there is a constant threat of dust storms in this region due to the large amount of rock dust the wind has etched from the mountain faces.

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## Flora and Fauna

Like much of Athas, the Blackspine Mountains region is fairly arid. There are occasional patches of scrub plains protected from the constant wind by the twists and turns of the badlands, but by and large the Blackspine is a barren place.

Most of the creatures that live in the mountains survive on the erdlu herds found here. While the herds spend little time on the barren granite slopes, they can be found in small herds throughout the rocky badlands. Rasclinn, tagsters, and so-ut occupy many of the canyons, making any journey into the Blackspines potentially deadly.

The western foothills, which get most of the rainfall in this region, are an exception to the barren condition of most of the Blackspine range. While not as lush as the Crescent Forest, portions of the Blackspine Gap are as fertile as the Verdant Belt itself. However, unlike the Belt, most of this area is uncultivated and there are many carnivores that threaten the life of any traveler in the region.

The most common creatures in the area are z'tal and jankz, which live in wild herds in the western foothills. Predators include braxat, id fiends, and gaj.

## Travel

The rocky badlands which comprise most of the Blackspine region are easily traversed, if one is willing to risk getting lost in the labyrinth of box canyons and ravines. The canyon bottoms are relatively flat (although often filled with rock dust—occasionally to dangerous depths), and there are a number of surface passes through the foothills. (Treat the rocky badlands as stony barrens—2 movement points per mile—if the party has a guide experienced in the region. Otherwise, they must pay the normal movement cost of 3 movement points per mile.)

Traveling up the granite mountains is very difficult. No mount can climb on these granite slopes, and climbers are slowed to an absolute crawl because there are almost no footholds. (Travel in these peaks, as in other mountain areas, costs 8 movement points per mile.)

Water and food are easy to find on the western slopes, but become more difficult the higher you go into the mountains. Any expedition onto the actual granite faces should bring provisions. There is no reliable source of water or food in these high mountain regions.

## Encounters

The Blackspine Mountains, while they are unique in many ways, are representative of a number of minor mountain ranges in the Tyr region. You should use the Second Alternate Rocky Badlands and the First Alternate Mountains encounter tables from the DARK SUN™ appendix of the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™* to determine the nature of encounters in this region. In the fertile regions in the Blackspine Gap, we recommend using the First Alternate Verdant Belt Table.

## Inhabitants

By far the most important inhabitants of the Blackspine Mountains are the many tribes of gith known as the Gith Horde. These vicious raiders have long been the bane of the region, with at least 5,000 gith living in scattered tribes throughout the region. Historically these gith were divided into over a hundred warring tribes of 25-50 members each, which ensured that they were little threat outside the Blackspine Mountains.

Recently, things have changed. A powerful new leader has arisen among the gith and is slowly unifying the gith tribes into a potent and threatening raiding force. Major gith raids have already begun to fall on client villages in the northern reaches of Nibenay, particularly on the eastern side of the Welcome Oasis. Indeed, the fort at the Welcome Oasis was attacked by a raiding party of nearly 200 gith, and only the combined force of every psionicist and warrior in the oasis managed to drive them away.

This new leader, who is known as Blackspear, has gained control of about half of the gith tribes in the Blackspine Mountain region. According to rumor, Blackspear is a very talented psionicist (as are all gith leaders) who uses his powers not just in combat, but to ensure the loyalty of his followers. The templars of Nibenay and the merchant houses that serve the client villages have become concerned with the gith attacks, but thus far there is little they can do. Unfortunately, gith raids have now begun in Blackspine Gap, taking a number of merchant caravans on the Nibenay-Raam road. Whether these attacks are also being made by followers of Blackspear or whether these gith are raiding closer to Nibenay because they have been forced out of their usual territory is not yet clear.

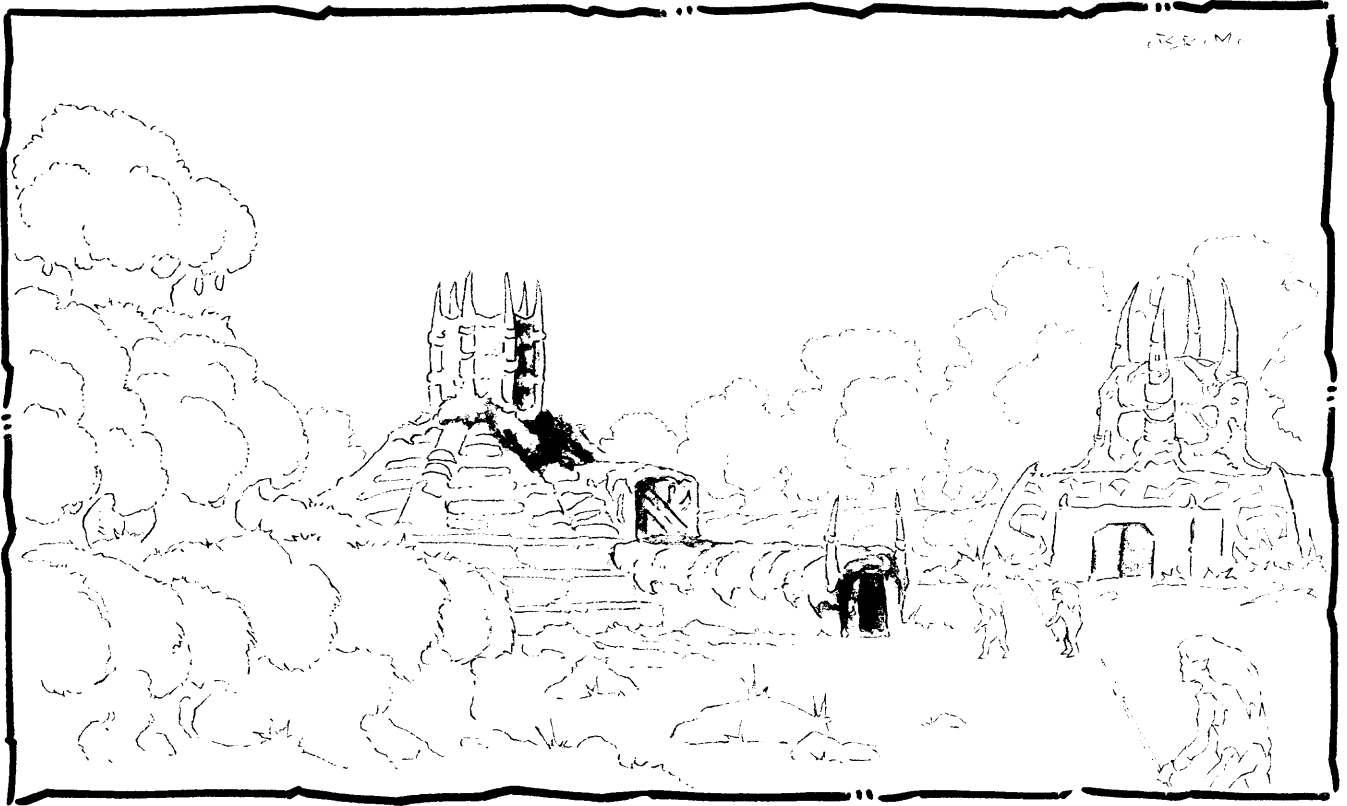


## Lands of the Ivory Triangle

Where the gith prosper, few other intelligent beings can survive. However, numerous travelers have reported encountering bands of the mysterious kenku—half-human, half-bird creatures which attack by stealth. These creatures are known to conceal themselves in human society, but the repeated encounters in the wilderness indicates that there may be a large enclave of the creatures somewhere in the Blackspine Mountains. The scholars of Nibenay have analyzed the reports of the survivors, and they surmise that the kenku are somewhere in the north-

western portion of the range, but it is impossible to pinpoint their location.

In addition to the kenku, belgoi have been encountered in this region. These vicious cannibals have been appearing in increasing numbers in the Blackspine Gap. Nibenay templars destroy them whenever they are encountered, but there are still many threatening the caravans of the region. As with the gith raids in the Gap, Nibenay scholars speculate that the increased gith activity has forced the belgoi out of the mountains.





## Chapter 4: Monsters of the Ivory Triangle

The Ivory Triangle region has a number of unusual creatures that appear nowhere else on Athas (at least, so far as is known). Much of this life is focused only on survival, feverishly clutching a niche that allows the creature to live. Thus it is throughout Athas, no less in the Ivory Triangle.

The following creatures were mentioned elsewhere in this book, but have not been detailed in previous *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM™* entries in other products. Many of these creatures are dangerous or represent a source of special wonder.

For every species mentioned here, there are hundreds more lurking amid the boughs of the Crescent Forest, concealed beneath the salt flats of the Great Ivory Plain, or nesting in the high peaks of the Blackspine Mountains. Many of these creatures pose no threat to a prepared

human or demihuman party. Of the hundreds of bird species within the Crescent Forest, for example, perhaps a half-dozen are distinguished enough to warrant notice by any but the most obsessive scholar. The Blackspine Mountains shelter perhaps three dozen different types of bats, most of which would fit in the palm of a human hand.

Nevertheless, one should not presume that all of the dangers of the Ivory Triangle region have now been enumerated. Travelers of Athas should not view these pages as an exhaustive list of the threats they may encounter. Rather, this should be viewed as a sampler, perhaps sufficient to prepare the traveler for what lies ahead, perhaps not. The world of Athas is filled with mysteries, and death can be found in the most innocuous places. Travelers are encouraged to keep their wits about them.



CLIMATE/TERRAIN	Crescent Forest
FREQUENCY:	Common
ORGANIZATION:	None
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Non (0)
TREASURE:	Incidental
ALIGNMENT:	Nil
NO. APPEARING:	1-10
ARMOR CLASS:	6
MOVEMENT:	1/2
HIT DICE:	3-5
THACO:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1 per 5' length
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-3
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Strength loss clinging
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Half damage from crushing attacks
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	L-G (4' long per HD)
MORALE:	Steady
XP VALUE:	50



The bloodvine is a danger to anyone who travels in the Crescent Forest. It is a parasite, dangerous primarily to those weak with hunger or thirst, or to sleeping victims. These parasitic plants consume the very blood of those they capture, and travelers report finding skeletons of fairly sizable creatures lashed tight to agafari tree trunk by these potent vines.

**Combat:** The bloodvine moves extremely slowly, at only 1/2' per round. Bloodvines are attracted by warmth, particularly that of a living creature. They move only at night

The bloodvine attack by injecting roots into its target. If the bloodvine has approached a target (which it will do only at night), this requires an attack roll. However, if the target touches the vine with bare flesh (day or night), the attack is automatically successful. The roots are covered with a sap which anesthetizes the wounds so that the victim feels no pain. An unconscious victim will not awaken, and a conscious victim must make an Intelligence check to determine that he has been attacked.

Once the bloodvine has seized its prey, it drink the victim's blood via its roots, causing 1d3 hit points of damage/round. In addition, the loss of blood diminishes the character's Strength by 1 point. Once the roots are inserted, no additional attack roll is required to inflict this damage and Strength loss each round.

To remove the vine, the victim (or someone aiding the victim) must make a Bend Bars roll; only one roll may be made each round. On a successful roll, the vine tears away (inflicting 1d6 hit points of damage). On an unsuccessful roll the vine remains attached, but the victim suffers an additional point of damage from the stress of tearing roots. Should the victim be separated from the vine, lost Strength returns at a rate of 1 point per hour.

The bloodvine takes half damage from crushing attacks. A bloodvine will not approach within two feet of a fire, and indeed it suffers double damage from fire attack. Cold inflicts only 1 point of damage per damage die, but it immobilizes the affected section of the vine for a number of rounds equal to the damage roll. Electrical attacks act as a haste spell on the bloodvine for 1d4 rounds. A bloodvine is killed instantly by a *warp wood* spell, or by the destructive effect caused when a

defiler casts a spell.

It is fairly easy to avoid bloodvines if one is aware of them. They move so slowly that the potential victim can just walk away. They are unable to completely leave their agafari tree, so they will not pursue a victim beyond a few tens of feet from their tree.

**Habitat/Society:** Bloodvines live on the bark of the agafari tree and are found only in the Crescent Forest. Growth begins at ground level and winds its way up the tree. Agafari trees that have been completely surrounded by bloodvine can be found in the central portions of the forest. Such vines represent a tremendous threat to travelers, as there are literally hundreds of feet of bloodvine in such infestations.

**Ecology:** Bloodvines live on the fluids they extract from insects and small mammals. They can live for as long as three months on nothing but rain, extracting nourishment from the agafari bark. After a month of such deprivation, however, the bloodvine loses the ability to move, and after three months the bloodvine dies.

Each bloodvine is inextricably attached to the tree which is its host. Bloodvines cannot be transplanted from one tree to another, nor will a bloodvine grow anywhere but on an agafari tree. How bloodvines reproduce is a mystery, but it is impossible to eradicate them completely; kill every bloodvine on an agafari tree and within a month new bloodvines will again sprout.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Salt flats/Stony Barrens			
FREQUENCY:	Rare			
ORGANIZATION:	Nil			
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any			
DIET:	Carnivorous			
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (1)			
TREASURE:	Nil			
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral			
NO. APPEARING:	1 - 4			
ARMOR CLASS:	3			
MOVEMENT:	15			
HIT DICE:	5			
THAC0:	15			
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 (See below)			
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2-12			
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Stun			
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil			
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil			
SIZE:	H (15')			
MORALE:	Elite (13)			
XP VALUE:	420			
<b>PSIONICS SUMMARY:</b>				
Level	Dis/Sci/Dev	Attack/Def	Score	PSPs
3	2/1/3	-/M-	15	40

Clairsentience— *Sciences:* object reading, sensitivity to psychic impressions; *Devotions:* danger sense.  
 Telepathy— *Sciences:* none; *Devotions:* life detection (special ability, no cost), mind blank

Cilops are relentless hunters who are prized by the templars of all the city-states for their unique tracking abilities. The creatures look like enormous centipedes that reach lengths exceeding 15'. Their segmented bodies are long and flat and form a hard exoskeleton. Their hooked legs allow them to crawl onto virtually any surface and to scale walls with ease. Their oval heads have a large single compound eye and three pairs of pincerlike jaws. Two prehensile antennae grow from either side of the jaws and reach lengths of 3' to 5'. Cilops have a protective coloration that reflects their native terrain. The cilops of the salt flats often display a chalky blue-white to steel gray color while the cilops of the rocky badlands vary from rust orange to dark brown.

**Combat:** Cilops seem to require no sleep and will track their prey for week without stopping. Their unique *object reading* ability allows them to touch an object and then associate that object with an individual. While they ordinarily track by scent, if they are in danger of losing a trail, they will use an ability similar to *sensitivity to psychic impressions*. This ability allows a cilops to detect the psychic residue of its prey and to resume tracking. Its *danger sense* ability generally prevents the cilops from being ambushed or surprised by its prey. When tracking by scent, use the tracking nonweapon proficiency with a bonus of +2

When the cilops engages in combat, it uses its antennae to stun its opponent. A successful hit by an antenna requires the target to make a saving throw vs. paralysis. Victims failing their saving throw suffer a shock to their nervous system which results in being stunned for 1 turn.

The cilops can also deliver a vicious series of bites. While listed above as one attack, the cilops may actually attempt to bite one target three times. If the first set of pincers hits the target, the second and third sets



automatically hit. This will inflict a total of 3d6 points of damage. If the first set of pincers misses, the cilops may attempt to hit on the same target with the second set. If this attack succeeds, the third set will automatically hit for a total of 2d6 point of damage. If the second attack misses, the cilops may try to hit the same target with the third set of pincers. A hit with the third set of pincers will deliver 1d6 points of damage.

The cilops will concentrate its attack on one individual until it is disabled before turning its attention to another threat.

**Habitat/Society:** Cilops have no lairs or consistent nesting areas, but constantly roam in search of food. They will occasionally hunt in small pack, but there appears to be no clear structure to the group. The cilops can be captured and trained. The creature seems to become familiar with its handler and can be used to hunt individuals if it is provided a fresh trail or an object that has been handled by the victim. Cilops have not been successfully bred in captivity and must be captured. Templars from the city-states usually try to find cilops in the salt flats, where it is easier to spot them. Cilops have even been used to track others of their kind.

**Ecology:** Native to the salt flats of Athas, the cilops have developed their extraordinary tracking abilities in order to find food in the barren wastes. Their protective coloration helps them to avoid predators, but they are particularly vulnerable to attack from flying creatures. Their poor depth of vision makes them rely upon their innate *life detection* ability and *danger sense* to warn them of predators.

Cilops will pick up the trail of their prey and track the victim relentlessly, even as they come across more vulnerable and more attractive targets. The cilops will fix on a particular target for as long as a week before selecting a new trail. Cilops will feed on just about any moving creature—they prefer live prey. A cilops requires one dwarf-sized meal per week.



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Forest
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Grove
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Photosynthesis
INTELLIGENCE:	Supra-genius (20)
TREASURE:	Q (x5), X
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	1-3
ARMOR CLASS:	0
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	15
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	6-36/6-36 or 4-24
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Never surprised
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	65%
SIZE:	H (18'-20')
MORALE:	Fearless (19-20)
XP VALUE:	10,000

Athasian treants are magical creatures, a mystic blending of the characteristics of a *tree of life* and a *water spirit of the land*. They are virtually immortal, and they act as incarnate guardians of the wilderness for which they were created. Often they are dedicated to caring for groves of trees of life, much as the normal treant is the caretaker of a normal forest.

Like normal treants, Athasian treants are almost indistinguishable from trees. When stationary, they look almost exactly like the species of tree from which they were constructed, giving them a 95% chance to hide themselves within a grove of trees. Their skin is bark, their arms tree branches, and their facial features look like the knots on the trunk of the tree.

**Combat:** The combat abilities of an Athasian treant are much more fixed than those of a standard treant, in part because Athasian treants are magical creatures rather than a natural race. Their tough, barklike skin gives them an excellent Armor Class against all attack except fire, which receives a +4 to hit and +1 damage against Athasian treants. Their limblike claws inflict 6d6 damage each, and they are capable of lifting creatures of up to 500 pounds. They may also hurl boulders for 4d6 damage, but they may only hurl one boulder per round.

Unlike their standard counterparts, Athasian treants cannot animate other trees. Moreover, Athasian treants have no magical resistance to fire magic, as it is from the sphere opposing the water spirit.

However, they can cast spells of the Water sphere as an innate ability. They may cast each of the following spells once per day: *create water*, *purify food and drink*, *create food and water*, *lower water*, *reflecting pool*, *conjure elemental (water)*, *part water*, and *transmute water to dust*. Each of these is an innate ability of the Athasian treant and is cast without verbal, somatic, or material components at an initiative rating of 2.

**Habitat/Society:** Athasian treants are created by druids for the express purpose of protecting the wilderness. While they have some advantages over their normal spiritual forms, in other ways they are very limited. Also, it is impossible to create an Athasian treant without the voluntary cooperation of a *water spirit of the land*, so they are extremely rare.

In fact, a *spirit of the land* is more powerful outside of this form than



in it, when it manifests both more magical powers and more physical abilities. However, *spirits of the land* are not very attentive, and they will often wait until huge devastation is inflicted on the land before doing anything. While in treant form, a *spirit of the land* is much more closely tied to the physical world, and will therefore react much more quickly to the depredations of defilers and other attackers. Once bound to the treant, however, the *spirit of the land* cannot leave until the treant is killed. While in the form of a treant, the *water spirit of the land's* memory is limited to its life as a treant.

**Ecology:** An Athasian treant is created from a *tree of life* which is specially constructed by a druid to house a water spirit. The druid must convince the *water spirit of the land* of the necessity of the transformation and then must cast the following spells: *liveoak*, *reincarnate*, and *tree of life*. This not necessarily easy, for when the spirit leaves the water source it presently inhabits, that pool or stream quickly dries up and vanishes.

Invariably, an Athasian treant will be associated with a particular site and will be tasked with defending that site. It will fight fearlessly in defense of that site, as death has no meaning for such a creature. In the absence of violence, an Athasian treant is immortal; if killed, the *spirit of the land* is freed without injury, although it cannot reform a physical body for a number of years equal to the time it spent as a part of the treant. A *spirit* having been freed from a treant will recall its experiences as a treant as well as its existence prior to having been transformed. The water source which it once inhabited, however, will slowly return if it's bed has not been entirely eradicated.

Although the treant will die in the defense of the wilderness, it will in all other matters act in the interests of its own survival, and it will not give up its life to free the *spirit* within.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	The Great Ivory Plain
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Water
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5-7)
TREASURE:	As in life
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING:	1-4
ARMOR CLASS:	See below
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	4+2
THACO:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK	3-18
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Blood drain
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	See below
SIZE:	M (6')
MORALE:	Fearless 19-20)
XP VALUE:	420

The salt zombie is an undead creature born of hate (and possibly a subtle magic of the Great Ivory Plain). Resembling the common zombie, these animated corpses are much more powerful (and even a little more intelligent) than their purely magical brethren. These creatures are formed when a human or demihuman dies of thirst in the Great Ivory Plain.

Unlike common zombies, salt zombies do not look like rotting corpses, but rather resemble a thin and desiccated husk, appearing almost mummified (although not wrapped in strips of linen like a mummy). The eyes of a salt zombie are sunken and shriveled, the limbs are thin and spindly, and the abdomen is desiccated and thin. Their lips are often dry and cracked, but do not bleed.

**Combat:** Salt zombies pursue the living for the water within them. Their thirst for this water is overwhelming, and salt zombies can sense victims for a distance of up to 5 miles.

When attacking, the salt zombie strikes until it inflicts a wound that draws blood (i.e., until it inflicts damage upon the victim). At that point it lunges for the victim, sucking at the bleeding wound. The zombie must make a roll to hit to get its mouth on the wound, but it then hits automatically for 1-6 points of damage each round. The first strike often incapacitates its foe, but in any case the salt zombie continues to drink until all blood is drained and the victim is dead.

Once the salt zombie has grabbed a victim, they may attack the zombie with weapons of size S only. Other weapons are too long and unwieldily to attack an opponent so near. Other individuals may attack the salt zombie normally, but on a roll of 1 (or on a roll that is at least 10 less than is required to hit the salt zombie), they hit their companion instead.

The salt zombie can be hit by normal weapons, but its Armor Class is the same as it had in life, with an additional -2 bonus because of its desiccated condition. Thus, a salt zombie wearing no armor is treated as Armor Class 8, while a salt zombie wearing scale mail would be treated as Armor Class 4. Salt zombies never wear shields or use weapons.

Like other undead, zombies are immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, *death magic*, poisons, and cold-based spells. A vial of *holy water* inflicts 2-8



points of damage, and a *create water* spell immediately sates the zombie, sending it into a torpid state for 1-6 days. Nonmagical weapons inflict half damage on salt zombies due to their desiccated condition, but they suffer double damage from fire-based attacks.

**Habitat/Society:** Salt zombies have little in the way of actual society. They are not intelligent in the normal sense, but are driven to attack by the thirst that possesses them. They band together in packs for survival, but once combat is enjoined it is every zombie for itself.

**Ecology:** There appear to be several areas of the Great Ivory Plain where a person who has died of thirst will become a salt zombie. (A person who dies of thirst through hit point loss does not become a salt zombie.) The sheer force of will of an individual refusing to die seems to somehow reanimate their corpse in these peculiar regions. It is unknown what sort of residual magic may linger in these areas to cause such an effect. There is a 5% chance that any person dying of thirst in the Great Ivory Plain will reanimate.

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Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®  
2nd Edition



# The City-State of Gulg





Boxed Set

## The City-State of Gulg

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Respectfully dedicated to the memory of  
**Curtis Scott,**  
lost tragically in an auto accident August 19, 1992.  
He will be missed by the many friends he touched through his writing and gaming.

### About This Book

This book is intended to serve as a source book for DMs on the city-state of Gulg. You may or may not want to make the material in this book available to your players. There are a number of other DARK SUN™ game accessories that refer to Gulg or describe a particular aspect of life there in more detail. These products are referred to in the appropriate sections of this book. However, everything that you need to base a campaign or run an adventure in the city is provided here.

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# The City-State of Gulg

*I have been asked by Shallin Losya, our master of the Unseen Way, to draft an introduction to our home city for new agents who hire on from foreign states. Since I grew up in Balic, but have spent all of my adult life at the main chapter house in Gulg, Shallin feels that I am well suited to the task. Because of the occasional difficulties we face in transporting written material through the city gates and because of the sensitive nature of some of the material included here, this document is restricted to the chapter house library and should not be removed from there.*

*To the untrained observer Gulg appears to be an empire of hunter-gatherers centered in a city surrounded by a wall of brambles. Hundreds of fierce warriors patrol the city with skulls mounted on their spears. A strange ascetic class of noble hunters stalks the forests. Thousands of slaves forage through the trees and grasslands. In the center of it all the forest goddess Lalali-Puy entertains her people with spectacular, bloody festivals.*

*In truth Gulg's economy is based on the agricultural production of slaves and client villages. The oba's people are accomplices in their own oppression. They perpetuate a centuries old culture of an inflexible social order and conformity.*

*Travelers often describe Gulg as having a content populace, and this is true. It is not because of the benevolence of the oba's rule, but rather because the strict social order drives out any nonconformists or individualists. The remaining crowd do indeed seem content.*

*It is unlikely that this document will ever require much revision. Things don't change much in Gulg.*

*23rd day of Sedulous, 79th King's Age*

*Recording librarian, Holda Poru*



Gulg is a city that has, through the effort of its ruler, been remarkably resistant to change. The queen has created a stable if not stagnant society that, while delicately balanced, has continued to suppress the vehicles of change—including free mercantile activity. The city is a pleasant enough place to live for natives, but of all the cities in the Tyr region, Gulg is the least hospitable to strangers.

Gulgs live by relatively simple means in a culture that stresses respect for the wisdom of elders, veneration of the hunt, and individual conformity. The people of Gulg are taught to respect the forest of their queen and to live within the strict confines of the rituals and customs that dictate their behavior. This respect, however, is more a testimony to the power of superstition and an oppressive culture than any enlightened impulse to act as custodians of the planet.

Outsiders often romanticize Gulg as having the only ruler who enjoys the popular support of her people. While this is true in some regard, the oba enjoys that support for three simple reasons. First, they believe she is a goddess embodying the life of the forest whose appeasement benefits the life of the community. Second, they rightly believe that she is all that stands between them and slavery in the city-state of their ancient enemy, Nibenay. Last, the stifling culture of the city is so ingrained in the public consciousness that the people would be hard-pressed to even imagine a different life. The people of Gulg do indeed love and fear their oba.

A visitor to Gulg may become discouraged at the confusing customs and suspiciousness of the natives. There are, however, many small and fascinating pockets within the city that will reward the curiosity of the persistent seeker, not least of which is the city-state's ruler.

Gulgs believe their queen is an immortal of supreme power. Lalali-Puy (pronounced la-la-lee-pie, meaning forest goddess) is called oba by her people. She is a stunningly beautiful woman with luxurious black hair, and she has not appeared to age a day in all the centuries of her rule.

Her influence can be felt in all aspects of Gulg life. The leafy crown of the her palace, built amid the branches of an enormous agafari tree, can be seen from virtually any point in the city. Common greetings invoke the protection of the forest goddess and her decrees prescribe and regulate all aspects of the behavior of her subjects. The entire forest and everything in it belongs to her. The city of Gulg survives only by her will.

The oba has worked for centuries to cultivate a stable and loyal populace. She has made a tremendous effort to elevate the hunter-gatherer culture and denigrate the mercantile life and other forces of change. The mythology of her relationship

# The City-State of Gulg



to the people, and the culture she has fostered, requires that she protect the forest and its surrounds. This is not motivated out of any ardent love of nature but simply the logical program of a keen political intellect. Do not think for a minute that Lalali-Puy does not train scores of defilers, or that she would think twice about laying waste to the entire forest if it would advance her long-term goals. It was, in fact, her command that caused the hunter nobles of Gulg to hunt the kirre to extinction in the Crescent Forest.

The oba is an erratic ruler who delegates little authority. She formalizes little in the organization and administration of her city and makes personal decisions on virtually every issue. She can be generous and forgiving when pleased and savagely cruel when annoyed.

The queen's capricious nature has made an indelible imprint on Gulg society. It has encouraged the development of autonomous neighborhoods, called dagadas, that administer their own affairs. The less that the common people must directly interact with the government, the better off they tend to be. As long as the dagadas provide their required production or taxes to the templars, they will continue to receive grain as needed and be left alone. The independence of the dagadas

has actually created small pockets that allow subcultures of dwarves and elves to thrive without interference from the state.

Lalali-Puy's manner has also fostered the strength of Gulg's body of social conventions and customs. At some level the high value placed on individual conformity grew from a practical knowledge of a code of behaviors that would not anger the queen.

One facet of her controlling manner that has benefited her rule is the relative ease with which common people may gain access to the queen. While an individual may have to wait months for an audience, any citizen may petition the oba directly. The pilgrims who seek a personal audience, however, often regret having requested it. Depending on the oba's mood the visitors may not escape with their lives, or they may end up being indefinitely detained because their company amuses the oba. Because of her high public presence, it is difficult for anyone to mislead Lalali-Puy about conditions in the city. As a rule, the oba has a better understanding of the state of her people than her rivals do of theirs.

The queen's desire to have a direct hand in all affairs of the state results in a tremendous amount of inefficiency. Some simple decisions that are delegated to underlings in other city-







## The City-State of Gulg



states are held up for months in Gulg because of the queen's insistence on making decisions personally.

At the lower levels of government, however, the templars are generally efficient and can do their jobs without interference, unless the oba has taken a particular interest in their area of responsibility. It is the highest levels of the government that suffer most from Lalali-Puy's volatile personality. The wisest and most competent officials stay safely within the queen's loyal inner circle. Ambitious courtiers, however, spend much of their time delicately maneuvering to win her favor while attempting to avoid her sudden anger.

One should not make the mistake of underestimating the oba. Her intelligence and power are staggering. Despite the manner of her court she is not easily flattered, nor is she easily deceived. Her savagery and cunning are well known to her enemies, and her fury knows no bounds. It has been that way for centuries, for the city of Gulg is the center of an ancient empire.

The city lies in the southern end of the Crescent Forest and its influence extends well into the Verdant Belt in all directions. Gulgs live in hundreds of small autonomous clan compounds that lie within the protection of the city's great Mopti Wall, an impenetrable barrier of brambles. While the culture of the Gulgs is clearly ancient, it is almost impossible to give credence to their own history because it is so intertwined with fables and legends.

The city appeared in merchant house records thousands of years ago, but the absence of strong mercantile activity leaves the details vague. Apparently the culture descended out of a primitive society of hunters and gatherers, some of whom still continue to forage through the forest surrounding the city. By building a cohesive city-based society over the centuries, the queen has managed to create a formidable military power. As the population grew, the city turned from its traditional means of production to agriculture and herding. To secure the stability of her society and her power-base, however, the oba continues to celebrate the traditional culture of hunting and gathering.

The recent history of Gulg has centered on the oba's impulsive decrees and continuing clashes with the army of Nibenay. The conflict with the city of the Shadow King (Nibenay's ruler) keeps the eyes of the populace away from domestic problems and turned toward the protective arms of the oba.





# Gulg Society

To understand the society of Gulg one must first understand the concept of the *dagada*. The word comes from the Gulg term for home and represents the single most influential social force on an individual outside of his or her immediate family. The dagada is an extremely close-knit community that shares attributes of both clans and neighborhoods found in other societies. It is similar to a neighborhood in that it is a social organization defined first and foremost by physical proximity. It is like a clan in the role that it plays in enculturating an individual to the values of the society.

The word dagada is used to collectively describe both a cluster of huts and the people who live there. A dagada may contain up to 100 huts, all usually within a common thatch or clay wall. A dagada may include a number of families, but extended families may not necessarily live within the same dagada. Each dagada has a number of social classes present and represents a cross-section of Gulg society. These communities have a large degree of autonomy in managing the affairs of their neighborhood, as well as a degree of responsibility for the other people in the dagada. It is considered the societal duty of the dagada to provide for the members who cannot provide for themselves. Parents in a dagada share the burden of raising their young. Several women may care for the young children of a dagada while others attend to their various occupations in the fields, the craft halls or the marketplaces. Elders within a dagada are collectively responsible for the education of the young, although this task generally falls to individuals who command respect and have a propensity for teaching.

The dagada is the center of its members' social lives. Members of a dagada spend most of their leisure time socializing within the neighborhood. A dagada often enters teams into city-wide contests.

Dagadas may vary in their internal political structure. Some are run on a simple town council model where every citizen may speak. Others are ruled by a single elder or a dominant family. There is, however, always one individual who is recognized by the state as having the authority to speak for the community, arbitrate differences between members, and allocate grain that the queen's templars distribute. This leader is called the *ambo*, from the Gulg word for oversee. The state usually allows each dagada to select their own ambo in the manner that they see fit. Occasionally, the state appoints an ambo or assigns a templar to manage a troublesome community.

Individuals are expected to resolve their problems and disputes within the structure of the dagada. Whether it is a personal difficulty that needs to be overcome, or a difference between neighbors, it is considered the responsibility of the

entire community to see that the problem does not leave the dagada's walls. It is considered a great embarrassment and sign of weakness to allow the problems of a dagada's members to extend outside the dagada.

If a disagreement arises between two individuals of different dagadas, the ambos will attempt to resolve the problem. If no satisfactory solution can be reached, the queen's templars become the sole arbitrators. People try to avoid escalating a problem to the point where a templar must intervene, for such a solution is generally disagreeable to all involved parties. The templars are deliberately severe in their judgments to discourage people from requesting their intervention.

Some dagadas specialize in one particular craft or trade. These communities function as small independent craft guilds within Gulg society. While there are usually a number of dagadas based around any given trade, they are not affiliated with one another. For example, the decisions made in one weaver dagada will only indirectly affect the others.

Each craft dagada has its own criteria and rites associated with accepting individuals into the community. Some will allow adolescents to apprentice within the craft hall, but will not initiate the youths until they have trained for a number of years and proven their ability and commitment to the craft. Sometimes young people will train in a craft dagada but never seek admission. They will instead remain at home and practice their craft for the benefit of their neighborhood. An apprentice will never be allowed to gain full mastery of a craft, however, without actually joining the craft dagada.

The craft dagadas turn over the bulk of their output to the templars. This output is then sold to the exporting merchant houses for the benefit of the city.

## The Peoples

The Peoples are broad kinship groups that are the vestiges of the most ancient families of Gulg. Before the development of the dagadas, the Peoples had a strong influence on the shaping of an individual in Gulg society. Now they serve primarily as a means of bridging relationships outside the dagadas. Two people who have never met but share the same People will treat one another more favorably or take extra effort to assist one another. Children will trust a stranger who is of their People.

Each People has its own unique origin myths, taboos and prescriptions. However most Gulg's lives are affected by their People affiliations only during festivals and funerals. During the high and low sun festivals, huge celebratory convocations of the Peoples take place. Each of the Peoples is associated with



a particular elemental cult that prescribes the funerary rites of its members.

There are 39 Peoples in the city of Gulg, three of which are kinship groups of the slave-born who have traditionally served the city for hundreds of years. The Peoples of Gulg include *Gebekirovi Alalazonu* (which translates as human-kirre-children who of old came from Alala); *Akosuwi Madjanu* (the sons of Akoso who come from a place where it does not rain); and *Ribenu* (the people who are sellers of goods).

One People, the *Obante Kopokono* (children of the oba who remain in the forest), are not actually a People in the common sense. Gulgs believe that some forest spirits like to visit the world of the living briefly and then return to the forest again. Consequently, when a Gulg dies in childhood, the belief is that the child was an Obante birth, or of the Obante Kopokono People, who wanted to visit the living world for a short period of time. All Gulgs venerate the ancestral burial site of this People, for no one knows when a member of their family will join them.

## The Daga-faris

The Peoples of Gulg each have a *daga-fari*, or house-tree. This is a small complex of huts built among the branches of an agafari tree. It is similar in principle to the oba's Sunlight Home. The structures are, however, very modest in comparison to Lalai-Puy's palace. The *daga-faris* of the Peoples are considered the ancestral homes of the clans.

Each *daga-fari* is tended by a single *ambofari*, or overseer of the tree, whose duty is to tend to the tree and administer the activities and responsibilities associated with it. The *daga-faris* serve in a charitable capacity and as a repository of the heritage of their respective Peoples. Each house contains the artifacts of a People's history that are used in festival processions. A *daga-fari* also contains the People's skull room. The *ambofari* of each succeeding generation contributes his skull to the *daga-fari*. A peculiar ritual involving a *speak with dead* spell maintains the continuity of a People's history.

The treehouses also contain a small stock of grain that is contributed by individuals for good luck. The grain is used to help indigent members of a People. Because the *dagadas* take care of members who are having difficulty, only the most desperate people end up turning to the *daga-fari* of their People for aid. The *daga-fari* will also provide temporary shelter for such individuals.

## Ownership of Property

Theoretically, all property under the sway of the oba's empire belongs to Lalali-Puy herself. For this reason, land is held by the person who is actually using it at the time, but the ultimate title to the land is vested in Lalali-Puy. In fact, all land, livestock, goods, belongings and the people themselves live under the claim of the oba. In practice, however, there is a distinct sense of property rights in Gulg that accommodates several types of property: the property of the person, the family, the *dagada*, the People, the client villages, and the queen.

### Personal Property

Property of individuals includes utensils, weapons, mats, pipes, fetishes, pots, clothes and money, as well as the hut a person builds. As long as a person meets the social obligations of their *dagada* and People, as well as the legal obligations of the state, they are free to do with these items what they will. Many personal effects are buried or burned with a person when he or she dies. Items which are not buried or passed to the *dagada* are inherited by the oldest child.

### Family Property

The individual family may lay claim to their home while they live in it, a plot of land while they work it, and the collective belongings of its immediate members. The eldest member of the family has discretion over all of these items, including the family members themselves. No one but the queen and her templars, however, may enslave a free citizen.

### Dagada Property

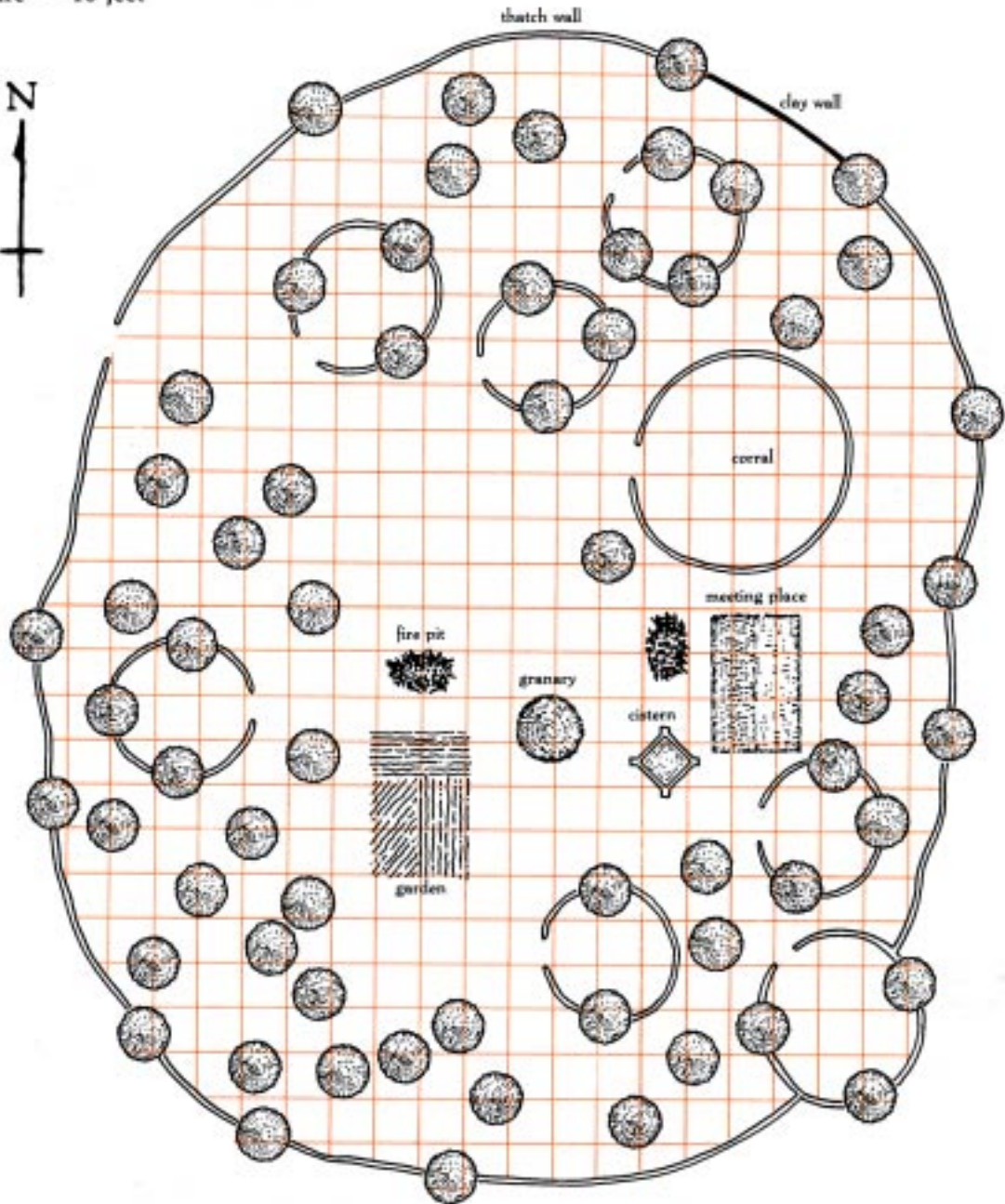
Property of the *dagada* includes all communal goods within the confines of the neighborhood, such as the wells and granaries. The huts in which individuals live are also property of the *dagada*. While a person is living in a hut their ownership is not challenged, but if that person leaves the *dagada* the hut is given to someone else at the discretion of the community.

A *dagada* also has claim to a certain amount of their members' output in order to pay taxes and to meet the needs of the other community members. A young man training part of the day in a weaving *dagada* is expected to leave his work behind for the benefit of the craft community. When he returns home, however, he is expected to weave goods for the *dagada* which can be used by members or sold to raise tax money at market.



# A DAGADA

1 square = 10 feet







The ambo of the dagada has discretion over the distribution of grain which is provided to each community by the templars.

## The People's Property

The various Peoples of Gulg have some common property. This is limited to their daga-fari, their charity grain, and their ancestral burial sites. These things are placed in the stewardship of the ambofari, who has sole discretion over their use.

## The Client Villages' Property

The resources of any village that requests the protection of the army of Gulg, or that receives such attentions uninvited, become the property of the queen. Every family in the client villages knows that the templars may, at any time, seize their property or press their children into military service.

Each client village has at least one Gulg citizen who is appointed headman by the state. This leader is treated much like an ambo of a dagada but is individually responsible for meeting the tax burden of the village.

Personal property is handled in a wide variety of ways in the client villages. Generally, property rights in a client village embody the customs of the people who are native to the village. The client villages at the farthest reaches of the oba's empire were founded by a variety of races and cultures and often reflect little of Gulg's cultural influence. As long as the villages are able to provide their taxes and levies, the templars rarely interfere with their administration or property.

## The Queen's Property

While all Gulgs recognize that everything in her domain is the property of the oba for practical purposes the property of the queen includes: the money and goods she obtains from taxes and revenues; the tools and equipment of the army and the state; the lands surrounding Gulg; and the client villages. The oba also owns the slaves who work the lands and serve the city-state in various capacities.

The popular understanding that the oba holds title to all the lands surrounding Gulg is illustrated when earth cultists bury their dead. The family offers the oba a finely woven decorative cloth as a way of symbolically compensating the ruler for the land used for the grave.

## Education

Education in Gulg society is essentially a system of apprenticeships, with formal education being reserved for the templars of the queen. Until the age of six, children in Gulg spend most of their time at play in the care of a dagada mother who is compensated by the entire community. The children are taught simple tasks, including how to clean and dress themselves. Their games are often centered around hunting and stalking skills.

At the age of six, children begin to accompany their parents to work. Farmers' children chase birds from the fields, crafts-peoples' children begin to assist as they can. In the evenings, the children gather to hear dagada elders tell fables and stories. They hear tales that explain the countless superstitions and customs which surround life in Gulg.

At the age of 13, children undergo the Forest Walk. During this ceremony, a vocation is chosen for them and they accept the mantle of citizenship in Gulg. At this point the young people begin to prepare more formally for adult life by pursuing apprenticeships.

Mornings are spent performing menial duties around the dagada and practicing hunting and combat skills at the parade grounds. In the afternoon the children assist practitioners of the crafts they hope to one day master. The morning hunting games take on more importance during adolescence, for the army is usually the only option for youths who fail at their apprenticeships. Some end up outcasts, still others end up exiles or criminals. This is not to say that the army is not highly esteemed in Gulg society. On the contrary, the army is highly regarded as the right arm of the oba's wrath. The army is simply the one place where most young Gulgs can take any skills and most likely find acceptance.

The responsibilities of an apprentice are entirely at the discretion of the master. The master, however, is expected to instruct the apprentice in the legends and stories specific to his trade and the totem of the child. The craft dagadas have developed rigorous programs of training designed to prepare an apprentice for eventual admission to the dagada.

The evenings for most young people continue to be spent under the tutelage of the dagada elders. During adolescence, however, boys and girls attend separate storytelling sessions and begin informal instruction in legends and mysteries that will prepare them for marriage. Through these sessions the elders of the dagada are able to gently educate the youths to their physical capabilities and responsibilities.

Children who are chosen to pursue the elemental cults of the priests or the disciplines of the Unseen Way are sent to live



at the temples or the Seer's Dagada respectively. Aspiring psionics do not leave the Seer's Dagada. They are no longer considered members of their home dagadas or their Peoples. Children who cannot endure the rigorous mental training demanded of a seer remain inside the dagada and simply perform menial tasks for the community.

The children who are chosen to join the elemental priest cults leave their home dagadas to study at the elemental temples. However, they often return home and continue to retain their claims of membership. The young acolytes tend to the needs of the sick and ailing within their home communities. They are generally treated with nervous indifference by the people of the city.

A child who is selected for a life of service as a templar leaves home to live in a special dagada for young templars. Here, not unlike the students of the seers, children are divested of any allegiances they may have had outside of the priesthood. They renounce their claim to any kinship group and devote themselves solely to the queen. A templar's education is structured and involves capability testing at every level. After two years, students begin to specialize in particular areas of expertise ranging from military engineering to the research of defiling magic. A student selected for the priesthood who is unable to advance simply remains in a subordinate rank, attending to menial tasks.

## Rites of Passage

The adult life of a Gulg begins at the age of 13 with the rite of passage called the Forest Walk. After this initiation, young Gulgs are directed into the occupations which they will pursue as adults. This rite also marks the time from which a Gulg is recognized by the state as a citizen. While the hunter cult of Gulg, the army, and many of the craft dagadas have their own rites of passage, the Forest Walk affects the lives of all Gulgs.

The Forest Walk is a difficult trial. When children turn 13, they are awakened before sunrise by their dagada ambo. An ambo chases an initiated youth through a narrow gauntlet of neighbors. The neighbors beat the child's back with stinging vines while chanting, "Not a boy and not a man, leave our home." (Or, in the case of a young female, "Not a girl and not a woman...") The elder parent delivers the last and hardest blow before the child sets off a one into the Crescent Forest.

Initiates take no food or water into the forest, and they may not eat anything they find. They may only drink water that they find at dawn or dusk. They may not follow any paths or animal trails, but must make their own way through the foliage.



After several days of abstaining from food, the child awaits a vision. The vision usually involves a creature of the forest which the child accepts as his or her totem. The animal totem is a source of strength and an omen of the child's destiny. After a child has received a vision, he or she may stop fasting and return home.

Upon the youth's return, the parents present their child to the ambo with the ritual request, "A man (or woman) from another place seeks a home here." The ambo then welcomes the new member of the dagada and a feast is held. At the feast, the youth sits to the right of the ambo and is welcomed to adulthood by the members of the dagada. A templar is often called to acknowledge the arrival of a new citizen. The elders within a dagada interpret the youth's vision and proclaim his "honor name." If a child has displayed any of the talents that are sought after by the psionics and clerics, a representative is certain to appear to help guide the "interpretation" of the vision.

There is a codex of specific meanings associated with every beast of the forest that a youth might envision. According to this set, a child who sees a vision of a mud-dauber wasp is destined to become a daga builder. A child who receives a vision of a hegbo lizard, the symbol of Gulg, is chosen for life among the templars.



There is even a list of interpretations for fantastic creatures which do not exist on Athas. No child in recent memory has claimed to have seen any of these creatures, though the interpretations associated with them remain in the memorized codex of honor names. Those with magical talent can learn to focus their totem's strength and magic in the creation of a fetish (described in the Veiled Alliance accessory).

Occasionally children do not return from their forest journey. They are not considered to have died, but are said to be "still searching for their path."

## Appeasing the Supernatural

Throughout the folklore and customs of the entire Gulg and Nibenay region, reminders exist of the power of sacrificing human life to appease supernatural forces. Sometimes the sacrifice is symbolic, as in the practice of promising a newborn child to service in the army. Other times the sacrifice is very real. The Gulg legend of the sacrifice of the oba provides the cultural foundations for the sacrifices of the elemental cults and the Dragon's Levy, both of which persist today.

## The Sorcerer-Queen

Ancient legends tell of a massive sacrifice made by the people of Gulg in order to keep their ruler. According to the story, the oba emerged from a huge agafari tree to eliminate dangers that threatened the forest. Once she had secured the safety of her people, the oba told them that it was time for her to return to the forest.

The people wailed and begged the oba to remain. "Surely," they cried, "without you the desert will overtake us, our enemies will enslave us, and our children will not know where their elders are buried." The oba smiled upon her people but told them that her work was done. The elders selected 1,000 volunteers to be sacrificed so that the oba could stay. Apparently, the sacrifice worked. The oba was transfigured and her power became even more radiant. It is believed that one day the oba will again be called back to her home, and again the people may need to intervene.

## The Elemental Cults

In small pockets scattered throughout the region, the practice of offering human sacrifices persists. The hunters and gatherers of the Crescent Forest sacrifice humans (or demihumans) when an elemental force appears to be out of balance and threatens their forest homes. For example, an extensive drought

or damaging windstorm will often prompt a sacrifice.

The army of Gulg sometimes performs such sacrifices as a way of requesting that the elements strengthen their mutual child, the forest. The soldiers believe that by performing such sacrifices the spirits of the dead will intervene on behalf of the forest. This in turn strengthens the forest-goddess, who then strengthens her army.

Although the elemental priests insist that the sacrifices do not, in fact, influence the elemental planes, they are still occasionally called upon to preside over them. In Gulg, to resist popular beliefs is often more dangerous than breaking the law. The common people believe that the only hope they have to influence the forces of nature is to send a spirit to intervene, even though clerics can personally direct and channel the energy of the elements. They believe that the impact of a sacrifice is a greater influence than the meditations of a single priest.

Volunteers are ritualistically immolated in a manner appropriate to the elemental force they wish to appease. If the earth is barren, a volunteer will be buried alive. If the sun or wind must be controlled, the volunteer is burned alive. The volunteer is expected to carry a message to the elemental force upon his or her death and intervene on the community's behalf.

If no volunteer steps forward, an unwilling victim is selected for the sacrifice. As an unwilling sacrifice cannot be relied upon to intervene for the community, a stone or stick is imbued with the message and placed in the victim's mouth. This message totem is believed to carry the community's plea to the elemental force when the victim dies.

## The Dragon's Levy

The single cultural ritual that cuts across the societies of all the city-states is the Dragon's Levy. Although it is explained and implemented in different ways throughout the Tablelands, it is practiced in every sorcerer-king's empire. In Gulg, the people believe the Dragon is the one force that can endanger their home while the oba rules. Every year 1,000 people are led into the salt flats by the oba's templars to serve as sacrifices for the Dragon. Sacrifices are usually comprised of prisoners of war, criminals and captive slaves, though a few zealous citizens always join the group in a display of religious or patriotic frenzy.

There are conflicting cosmologies that explain the role of the Dragon and his levy in Gulg society. The most common belief is that the Dragon serves to cleanse the city of those who would diminish Gulg's supremacy by accepting its undesirables. Military campaigns are often undertaken to raise the numbers necessary to appease the Dragon.





## Funerals

A funeral is considered a private matter, although elemental priests, the ambo-fari of the bereaved's People, and a few members of the dagada will generally attend. Each People of Gulg is associated with a particular elemental cult for the purposes of funeral rites. Each cult prescribes how a body is to be returned to its elemental components after death. The dead of an earth cult People, for example, are buried, while those of the air and fire cults are burned on pyres. Only the Obante Kopokono People are considered a People of the element of water. This People's dead are washed in water and then buried in mud-filled graves.

A white and ochre band is painted around the middle of every body that is prepared for funeral rites. This band is meant to prevent a spirit from returning to bother the living. The effectiveness of this custom is doubtful since the dwarven community of Gulg has been plagued with its share of dwarf banshees.

## Marriages

Marriages in Gulg follow the same rituals and customs for all classes of people. Only the slaves follow different constraints on pairing with mates.

In Gulg, marriage is as often a practical matter as one of affection. A mate is seen as a way of securing one's spiritual and economic well-being. The spiritual life is ennobled by continuing the lineage of one's family and People. Economically, a mate can generate offspring and contribute to the production of the dagada. In fact, when a person asks permission of a partner's guardian to marry, the request is made with an offer of service. This offer is meant to compensate for the loss of productive capacity associated with losing a family member. It usually takes the form of several months of labor.

Intimate relations prior to marriage are common in Gulg, and an unmarried girl who has had several children is prized for her fertility. The gift that must be paid for such a spouse is correspondingly larger because of the additional productive capacity of the children. After the marriage, a spouse is expected to remain monogamous except during certain celebrations and festival days.

The eldest member of a family has discretion over the matching of his or her younger charges. It is, however, the responsibility of the elder partner to request the permission of the younger's guardian, regardless of whether a marriage is arranged or of the couple's choosing.





## Entertainment and Dining

Storytelling is the most popular form of entertainment in Gulg. There are even games built around storytelling. In the dagada, neighbors will often weave tales long into the evening. Some dice games are popular, as is a simple strategy game played with pebbles in hollowed-out pockets in the ground.

Outside the dagada, the most popular forms of entertainment are the hunting games and festival contests. Hunting games range from spear throwing contests, to savage children's games in which the participants reenact the Red Moon Hunt. The public festivals all include gladiatorial games as well as various contests in which dagadas enter teams.

Gulgs traditionally eat two meals each day, one during mid-day when the sun is at its zenith and the other after dusk. The Gulg diet consists almost exclusively of millet, fruit and erdlu. Kola nuts are used to make a mind-stimulating drink.

A diet of red meat is almost exclusively a privilege of the hunter nobles. Hunters returning from the forest are expected to share what they cannot eat themselves with their dagadas.

## Dress

Both sexes wear colorful skirts in Gulg. The women sometimes drape theirs from the shoulder, while men wear theirs around their waists. The elders of Gulg wear pale caftans as a sign of their seniority. Children often wear little or nothing until after the Forest Walk when they become adults. Elaborate jewelry is popular among all Gulgs.

Hunter nobles wear dark brown or mottled green skirts as well as elaborate body paint. These body paints are generally used as camouflage. The warriors of Gulg's army also wear body paint, but they use fierce colors meant to inspire fear in their opponents.

Templars wear coarse layered robes of red or black with collars that come to the base of the neck, just below their necklaces of rank.

## Cultural Identity

### Art

Decorative arts are deeply integrated into the lives of the Gulgs. Virtually all Gulgs practice jewelry making, simple pottery shaping, weaving, and ceremonial body painting. Even the warriors of Gulg's army spend time decorating their shields and weapons. Only the hunter noble cult of Gulg abstains

from such idle pursuits. They believe that mark making saps the strength of a hunter. This is not to say that they eschew ornament. On the contrary, the nobles of Gulg often sport the most dazzling array of feathers, paint and blood. However, slaves prepare all of their decorations for them.

## Sculpture

Gulgs adorn their homes with small wicker animals and fetish dolls made of wood, straw and bone. These, along with some decorative objects used in public ceremonies, represent the extent of sculpture in the city.

Hunters sometimes make a fetish model of their prey before embarking on a hunt. Suitors create fetish dolls of the objects of their affections. These small totems are believed to help the creators gain mastery over the beings that are modeled. The queen's templars, psionic masters, and elemental priests have all imbued such dolls with power at one time or another, which has contributed to continuing popular beliefs about the benefits of fashioning them.

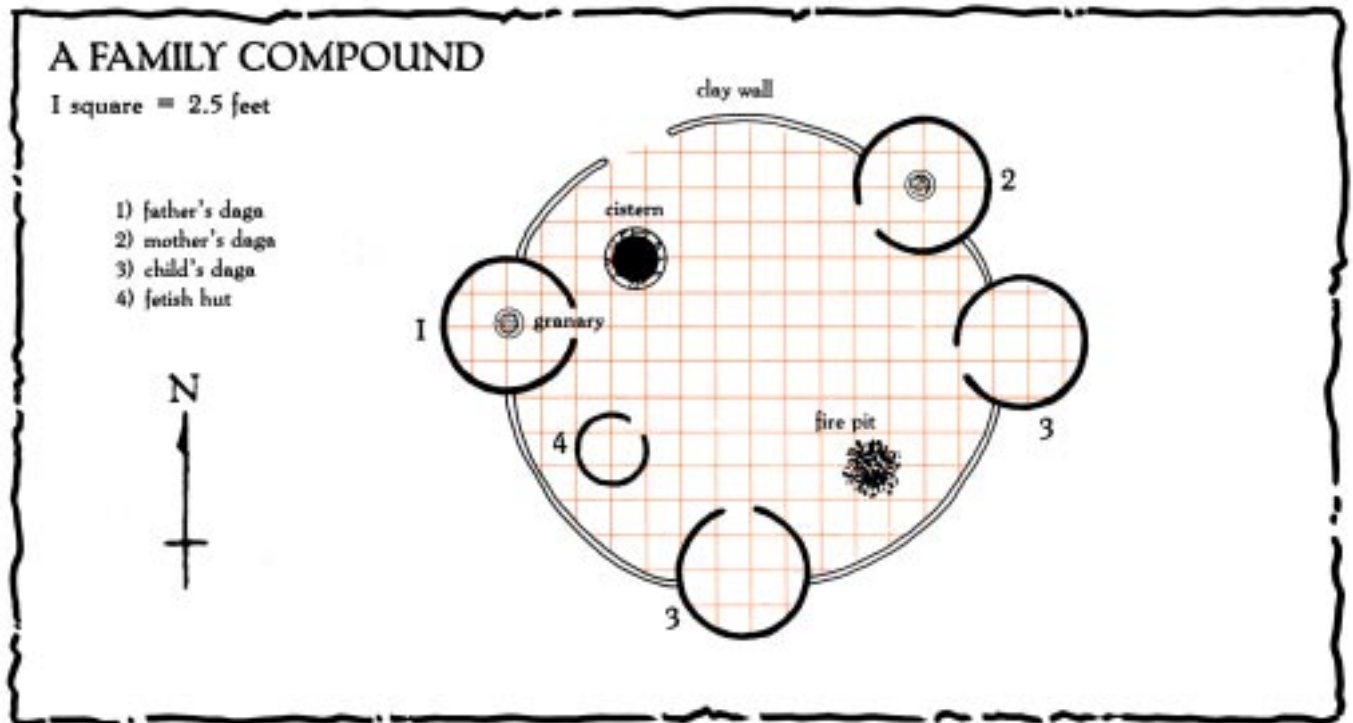
## Architecture

Most Gulg homes are *dagas*, circular clay huts with thatch roofs. The homes are arranged in clusters around a granary or well. Some family units within a dagada build a circle of dagas whose doors open into an open center area. The huts are connected by a wall of clay or rushes, depending on the wealth of the family. These walls serve to keep livestock from straying, and high oval doorways prevent animals from wandering into the huts. Often an entire dagada will be enclosed in this manner. The dagada wall serves to define the boundary of the neighborhood, as well as prevent the unobserved approach of strangers.

Individual dagas are often adorned with colored stones and decorative lines. It is not unusual to find objects pressed into the clay around the doorway of a daga. These are usually totems of the resident's family, People, occupation, or elemental cult. The dagas of hunter nobles are painted with broad bands of ochre and white. The paint stripe must completely surround the house. It is said to protect the inhabitants from spirits that a hunter may have angered.

The architecture of the merchant emporiums operating in Gulg sometimes follows the conventions of the merchant house's home city. Most, however, use rectangular clay buildings with thatch or clay roofs. Brilliantly-colored awnings make the merchant's stalls easy to identify

The Temple of Earth is the only stone building in Gulg.



The Temple of the Sun is baked clay. The Temple of Air is an open clearing surrounded by the dagas of the priests.

Certainly the most distinctive architectural features of Gulg are the daga-fari tree buildings. The greatest of these is the queen's palace. Each of the 39 Peoples of Gulg has a tree building which serves as a symbolic clan home. The tree buildings are all built in large agafari trees. These trees can survive for centuries with large sections of the trunk hollowed out. Generally, the tree houses consist of a few small, thatch huts resting in the branches of an agafari. They are accessible by ladders, ropes, or stairways cut into the tree trunk. The huts are often surrounded by several small platforms and walkways made of lashed wood. The daga-faris are considered sacred sites within the city.

## Literature

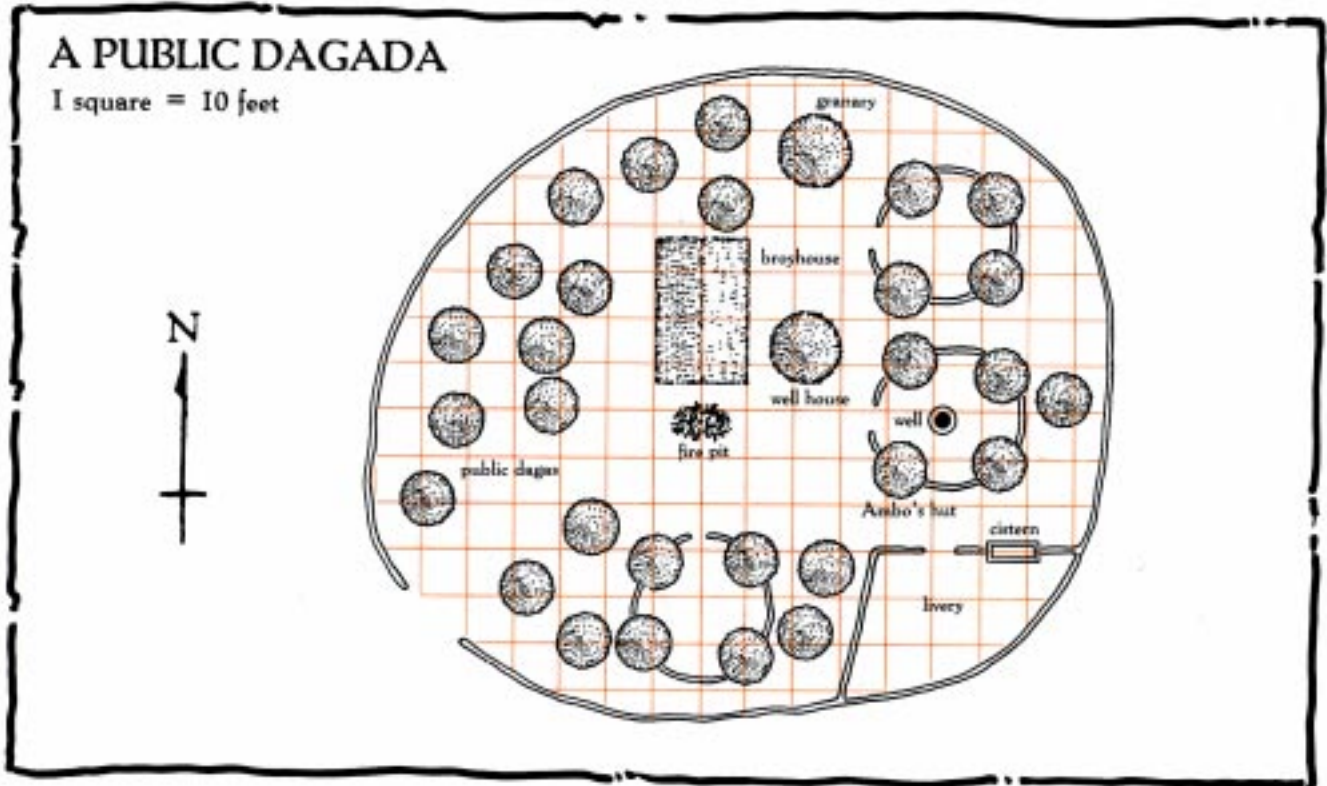
Gulg's literature is a rich oral tradition of folk tales and animal fables. The stories are often told at family fires, and all Gulg children grow up with a common body of knowledge rooted in these tales. The stories are an important part of a child's education in Gulg.

The Gulg stories are always allegorical and, as a result, details often vary in a tale's retelling. Gulgs value the emotional truth of a story much more than the veracity of particular events. Storytellers are encouraged to discard facts in an effort to better add drama or express the moral of a story. Historical tales are equally subject to reinterpretation, which makes it very difficult for outsiders to piece together an accurate picture of Gulg's past. The only subject that Gulgs can be relied upon to recall accurately is the lineage of their People.

Writing is neither valued nor legal among the free citizens of Gulg. The hunter nobles of the city disdain writing as a crutch for the feeble-minded and, while they are permitted to pursue it, they prefer to spend their time improving their predatory skills. Templars use writing as necessary, but often maintain accounts through systems of counted pebbles. Bards in Gulg rely on their memories for their storytelling.

Writing is primarily a tool of foreign merchants, who use the written trade language of their House in their work. While even this is illegal within the city walls, it is largely ignored by the templars. Writing is generally associated with magic use and immediately arouses the suspicion of Gulg's citizens.





## Gab-Ali Stories

The Gab-Ali stories are an endless collection of tales about a young thief who escaped the Red Moon Hunt and gained the queen's favor. Many fantastic feats are attributed to this mythical hero who usually defeats much stronger opponents through his sharp wits and stealth. Gab-Ali stories allow for a form of audience participation in which the storyteller pauses at a dramatic moment, turns to the crowd, and asks as if he were Gab-Ali, "Should I open the door?" The crowd responds with raucous suggestions from which the storyteller directs the plot. Part of the fun of a Gab-Ali story is to see how a skilled storyteller can arrive at the traditional ending of a tale while overcoming the obstacles of the audience's directions.

During the high and low sun festivals there are huge convocations of the Peoples. These celebratory shows of unity involve public displays surrounding the origin myths of the various Peoples. This helps to promote solidarity across dagada boundaries before the fiercely competitive dagada games begin.

The dagada games involve various of trials in which the different communities pit their teams and champions against one another. Some of the trials involve wrestling matches or spear throwing contests. Others involve ordeals of endurance, such as walking on coals or piling stones atop someone. There are often casualties in these events.

The gladiatorial games are held at the parade ground. Many of the contests pit fighters against forest predators or exotic beasts which the oba purchases from merchant houses. Free citizens are permitted to join these games if they choose, and this is the only situation where a slave may kill a citizen without fear of punishment. The day concludes with honors being bestowed on champions by the queen.

## The Calendar of Gulg

The Gulgs use a simple calendar of counting days to or from a seasonal change. Unfortunately, most Gulgs cannot count very high. This keeps them focused on dates in the immediate future. They often track planting times by keeping baskets in which they move one stone to another each day.



# The People of Gulg

## The Free Citizens

The common city dwellers of Gulg are primarily farmers, laborers and craftspeople. Most live in dagadas populated by other free citizens, a noble or two, and a few contract slaves. They rise early and begin their day tending to the affairs of the dagada before turning to private matters.

Each member of a dagada has been told by the ambo exactly what they are expected to provide in order to meet the material needs of the community and pay the taxes owed to the state. A baker may be required to provide seven of every 10 loaves he bakes to the dagada for distribution to the other members. A herder, on the other hand, may be called upon to turn over a number of his erdlu, three of which will be provided to other dagada members, the rest going to the templars to cover the community's tax burden. It is the responsibility of the ambo to make certain that the taxes of the entire community are paid and that no member goes hungry.

Free citizen farmers work small plots of ground outside the city in the Verdant Belt. Sometimes a single family will work an area and provide part of their production to the dagada, while in other cases members of a dagada will work a plot together.

Laborers can be seen all over the city carrying large baskets on their heads or building fences. They are usually compensated in ceramic pieces or grain. A laborer conventionally works outside his dagada but turns a share of his revenue over to the community.

Craftspeople often join craft dagadas and produce goods which the dagadas then sell at market. Their material needs are taken care of by the craft dagada. Those who live and work in a residential dagada contribute to the community like other members.

Some free citizens are employed directly by the state as either soldiers or civil workers. They are paid a small amount of grain and occasionally a few ceramic pieces. They have no tax liability, and if they live in a dagada are only expected to contribute to meet the material needs of the community.

Free citizens are permitted to leave their dagadas to travel, but are expected to return with gifts as a symbolic compensation to the community for the loss of their productive capacity. People who neglect their responsibilities are shunned by the people of their dagadas until they have made restitution. If the problem continues, the offender can be exiled.

## Hunter Nobles

Hunting is celebrated in all aspects of Gulg life, from the brutal children's games to the bloody excesses of the gladiatorial shows. Nobility in Gulg is not tied to ownership of land or lineage, but rather the hunting skill of an individual. The nobles of Gulg are an elite class of hunters who rise from the general populace because of their superior abilities.

While hunting accounts for only a small part of the city's production, hunters are esteemed as supporters and protectors of the community. The oba encourages the cult of the hunter by granting a host of privileges to the hunter elite and by honoring them in public games and ceremonies. The queen administers the admission of aspirants to the noble class.

This class system is tremendously popular with the people of Gulg for several reasons: the people do not resent the preferential treatment the nobles receive because anyone has the potential to rise to noble status; the life of the hunter elite is rigorous and leaves little time for the idle pleasures which most citizens enjoy; the nobles are often on the front lines of any military conflict in defense of Gulg; and a dagada benefits from the political influence of a resident noble. Dagada members enjoy fresh meat and social status within the city as well as contract slaves and other resources which the nobles have access to.

## The Hunter Cult

The hunter cult represents the body of rituals and beliefs which surrounds the daily life of Gulg's hunter noble class. It is a lifestyle steeped in traditions, many of which are secret and known only to initiates. A few of these traditions make up huge public ceremonies promoted by the oba and known to virtually everyone in Gulg. The metaphor of the hunt appears throughout the folklore of the Gulgs.

The teachings of the hunter cult require that every hunter strive to eliminate thought in order to hunt by pure instinct, like an animal. The goal of every hunter in the moment of the kill is to act without decision. They place a tremendous amount of value on the aesthetics of a kill.

The forest goddess Lalali-Puy lies at the center of the hunter cultist's world. The queen has succeeded over the centuries in creating a noble class that is fanatically loyal and will act unquestioningly in defense of Gulg. Nobles do not value material wealth, and their influence is not passed to their children. They are popular with the masses, but disdain politics and mercantile enterprises. They create none of the problems



# The People of Gulg

for the queen that the noble classes of other cities create for their rulers.

## Becoming a Hunter Noble

There are several ways in which a Gulg may become a hunter noble. The most common is to be selected after the Forest Walk to train for the hunter's life. In exchange for the quarry which they take, young hunters contract slaves to help in training and tracking. Still, this life does not guarantee a place among the nobles. An aspiring hunter must succeed in the Red Moon Hunt to achieve full acceptance among the nobles. The hundreds who spend years training and fail, however, find that the preparation has made them choice candidates for the army of Gulg.

The queen occasionally grants noble status as a reward for extraordinary service. The recipient must be prepared to lead the rigorous life of a Gulg noble.

## The Red Moon Hunt

The best known rite of entry into Gulg's hunter noble class is the Red Moon Hunt. This ritual is traditionally held the one night of the year when the moon Urgati (Ral) is alone in the sky.

Aspiring nobles meet at the end of the day outside the city in one of the queen's sacred groves. Here Shala, the Hunt Mistress of Gulg, provides simple weapons to a small collection of prisoners and slaves. At moonrise, the fugitives are released into the forest. One thousand heartbeats later the aspiring nobles set off in pursuit of the prisoners. Any candidate who returns before dawn with the head of one or more fugitives will be considered for a place among the nobles. Any fugitive who escapes death is considered free. Sometimes the oba affords such freedom only to those who never return to the city. Other times she insists that the fugitives return at dawn to claim their freedom before banishing them from the city.

The aspiring nobles may take any contract slaves or friends who agree to serve them on the hunt. It is considered poor form, however, to defeat prey with overwhelming numbers. Much higher regard is given to those who make a kill with equal or lesser strength of arms. The oba often refuses nobility to those who demonstrate no art in their hunting.

## The Hunter's Life

The life of the hunter revolves around the Hunter Lodge at the center of the hunter dagada. As a rule, hunter nobles continue to live at the dagada of their birth. The hunter dagada is home only to the lieutenants of Shala, the Hunt Mistress of Gulg, and Akili, the Diviner of the Hunt.

Shala lives in the Sunlight Home and is the primary liaison between the hunter nobles and the queen, Shala rules upon all affairs of the hunter nobles. She has attained her position through sheer mastery of the art of the hunt. She has, at times, discarded her weapon in order to disable prey with her bare hands.

Akili is a powerful templar psionist. The elderly woman administers to the spiritual needs of the hunter nobles. She determines which animals may or may not be hunted and where hunters may search for prey.

The hunters spend their days stalking the forest and their evenings engaged in dark rituals meant to empower them and help them gain mastery over their prey. The hunter nobles are feared and respected by all Gulgs. It is not uncommon for a hunter to take a contract slave on as a servant and hunting partner. These slaves often become close allies of their masters. Slaves are generally perceived as animals in Gulg, and a slave is thought to help a hunter become closer to his or her prey.

## The Slaves

All slaves in Gulg are technically the property of the state. The majority of these slaves are used to tend crops and herds in the fields of the client villages. Others are "contracted" from the state by dagadas and individuals in exchange for a greater share of taxes. Unlike the slaves of Nibenay and some of the other city-states, slaves in Gulg are never compensated for their labor, and there is no way for them to earn their freedom except through escape or death.

Slaves are easily identifiable by their meager dress and the deep blue patterns tattooed on their faces and arms. The system of markings looks like ornate decoration to the uninitiated, but a templar can decipher a slave's lifelong service record at a glance.

Slaves in Gulg tend to be treated with indifference. The indifference can, however, often result in neglect. Gulgs regard slaves as mere animals, and would no more take a slave into their confidence than they would a kank or crodlu. People do not dare abuse or damage state property, but a difficult slave will be returned to the templars who have no such concerns about the care of their chattel.





## State Slaves

There are whole quarters of the city comprised of the dagadas of slaves. The huts in these clusters are made entirely of thatch and are often overcrowded. Each dagada has an overseer who is responsible for tending to the slaves.

The slaves serving the state are used primarily in the state-controlled fields of the client villages. Many serve the templars and the army as laborers. Templars are often assigned slaves as personal attendants. Some slaves are actually used as gatherers in the forest surrounding Gulg, but their labor constitutes only a minor part of the city-state's production.

## Contract Slaves

Dagadas may turn over an additional portion of their production to the state in exchange for the service of a state slave. These slaves may stay in the state slave dagadas or may take up residence with their keepers. If a slave lives in a residential dagada, the people of the community are responsible for feeding the slave out of their own resources. The dagada is also responsible if a slave escapes. Consequently, one tends to see only a few slaves in the residential areas and fewer still traveling with their patrons.

Hunter nobles often contract with the city for the service of a slave to maintain their equipment and prepare their gear. The hunters prefer to contract gladiators to train with and to serve as squires. These slaves often develop lifelong relationships with their masters and care for them into old age. Ironically, in Gulg it is only the slaves of the nobles who are not treated like animals.

## Becoming a Slave

There are three types of slaves in Gulg: those who are born into slavery, those who are captured enemies, and those who have broken city laws. It should be remembered that the power of the templars is so absolute that even angering a disciple of the queen can constitute grounds for enslavement.

Any child of a slave is by law a slave. There are three slave Peoples whose kin have been slaves in Gulg for centuries. These slaves may not have the skills or abilities of other slaves, but they are valued for their docility.

Gulg's many forays against Nibenay, neighboring villages and various raiding tribes yield scores of prisoners of war. Warriors are usually sent to the gladiatorial games of the seasonal festivals or released in the Red Moon Hunt. Others wind up

in the fields of the oba under a templar's lash.

Even the breach of a local custom can land a person in the oba's dungeons. This fate, however, usually awaits dangerous criminals and prisoners who have some political value to the arresting templar. Most criminals wind up enslaved. This is particularly true if the transgression was seen as a breach of the property rights of the state, such as when a citizen cannot pay a tax or debt to the state.

Individual citizens of Gulg who have difficulty meeting a tax or fine imposed by the templars can usually rely on their dagada or family to pool their resources to prevent the person from being cast into slavery. Consequently, it is only those outcasts who have managed to alienate their families, their dagadas, and even their Peoples, who wind up in bonds. The violation of the social order required to achieve such a result is so severe that the natural born slaves of Gulg look upon such unfortunates with more contempt than they do the captive slaves.

## Life of a Slave

The imprint of Gulg society is so deeply ingrained in the consciousness of all city dwellers that both the slave-born and the former citizens seem to accept their fate with a certain fatalism not seen among the slave populations of the other cities. It is the captive slaves who create the most difficulty for their masters and who hunger most for freedom. It is also the captive slaves who are given the most back-breaking work and receive the most brutal treatment. Such captive slaves are even brutalized by the slave-born of Gulg.

The slave-born of Gulg are raised within slave dagadas. The social structure of a slave dagada is a crude parallel to that of the free citizens, with templar guards serving as ambos. Slaves receive daily rations of grain and water from the templars, but contract slaves must be fed by the dagada they serve.

The slave-born of Gulg are raised to serve as farmers and laborers but may end up learning a craft if they are contracted by a craft dagada. Some are employed in the military, which is considered an honor among the slave-born. The citizen slaves and lawbreakers are generally put to use where the skills of their previous life can best serve the city. Captive slaves are separated from their families, kept in closely supervised work teams, and employed primarily as field workers and laborers.

Templars select a slave's mate. The mated slaves are permitted to live in the same slave dagada when one or the other is not under contract. The templars particularly make a point of matching up captive slaves with Gulg natives. They believe



## The People of Gulg

that this both ennoble the offspring of the foreigner and decreases the likelihood of an escape attempt. Partnerships that form and produce children without the direction of the templars are not discouraged. Such a pair, however, must be prepared to be separated and rematched if the templars think it appropriate. In general, the templars only direct the matching of particularly talented slaves. Unusually strong or dexterous slaves are especially valued for breeding potential gladiators.

Slaves have no rights except to request that a templar recall them from their contracts. Beyond that, a slave's life belongs to the state. Citizens may not use unreasonable force in dealing with contracted slaves. Any means of coercion that is considered appropriate for a beast of burden is acceptable, however. Whipping, prodding, leashes, bits, and pack saddles are all a part of a contract slave's daily routine. However, accidental deaths or crippling injuries result in serious penalties for the keeper.

### Outcasts and Criminals

In spite of, and perhaps because of, Gulg's inflexible and conformist social order, with its dizzying array of customs and taboos, many Gulg find themselves outside of society. Some of these people are strong individualists or visionaries; others are just criminals.

Whether citizens run afoul of local customs or simply spend too much time in the company of elves, Gulg can quickly find themselves exiled, imprisoned, enslaved, or executed. An ambo has the authority to exile a citizen from a dagada. This does not relieve the dagada of the individual's tax burden for that year, however, so this step is only taken with incorrigibles. The state is extremely inconsistent in its sentencing and punishments. The manner in which these people are handled is often left to the discretion of the arresting templars. Occasionally, Lalali-Puy herself takes an interest in a criminal and personally rules on his or her fate. Many outcasts are simply banished through the Exile's Gate, while others go to the dungeons to await the next Red Moon Hunt.

There are, however, a surprising number of places for such malcontents to find refuge. The bard dagadas seem to attract many people who lie outside the mainstream of Gulg society. The public dagadas which serve as inns are usually full of outlanders who are more accepting of Gulg nonconformists. The merchant houses also provide an avenue for success for those who are willing to revoke their citizenship.

### Hunters and Gatherers

Primitive clans of hunters and gatherers live on in the Crescent Forest as a continual reminder of Gulg's past. While hunting and gathering lie at the center of the public imagination in Gulg, these occupations account for very little of the city's actual production. An economy based upon hunting and gathering would never successfully support such a large population over any extended period of time without completely depleting the forest upon which it depends. Hunting and gathering, then, are elevated to a largely symbolic role, while the task of actually supporting the city falls to the more mundane work of farmers and herders.

In the Crescent Forest, not far from the city small clans of extended families still survive by hunting and gathering. These tribes are largely self-sufficient, but bring roots, fruit, nuts and fresh game into the city to trade for the few items they might require. They identify themselves by People names, some of which are the same as the Peoples of the city. The city dwellers look upon the hunters and gatherers as somewhat backward cousins. Their dress is usually simple and they wear crude body paints which have none of the sophistication of city fashion. Their speech is also awkward and stilted, but some claim that it is similar to speech used in the oba's court.

The hunters and gatherers are not actually citizens of Gulg, but a young hunter-gatherer deciding to leave the forest is usually given shelter in a house of his People and sponsored for citizenship.

The customs of the city explain that the simple forest people take the food of the oba directly from the forest and in return receive the protection of her trees but not of her armies. The hunter nobles are the first to offer security to the forest people. If a clan comes to the city walls requesting protection from marauding raiders or some wild beast, hunter nobles see it as an act of honor to assist these poor and distant kinsmen.



# City Life

Most people approach Gulg from the stone Road of Roshott that runs from the Estuary of the Forked Tongue to an area in the Verdant Belt just south of the Crescent Forest. In the heart of the Verdant Belt, many small client villages cluster around well-tended fields. Nearing the forest, an increasing number of larger fields appear, worked by slaves and overseen by templars. Interspersed among these are small fields worked by families and dagadas of Gulg. The stone road gives way to a wide dirt road, called the People's Road, that enters the Crescent Forest and leads right to the Sunlight Home of the oba.

In addition to the ordinary citizens traveling to and from the fields surrounding the city, the road is traversed by patrols of templars, lines of slaves, and merchant caravans. Several enterprising people have set up public dagadas along the road. These offer a daga and a meal to travelers starting at 5 bits a day. There are also a few public dagadas in the city. Elf tribes who have business in the city camp in the forest away from the road. Merchant houses have established large semipermanent camps on the side of the road leading toward the Mopti Wall.

The People's Road moves through the trade district where merchant houses keep small emporiums and templars negotiate for the oba. All around the city, daga-fari tree houses can

be seen rising above the dagadas. The Sunlight Home stands at the center of the city, to the north of the parade ground where the army drills and gladiatorial combats are held.

Templar dagadas and slave dagadas make up the residential areas closest to the palace. Toward the eastern end of the city, an irregular network of foot paths and dirt roads runs between the thatch and clay walls of the dagadas. The footpaths and roads of Gulg are dusty and well trodden. Market clearings can be found throughout the city, usually marked by a well. Crowding has reduced the number of trees and grassy areas, but the forest lies just a few hundred yards beyond the Mopti Wall.

## The City Gates

One of the most remarkable features of Gulg is the enormous Mopti Wall that surrounds the city. The wall is made up of miles of carefully cultivated brambleweed. The 20 feet thick and 20 feet high brambleweed is so dense that virtually nothing can pass between its thorns. The exterior of the wall is heavily patrolled, and scaffolding placed at regular intervals allows guards to keep watch from inside.

There are four gates into the city: the Queen's Gate, the







## City Life

Hunter's Gate, the People's Gate, and the Exile's Gate. The Queen's Gate is the largest entry, and is sometimes referred to as the Caravan Gate. All visitors and travelers carrying trade goods must enter the city here. The Hunter's Gate is only used by the army and the hunter nobles of the city. The People's Gate serves the common citizens. The Exile's Gate marks the location where outcasts are driven from the city. Anyone may use this gate as an exit, but no one may enter through it.

Templar guards and psionics work each gate. These servants of the queen can quickly determine the veracity of any entrant's claims.

## Commerce and the Marketplace

The oba rules over an essentially closed economy. While citizens may freely exchange goods with one another, outsiders are faced with a daunting body of regulations and barriers to trade within the city.

The oba owns all property in Gulg. The internal market is seen simply as the natural redistribution of the oba's property. The templars evaluate the productive capacity of each dagada and client village, and assess a certain quantity of grain and goods which must be produced and provided to the state.

## The City Market

The internal, or city, market takes place every five days in the market clearings of the city. Sellers arrive early to sweep the ground where they will spread out their wares. Craft dagadas usually send one member to sell the surplus goods they have manufactured. The sellers erect awnings of brightly-colored cloth—the traditional sign of a vendor's stall in Gulg. Buyers negotiate vigorously before settling a trade in either barter or ceramic pieces. Bards can be found performing at some of the clearings until dusk, when all of the markets shut down.

With the exception of the high sun and low sun festivals, there are no customs restricting trade on non-market days. On any given day, individual sellers can be seen sitting at busy crossroads with a small supply of goods. In the evenings there are a few sellers in the clearings (though no more than three in any location) with necessities that one may have run out of or forgotten to purchase on market day. Loaves, wine, sugar, grain, and hot coals can always be found here.

## Client Villages

The client villages may participate in the city market, but records are kept of the amount of trade goods that each client village brings through the city gates. If a client village appears to be generating more than the templars have estimated it to be capable of, it is reassessed with heavier taxes. Each client village is authorized to bring only certain types of grain or livestock into the city market.

Client villagers may trade directly with merchants who travel through their village. The restrictions on the goods that can be brought to Gulg by a given client village, however, prevents them from reselling goods purchased from merchants.

## The Dynastic Merchant Houses

The oba determines the outside influence of foreign cities and cultures on her people by completely controlling all trade with outside merchants. The dynastic merchant houses negotiate all trade directly with the oba's templars. The templars trade cloth, spices and livestock collected as taxes from the citizens and client villages, as well as surplus production from the city's slaves. They primarily seek gold, silver and iron for the oba, who uses these goods to equip her army.

The merchant houses may not trade directly with the public. Their emporiums exist solely to negotiate deals with the templars. The emporiums are smaller than those in other city-states and are not built to lavishly display goods. They are used to administer house operations and make presentations to the templars. The city keeps huge thatch storehouses where house agents may purchase goods from the oba.

Every individual or caravan passing through the city gates must declare every carried item. Consequently, most merchant houses bring only a few samples into the city, and negotiate a deal with the templars before bothering to unload a caravan. The merchant houses have all established camps outside the city where they can conduct business freely with travelers.

## House Inika

House Inika is the largest of the dynastic merchant houses to base its operations in Gulg. It is, however, small by the standards of the other major houses of the Tyr region. Taking its style from House Riben of Gulg, Inika keeps its caravans small and its profits high. Inika was established only 300 years ago when a trusted agent of House Riben left to start his own enterprise. After a rocky start, the small house established



itself as a shrewd competitor with an efficient, streamlined operation. It may have been the oba's intolerance for the opulent display and bellicose rivalries of the foreign houses that helped Inika establish itself. Its success soon eclipsed House Riben, whose fortunes dwindled over the centuries.

House Riben eventually neared financial collapse and, in an uncharacteristic manner, turned to the oba for financial assistance. The queen bought the facilities of the house and continues to use them today as her own trade storehouses. The family withdrew from mercantile endeavors, but a templar from the Riben family still heads the oba's trade operations.

House Inika has a unique advantage over foreign competitors in Gulg. It is the only trading house that has a thorough understanding of Gulg culture. Because of the expertise of its native employees, Inika is generally able to negotiate better terms with the templars for export goods than are its rivals. (See the *Dune Trader* accessory for more about House Inika.)

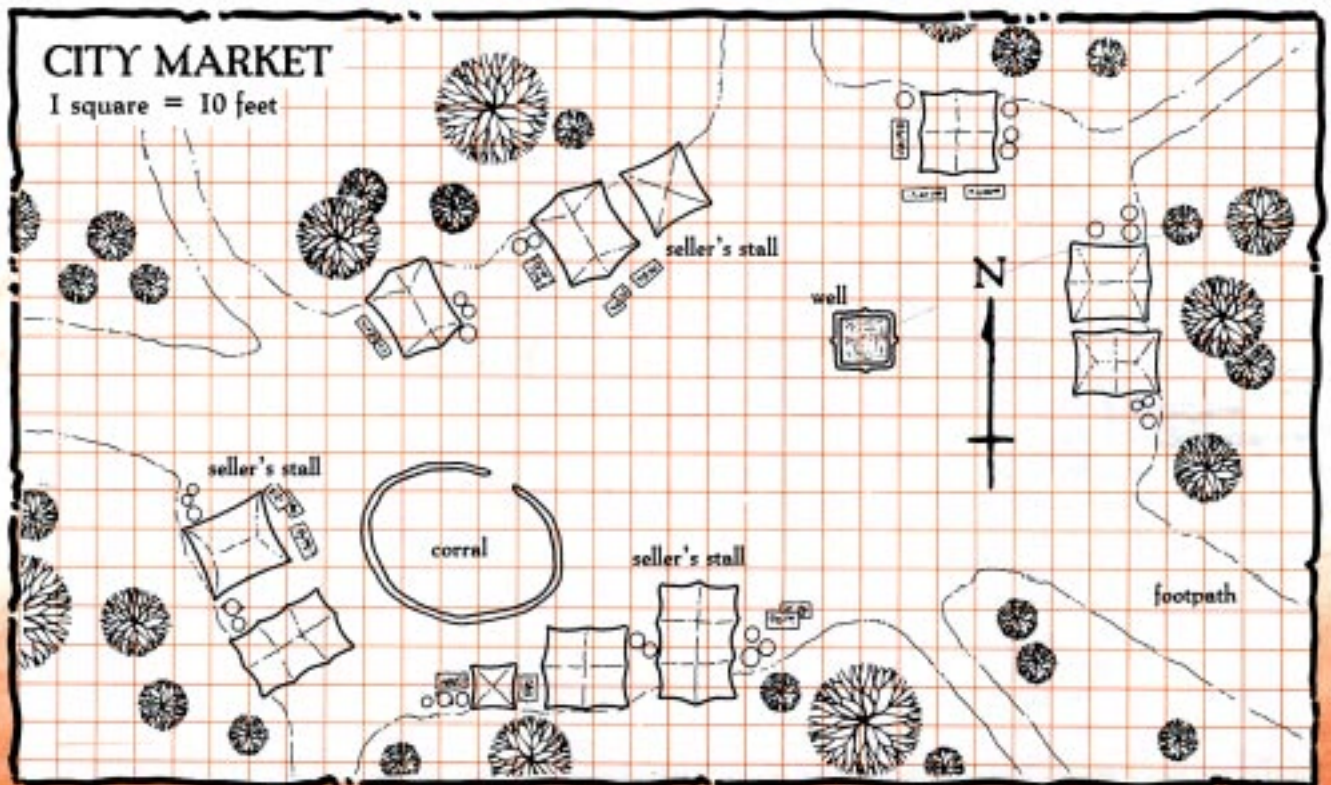
## The Elven Markets

Because of the oba's restrictions on trade, elf tribes face difficulties in Gulg that they do not encounter in other city-

states. Sometimes the elves will bypass the obstacles of the city completely by setting up market camps just off the road in the Crescent Forest. Occasionally, a single elf will bribe a sponsor for citizenship and bring her entire tribe into the city under the broad kinship laws. Elves who take this course take up residence in old slave dagadas or other empty huts and establish their own dagadas. Elven dagadas are always enclosed and usually considered dangerous eyesores by the general public.

Elven markets take place only within the walls of a tribe's dagada. The templars' tolerance for the elves is directly related to the amount of goods which the elves turn over in taxes. The elves are only authorized to sell their own handicrafts or livestock, but people are drawn to the markets by the contraband which is discreetly available there.

Respectable citizens rarely venture into an elven dagada, and then only during the daytime. In the evenings, the strange elven entertainments and music draw the more courageous Gulgs. The elves are careful when conducting business in Gulg, or the templars have absolutely no reservations about imprisoning entire tribes if they receive complaints from citizens.







### Citizenship

Citizenship is an important concept in all of the city-states. It can determine whether a person is executed for a crime or merely enslaved. As a citizen, every Gulg has three basic rights. These are referred to as the Three Great Gifts of the Oba:

- **The Gift of Protection from the Enemies of Gulg.** This right justifies the activities of Gulg's military. It also entitles citizens to call for protection from raiders and thieves on the roads surrounding the city. This right grants templars the authority to arrest foreigners and citizens who break the city's laws.

- **The Gift of the Fruit of the City.** This right is expressed in the distribution of grain from the city's fields to the people. It also justifies the internal city markets wherein citizens may freely exchange goods and services which they create.

- **The Gift of Petitioning the Oba.** This right takes two forms. A citizen theoretically has the right to appeal the decision of a templar to a templar who is one necklace higher in authority. This right is rarely invoked, and only in public places where there are many witnesses. Even then it may be ignored, for the first right of guaranteeing protection from the enemies of Gulg supersedes a citizen's right to petition. Thus, a templar can simply ignore a person's pleas for appeal by deciding that the citizen is an enemy of the state. The second form that this right takes is in a citizen's freedom to request an audience with the queen. A person may end up waiting months for such an audience, but it is actually a privilege that is generally honored.

While the state enforces the social customs, there are only three responsibilities that the queen has consistently demanded from her people. They are referred to as the Three Great Gifts of the Peoples:

- **The Gift of Protection from the Enemies of Gulg.** This responsibility is manifested in the state's ability to conscript anyone to service in the army. This is also cited to commandeer any resources that might be in the control of an individual. It is used to indict people who have aided those deemed to be enemies of the city, especially magic-users.

- **The Gift of the Fruit of the City.** This accounts for the heavy burden of taxes which all Gulgs bear. Virtually all of an individual's production goes to the state or the dagada for redistribution.

- **The Gift of Petitioning the People.** This claim legitimizes the queen's absolute power. By invoking this gift the forest goddess may instantly demand and receive anything from her people.

The Gulgs are perhaps the most xenophobic and ethnocentric of all the peoples of the city-states. Consequently, independent of citizenship, the way people are treated is directly related to how well they can negotiate the dense maze of customs and rituals in the city. For practical purposes, knowledge of Gulg's social protocol serves visitors much better than citizenship. When a person breaks the law, however, non-citizens are dealt with much more harshly than citizens. The exception is that Gulg-born who deliberately defy the social conventions of the city receive the gravest punishments, for they should know better.

### Becoming a Citizen

The templars of Gulg keep count of all city and client village occupants. This information is used in assessing the tax liability of each dagada and village. Anyone born to Gulg parents is considered a citizen after taking the Forest Walk.

Client villagers may or may not be citizens. The leader of a client village must theoretically petition for citizenship. That individual is then extended the Gifts of the Oba. The leader is personally responsible for ensuring that the village meets its tax requirements.

Any individual may petition for citizenship. Gulgs see it as a generosity and obligation they have to elevate the uncultured peoples of the Tablelands. A petitioning individual must have a sponsor, who in turn represents either a dagada or a People of Gulg. The sponsor accepts the liability for the aspiring citizen's taxes. The aspiring citizen is considered a client of his or her sponsor. As a client, he turns over revenue to his sponsor, who then pays the templars. A client remains connected to his sponsor for a period of three years, or until he marries a full citizen, and then becomes a full citizen himself.

The queen may also grant citizenship for extraordinary service.

### The Citizen's Stone

When leaving the city, every citizen may request a citizen's stone. This brightly colored stone serves as proof of citizenship to the templars and soldiers of the queen. A psionicist can quickly identify whether the stone actually belongs to the bearer or whether it has been stolen or sold. Carrying a citizen's stone which belongs to someone else is grounds for immediate execution.



# Life in the Oba's Court

The queen's palace, called the Sunlight Home, lies in the center of the city, at the end of the People's Road. It is a complex of huts built within the branches of an enormous agafari tree. The tree, called *obata*, is believed to be the tree from which the forest goddess first emerged into the world.

Compared to the palaces of the other rulers of the Tablelands, the Sunlight Home is small. It is, however, a true wonder. Stairways run both in and around the trunk of the enormous tree. Templars live in huts among the lower branches, while Lalali-Puy and her court dwell in the tree's highest branches. The queen's dungeons lie along twisted passageways amid the roots of the tree. Tunnels lead from the palace to the parade ground and to the Red Moon Grove outside the city.

The court of Lalali-Puy consists of an assortment of nobles, entertainers, visitors, templars, sages, and a few favorite gladiators. The oba spends much of her day hearing proposals and requests from her templars, and ruling on the petitions of her citizenry. Ambitious courtiers attempt to curry favor with the queen throughout the day without raising her anger.

The structure of the oba's government is rather simple in comparison to the huge bureaucratic machines of her rivals. She assigns unrelated responsibilities to individuals she believes to be talented, rather than tying jobs to a particular

institution or function. Thus, a templar who is in charge of the armaments for the infantry may also be assigned to manage the training of slaves for work in the fields.

The responsibilities of the government are generally divided between two high templars: Mogadisho, Warlord of Gulg, the master of the army; and Hoopidjo the Gatherer, administrator of city affairs. Lalali-Puy herself tends to rule on legal questions. She also personally supervises her defilers. Perhaps the only other person of formal authority that affects the management of the city-state is Shala, Hunt Mistress of Gulg. Shala is a courtier but not a templar. She does, however, rule over the affairs of the hunter nobles when Lalali-Puy herself does not take an interest in them.

The queen's true inner circle, however, consists of a secret society called the Paper Nest. While the group meets formally only on rare occasions, this handful of templars and advisers who have the queen's confidence are often consulted on an individual basis.

## The Paper Nest

The real center of power in Gulg lies in the Paper Nest. This secret society of the queen's most trusted advisers is comprised





## Life in the Oba's Court

of the highest ranking templars, a few favored nobles, and one or two elders from the Seer's Dagada. Membership in the group has varied between eight and 20 individuals over the centuries.

The Paper Nest takes its name from the nests built by the paper wasps. Its members are called in secrecy to leave the city under the protection of the queen's magic to carry out the group's primary function. They meet in a grove outside the brambleweed wall where they collect branches for the making of paper. With the branches in hand, they return to a chamber in the trunk of the obata—the Paper Nest. There, they make paper for the use of the queen and her templars.

During this process the members may speak freely with the queen without fear of reprisal. In this odd sanctuary the queen seeks advice from her most trusted servants. Once the paper has been made, the group disbands until the supply dwindles. Then they are again called to the Paper Nest. (See the *Veiled Alliance* accessory for more on the Paper Nest.)

### The Templars

Recognizable instantly from their tight necklaces of rank, the templars of the oba inspire fear and obedience throughout

Gulg's reach. The templars are the priests, inquisitors and administrators of the queen. They supervise the army and the economy, and enforce the laws.

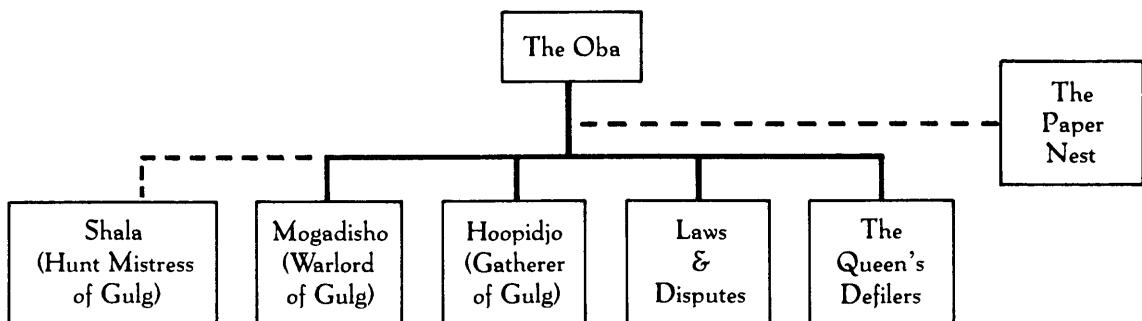
The disciples of the oba follow their own rites and traditions that are as ancient as those of the people of Gulg. Many of the higher level templars live in huts of the Sunlight Home. They are attended by initiates and conduct business from there. Others live in well-appointed huts within the templar dagadas. Still others actually take huts in the residential dagadas.

The queen allows for templars to be dispatched to a residential dagada at the request of the dagada's leader. This request usually comes when an ambo is fearful for the security of his dagada or suspicious of an illegal activity, such as smuggling or magic use.

The templars of Gulg display their ranks of office in the form of tightly-bound necklaces. These necklaces are threaded with small tubular beads and bits of human bone, hair and teeth. The necklaces are worn snugly against the neck and, as they accumulate, look like very high, tight collars. They form a four-inch band on the necks of the highest-ranking templars.

The necklace system is one of the few formalized institu-

### ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF GULG'S GOVERNMENT







tions within the oba's government. The necklace hierarchy, however, indicates only the order of command that the templars must follow when not under the oba's direct control. It is an approximate measure of a templar's experience and capability but not necessarily his political influence. The oba is often arbitrary and capricious in who she lends her ear. She will demand information from a low-ranking templar as quickly as she will from the templar's superior. Her constant interference with all matters of government increases the inefficiency of her rule but keeps the informal hierarchy of power and influence very decentralized.

## The Noble Speech

Part of the training which the hunter nobles and high-ranking templars receive is instruction in the High Gulg language. The queen insists that members of her court and any templars who report directly to her with any degree of regularity speak in the stilted and archaic High Gulg dialect. This is not actually another language, but the Gulg tongue as it was spoken in her court thousands of years ago. Courtiers are expected to speak in this manner only in the presence of the queen. Outside of her presence, they may lapse into contemporary speech patterns.

## Gulg's Army

The army of Gulg has a reputation for speed, stealth and incredible savagery. The warriors are called *judagas*, which means head-hunters. The name comes from the practice of taking the heads of their enemies as trophies. It is considered a great honor to defend Gulg in the service of the army. Young Gulgs learn to handle spears from an early age, but formal military training focuses on drilling and fighting in formation.

While most of Gulg's warriors begin training after the Forest Walk, the army accepts recruits who have abandoned other vocations. Each templar commander has discretion over the acceptance and testing of new recruits within their units.

In BATTLESYSTEM™ rules, the ferocity of the Gulg army translates to a 1 point bonus to morale for infantry units. With the exception of Heavy Charioteers and Heavy Cavalry, all of the unit types presented under "Sorcerer-King's Horde" in the *Dragon Kings* hardbound are available to the oba when drawing up army lists for BATTLESYSTEM scenarios.

There are two infantry unit types that are unique to Gulg. The oba only uses crodlu for cavalry mounts; kanks are only used for military baggage trains.







## Life in the Oba's Court

**Hunter Noble Leader** (10th Level Ranger)  
AD 8\*8 AR 5 Hits 5 CD 16' MV 12' Points 40  
Range 10'/20'/30' (magical long bow)

**Judaga Bowmen** 10 stands (50%)  
AD 8\*6 AR 8 Hits 1 ML 12 MV 12' Points 14  
Range 5'/10'/15' (short bows, poison arrows)

**Judaga Spearmen** 10 stands (50%)  
AD 6\*6 AR 7 Hits 1 ML 12 MV 9 Points 8  
Range 1'/2'/3' (large shields, spears)

### Building Armies

By following the BATTLESYSTEM™ rules on Scenario Construction, army lists can be built. Listed below are point costs for each of the basic unit types described in the *Dragon Kings* hardcover. Because the average army on Athas tends to be somewhat more formidable than is typical of a fantasy miniatures conflict, it may be helpful to increase the total number of points permitted in scenario construction.

Unit Type	Cost
Templar Overseer	160
Templar Centurion	105
Templar Animator	90
Templar Taskmaster	40
Defiler Master	190
Defiler Subordinate	70
Gulg Light Charioteers	63
Gulg Medium Cavalry	24
Gulg Light Cavalry	14
Templar Heavy Infantry	13
Human Slave Infantry	4
Dwarf Slave Infantry*	8
Skeleton Infantry	14
Skeleton Archers	19
Zombie Infantry	20
Mekillot Ram**	90
Ram Archers	10
Ram Javelineers	0
Mekillot Ram Slaves	1
Drik Ram	60
Undead War Beetle	75
Undead Beetle Archers	9
Necromancer (priest)	90
Undead Watroach	80
Necromancer (priest)	90

\* The MV of the Dwarf Slave Infantry is incorrect in *Dragon Kings*. The correct MV is 6.

\*\* In addition to carrying a heavy catapult, the mekillot ram is a boring machine with the following statistics: Hits 12/18 AD Stone: 8; Metal 6; Wood 6.

### Bribery in Gulg

Bribery is illegal in Gulg. The act of offering a gift in exchange for special treatment, however, is an art as deeply rooted and complex as any Gulg custom. In Gulg, gifts are considered an integral part of long term relationships. Offering a gift in exchange for privileges during a first meeting is considered bribery. Once two people have met, however, gifts are considered necessary for building a relationship.

Consequently, a traveler passing a few ceramic pieces to a guard is likely to wind up imprisoned. If that same traveler meets the guard several days in a row and chats about the weather, and then offers the guard an umbrella for shelter from the sun, the guard is likely to look away as his new friend slips by.

### Smuggling Spell Components

Lalali-Puy's templars are trained to identify signs of magic use. The templars at the city gates can spot those who potentially traffick in spell components.

Magic-users cannot hope to pass themselves off as clerics or psionicists. Elemental clerics virtually always wear the tattoos of their cult and psionicists have no need for material components or the charms used as crutches by those who cannot master the power of their minds.

Templars watch for the following things:

- Anyone carrying written materials.
- Anyone carrying anything known to have no practical value except as a spell component.
- Anyone traveling alone with no weapons or protective armor, and those with soft, uncalloused hands.
- Clients of herbalists as well as the herbalists themselves. (If you need a curative, go to a temple.)

A herder carrying a bale of fleece on his back is less likely to attract attention than a man with a small bit of fleece in a pouch (used to cast a *phantasmal force* spell). The templars also go by the rule of three. Any one common item that can be used as a component will probably be ignored, but a person who happens to have three or more such items is certain to be detained. Unfortunately, many common items can be used as spell components. Consequently, templars usually don't need



to look far for an excuse to detain someone. Thus, while a small square of silk (for *Nystul's magical aura*), a few pork rinds (*grease*), and a pinch of sand (*sleep*) might not alert a templar by themselves, the three together certainly will.

Once or twice, an elemental cleric has been caught smuggling spell components for a wizard by trying to pass them off as materials of the clerical trade. Templars are quite familiar with priestly items and will not be fooled by this tactic. The only time this strategy might work is when a component can be used by both a cleric and a wizard. Confiscated components are distributed to the queen's defilers.

## The Bone Village

Within the Crescent Forest, hidden from the Mopti Wall by distance and a stand of skeletal trees, lies Lalali-Puy's Bone Village. This out-of-the-way location serves as the oba's private domain, where she regularly conducts rites and ceremonies to increase her personal levels of power. Few Gulgs have personally seen this macabre village, but most know of it from the frightening tales told around dagada fires on dark, quiet nights.

The Bone Village dates to the earliest days of Gulg society. Then, as now, it was a place of punishment. Ancient druids brought enemies of the forest—human, demihuman, monster

and animal—to this spot and killed them, leaving their bones as reminders of their crimes and proof against further transgressions. The druids placed a magic over the location which traps the spirits of those who die within its borders. As long as their bones remain, the spirits are trapped in undeath, unable to bring more harm to the forest. The oba carries on this tradition, using the Bone Village as the killing fields for her most-hated enemies.

In the Bone Village, the ground lies hidden beneath carpets of white bones and hills of silent, staring skulls. The spirits of the dead flow freely over this stark, lifeless landscape, eternal prisoners trapped until their bones are gathered and buried beyond the village limits. When these spirits manifest, they appear as distinct glowing shapes clustered together in an ever-shifting mass of spectral energy. The spirits are drawn to any living animals or beings who wander into the village, for they crave the warmth and life these creatures emit.

The uppermost layers of bone come from those the oba has killed. Some of the dead have been drained of life to advance Lalali-Puy's pursuit of dragon magic. Others have served to power various dark ceremonies she sometimes conducts in the privacy of the Bone Village. It is definitely her domain, for even her highest-ranking and most-trusted templars strive to avoid this village of trapped and tortured souls.

# Races and Characters in Gulg

## Races in Gulg

The population of Gulg is overwhelmingly human and the people very ethnocentric. Gulgs are incredibly intolerant not of racial differences, but cultural ones. Consequently, a Gulg will get along quite well with a dwarf who understands and abides by a Gulg's sense of propriety, but will have little patience for a human who breaches etiquette.

In spite of the restrictive culture of the city, the unique autonomy of the dagadas allows independent subcultures to thrive relatively unhampered. As long as a dagada provides its taxes, it is generally free to administer to its own affairs. For this reason, the residential dagadas are almost entirely segregated along racial lines, and non-human dagadas operate much in the manner of such racial communities elsewhere in the Tablelands.

Elves living within their own dagada can run things as they see fit, as long as they pay their taxes and don't bother anyone. Some elf craftsmen and bards have established permanent residency, but the elf population tends to be transient. Any Gulg making the acquaintance of an elf for the first time will consider him completely untrustworthy and potentially dangerous. Gulgs only begin to trust elves who have established themselves in the city and have lived there for several years. This, of course, amounts to a very small number of the desert runners.

The craft dagadas, where ability and effort are the measure of a member, are somewhat more integrated. Many dwarves, elves and half-elves can be found here. Half-giants, who are valued for their tremendous strength and willingness to conform, can also be found in some craft dagadas. Most are not bright enough to negotiate their way through Gulg's cultural maze, however, and soon find themselves enslaved by the templars.

Bardic dagadas and the elemental temples are also home to a variety of races, as are the facilities of the dynastic merchant houses.

Half-elves are virtually always illegitimate children. Most are the result of fleeting in a airs that occur while an elf tribe temporarily camps in or around Gulg. If a half-elf has been raised by a human parent within a dagada, he or she is likely to be accepted by the community. Those abandoned by their elf parent are unlikely to find acceptance anywhere except perhaps in the bard dagadas.

Muls are found almost exclusively in the slave dagadas or in the barracks of the merchant houses. It is not uncommon to see muls accompanying hunters, templars and soldiers. Tem-

plars are quick to imprison dwarves at the slightest infraction in hope of breeding more muls.

Thri-kreen are respected and feared in Gulg for their hunting ability, and honored for the cohesiveness of the clutch. Although they are required to obey the laws of the city, they are not expected to conform to Gulg customs. Ironically, the normally ethnocentric and intolerant Gulgs overlook many infractions of etiquette when perpetrated by a thri-kreen. There are a few thri-kreen dagadas in the city where hunter nobles go to seek out hunting companions. A recent decree instituted to discourage raiding of client villages in the Verdant Belt offers a reward for thri-kreen heads, but Gulgs remain respectful of their thri-kreen neighbors.

Halflings are exceedingly rare in Gulg. When found they are viewed as curiosities and freaks. Popular myths tell of wars against the halflings which the oba waged in order to save the forest thousands of years ago. Gulgs react with a certain righteous disdain to any halflings they encounter. Lalali-Puy's halfling jester Spunt is a comic reminder of her mastery over the small beings.

## Character Classes in Gulg

This section describes how the character classes participate in Gulg society. Each description explains how the public perceives such people, and where they can be found. Visitors to the city may find this helpful when trying to hire talent, or looking for like-minded professionals who can offer assistance.

### Fighters

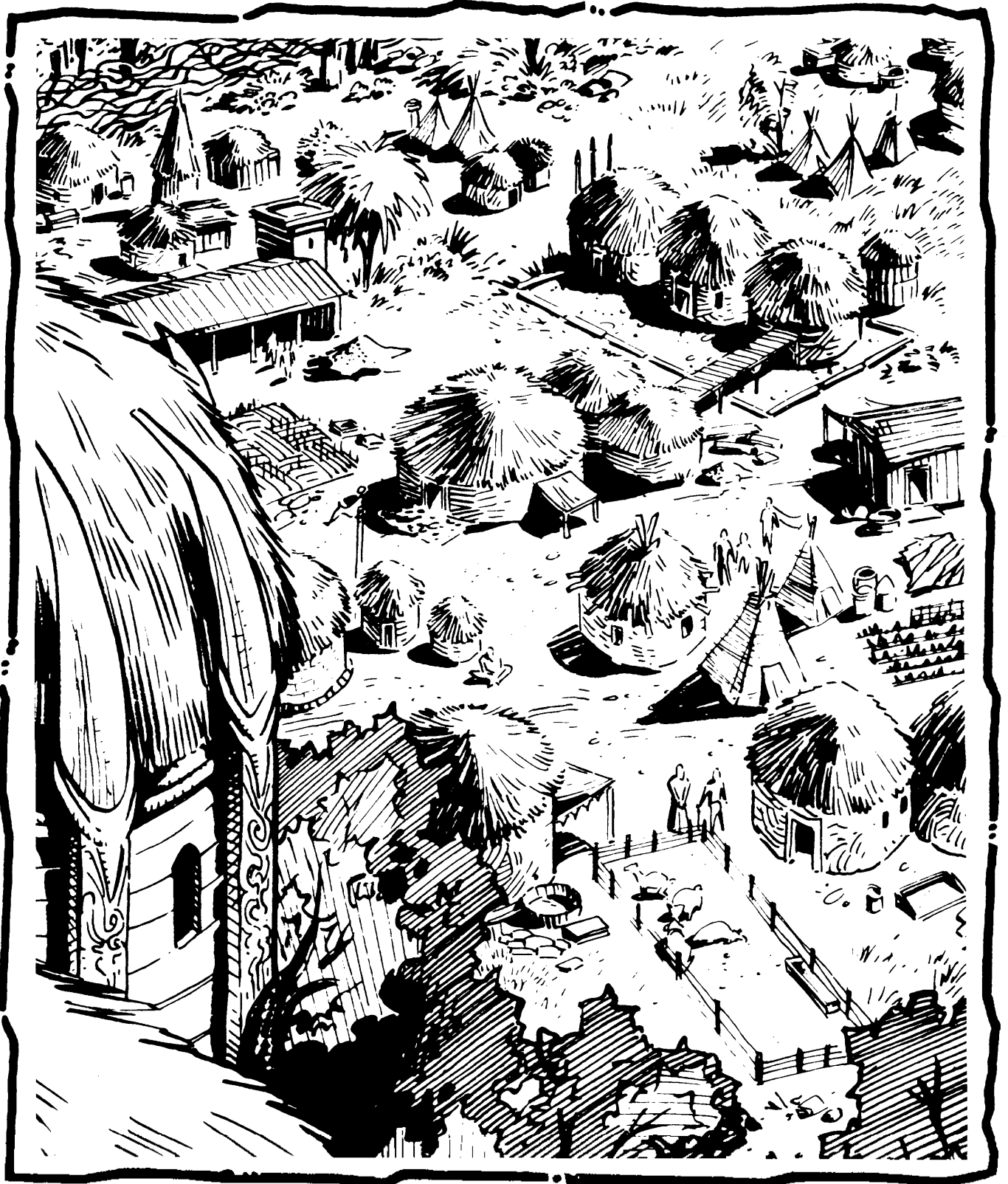
Fighters are employed by the dynastic merchant houses and can be found serving as guards and sentries throughout the city. Low-level fighters are seen as soldiers of average ability and do not receive the deference or respect that rangers do. Anyone, it is believed, can hit a man with a club. Fighters of higher level or unusual ability are perceived and treated by the general public in the same manner as rangers.

### Rangers

Because of the heavy emphasis placed on hunting and forest life in Gulg culture, there is a relatively high population of rangers. Most of the warriors in Gulg's army are rangers, as are the hunter nobles of the city. Rangers are found throughout the city and do not collect in specialized dagadas or organizations beyond the army and the hunter cult.



# Races and Characters in Gulg





## Races and Characters in Gulg

### Gladiators

The festivals of high and low sun include a week of gladiatorial games in which the people of Gulg celebrate their hunters. Military victories are also celebrated with bouts which include prisoners of war. Gladiators from across the Tyr region are also purchased from the merchant houses for participation in the public games.

Gulg's gladiators are owned by the state and trained in gladiatorial dagadas. Individual hunters and army commanders may contract gladiators as servants. Keepers are expected to train with the gladiator as a way of preparing for combat. During the games, these warriors represent their masters. The merchant houses are so invited to enter their own combatants.

Most of the games focus on individuals or small teams fighting animals. Some match Gulg gladiators against foreigners in order to exemplify the superiority of Gulg culture.

### Wizards

Magic use is illegal within Gulg and its holdings. It is punishable by imprisonment and death. The templars usually opt for immediate execution to avoid the difficulties of holding a magic-user captive. As is the case with common people everywhere, the Gulgs do not distinguish between preservers and defilers. All magic-users are equally feared and despised. The citizens of Gulg are quick to alert the templars to any public display of magic. Fortunately for magic-users, there are enough charms and superstitions woven into Gulg life that a magic-user may remain in a dagada masquerading as an eccentric with an unusual knowledge of such charms.

The commonplace exposure of clerical magic and psionic ability has made Gulgs quite indifferent to supernatural events. Consequently, a Gulg seeing a man pushing a levitating crate will assume psionic activity before magic use.

The people are aware that the oba lords over a force of wizards. They regard such mages with fear but are thankful that they are under the oba's control. They are also secretly pleased that such a horrible force will be used in defense of Gulg. See the *Veiled Alliance* accessory for details on the organization and methods by which a preserver may contact other preservers.

### Clerics

The elements are seen as terrible forces from which the forest was born and people must be protected. The fire of the sun

allows the trees to grow, the earth anchors their roots, the water nourishes them, and the air carries their seed. In turn, the trees offer shade from the torment of the sun, food, and protection from the howling winds of the Great Ivory Plain, and they hold the land from the torrential mudslides that spill from the mountains. While the forest goddess embodies the security that the forest offers, elemental priests are seen as people who can intervene on behalf of individuals to mitigate the terrible forces of nature. This power is gained at a price, however, for the priests must devote their lives to the elements.

Elemental priests can be found living in the dagadas of their birth throughout the city. Only the high priests and their closest assistants actually live on the temple grounds. On any given day, one may find a handful of students sitting at the feet of a temple teacher.

Clerics perform simple healing in exchange for donations to the temple. Monies are used to support the high priest and to maintain the temple grounds. Clerics are also called to preside at funerals. There is no temple of water in Gulg.

### Druids

The oba has been extremely successful in persuading druids to serve her interests. More than a few druids have been surprised to find themselves drawn into an uneasy alliance with the sorcerer-queen. Lalali-Puy has convinced these poor idealists that she is committed to the defense of the forest and its inhabitants. She has gotten them to aid her in slowing the threat that Nibenay's lumber camps represent to the Crescent Forest. The druids understand that they have a common enemy, but Lalali-Puy simply sees them as one more tool in her war against Nibenay. Several druids protect her sacred groves and tend to the Mopti Wall.

### Templars

Templars visiting from foreign cities are offered lodging in Gulg's templar dagadas or the Sunlight Home. They are watched carefully and subjected to telepathic probes. They are treated with diplomatic courtesy and sometimes offered opportunities to serve the oba as spies.

### Bards

Bards spend most of their time in the bardic dagadas, and this suits most Gulgs just fine. Bards are looked it with a bit of trepidation by the Gulgs. They are primarily dancers and

## Races and Characters in Gulg



musicians whose drumming is said to inspire grain to grow and armies to battle.

The music is also believed to be dangerously powerful to the weak willed. A popular story tells of Kili, a young girl who crept into a bardic dagada as a child and was seduced by the hypnotic power of the music. She began to dance and was unable to stop. She never returned home and her family believed her lost in the forest. She danced helplessly for years, growing into womanhood, aging, and finally dying. Still, the music kept her dancing and priests had to be called to lay her bones to rest. When Gulg drummers gather in a dagada, it is said that they summon Kili's spirit. The sticks with which the drummers play are called *kiliaba*, the bones of the girl who danced.

Storytellers are the most feared of Gulg's bards. It is said that a bard's tale can make a man's heart stop. It is also believed that if a storyteller tells a person a story about themselves and they die in the story, the person will actually die shortly afterward. This is the source of the common Gulg expression announcing a person's death, "His story was over."

Most people simply enjoy the stories of the elders in their dagada or the music that they can create themselves singing and drumming with friends. During major festivals, however, the bards flood the streets of Gulg to entertain the crowds. People turn out in huge numbers to watch and listen to them. It is during these events that the Gulgs show their appreciation and respect for the bards. In large crowds, under the protection of the templars, the people clearly enjoy the powerful work of bardic masters.

Some young people actually venture into the bardic dagadas in acts of daring, curiosity and youthful rebellion. At night the dagadas are alive with the sounds of drummers and song. Thrill-seekers venture in to play dice, dance to the hypnotic music, and sample the strange drinks which are offered.

### Thieves

The vague sense of property rights in Gulg makes life interesting for thieves. Because everything belongs to the oba, nothing can be technically stolen until it is actually removed from the city. As a practical matter, however, individuals and dagadas are charged with the care of "the queen's property." Thus, anyone who has something stolen can claim that a thief is offending the queen by endangering her property and removing it from its rightful caretaker. Thieves who have been caught, however, have occasionally been released after making a compelling plea that the keeper was not properly managing the



item for the queen. This double standard allows templars a lot of discretion over when they choose to enforce property rights and when they choose to ignore them.

Foreign thieves are seen only as criminals and enemies of the state. If caught, they are dealt with harshly but can occasionally escape severe punishment if they convince the templars to allow them to perform thieving services for the queen.

Thieves can be found throughout the city, but they frequent bardic dagadas and the merchant's quarters. Occasionally a group of thieves will form a dagada and support themselves either by pilfering goods from Gulg or the nearby client villages of Nibenay.

### Psionicists

Every Gulg is familiar with the power of the Unseen Way, but few have the talent or obsessive disciple required to master the mind. There are psionicists and wild talents scattered throughout Gulg, but the real center of psionic activity is the Seer's Dagada. Run by a powerful psionicist (and secret member of the Order) named Agafari, the Seer's Dagada offers the services of its members to the community. Most of the psionicists





## Races and Characters in Gulg

are telepaths and clairsentients. People pay the psionics to predict the location of prey, advise farmers on planting, and communicate with distant friends.

The oba employs a number of powerful psionics at the city gates. These servants of the queen verify the claims made by people entering the city and interrogate suspicious people.

### The Order

The Order is an extremely secretive society of Athas's most powerful psionics (see *Dragon Kings* for more information). Agafari, the head of the Seer's Dagada in Gulg, is a member of the Order. None of Gulg's psionics know this, but Agafari is a Gulg-born psionist hermit who was directed by the Order to return to Gulg to recruit the former master of the Seer's Dagada. When the master refused, Agafari killed him and assumed the position of leadership.

The Order has been extremely successful in maintaining its secrecy. There are few rumors or legends relating to this powerful organization. Psionics in the service of an Order member are not even aware of the organization. If a powerful but uninitiated psionist does become aware of the group, the Order can easily erase the individual's memories. Only rogue psionics who have refused to join the Order and have not yet

been destroyed can reveal the existence of the group, though they tend to avoid heavily-populated areas.

The sorcerer-kings are aware of the Order, as are most other advanced beings, but they prefer to keep their knowledge to themselves.

### The Veiled Alliance

The Veiled Alliance is an underground organization of preservers. The Alliance in Gulg suffered a serious setback 10 years ago when the oba's templars discovered the group's headquarters. Aukash-Pad, a member of the city's Alliance council, escaped the subsequent raid. After a brief period of hiding, he returned to lead the Alliance with a new vision. He believes that Athas will one day be blanketed with green forests and rich grasslands again, and he sees the Sea of Silt one day becoming a shimmering ocean of water. He has set the Alliance's sights on this goal and works toward it diligently.

The safest way to contact the Veiled Alliance in Gulg is to hide near a forest source of some magic component. The mages of Gulg gather components from such sites at regular intervals. (For more information on Aukash-Pad and Gulg's preservers, see the *Veiled Alliance* accessory.)



# NPC Master Table

Name	CL	AC	MV	HD	#AT	Damage (penalties & bonuses included)	AL	THAC0*
Caravan guard, human	F4	7	12	4d10	1	1d6 + 1 (bone spear)	N	17
Citizen of Gulg, typical	-	10	12	1d6	1	1d4 - 1 (bone dagger)	Var	20
Cleric of the Sun, typical**	Cf5	10	12	5d8	1	1d6 (obsidian club)	N	18
Druid of the Crescent Forest**	Dr5	9	12	5d8	1	1d4 (quarterstaff)	N	18
Drummer of Gulg, typical	B5	10	12	5d6	1	1d6 (bone wrist razor)	N	18
Elf, typical	Th3	9	12	3d6	1	1d8 - 1 (bone sword)	N	19
Elf chieft	F7	2	12	7d10	3/2	1d8 (steel long sword)	NE	14
Gladiator, mulf	G5	6	12	5d10	1	1d8 + 1 (obsidian sword)	Var	16
Guard, mul	F4	7	12	4d10	1	1d6 + 1 (bone spear)	NE	17
Halfling of Losthome	R3	9	12	3d10	2	1d4 - 1/1d4 - 1 (bone daggers)	Var	18
Hunter noble††	R7	4	12	7d10	5/2	1d6/1d4 - 1 (bone short sword/bone dagger)	LN	14
Hunter/gatherer, typical	-	10	12	1d10	1	1d6 (wooden spear)	N	20
Judaga archer	F4	8	12	4d10	2	1d6 (short bow with Type C poison)	N	17
Judaga warrior	F3	8	12	3d10	1	1d6 + 1 (wooden spear)	N	18
Merchant, typical	Tr3	10	12	3d6	1	1d4 - 1 (bone dagger)	N	19
Preserver, typical**	P5	10	12	5d4	1	1d4 - 1 (bone dagger)	NG	19
Seer, typical†	Psi5	8	12	5d6	1	1d6 - 1 (bone short sword)	LN	18
Slave, human	F2	10	12	2d10	1	Punch/wrestle	Var	19
Templar commander**	T10	2	12	10d8	1	2d4 (metal broad sword)	LE	14
Templar defiler**	D6	9	12	6d4	1	1d4 (metal dagger)	LE	19
Templar overseer**	T4	8	12	4d8	1	1d2 (whip)	LE	18
Templar, low-level**	T4	8	12	4d8	1	1d6 (agafari spear)	LE	18
Templar, midlevel**	T6	5	12	6d8	1	1d4 (metal dagger)	LE	18
Templar, master**	T10	2	12	10d8	1	2d4 (metal broad sword)	LE	14

\*\* THAC0 does not include penalties or bonuses due to Str or weapon material.

\*\* Possess spells.

† Possess wild talents or other psionics.

†† Hunter nobles also carry spears but use their blades in close combat.





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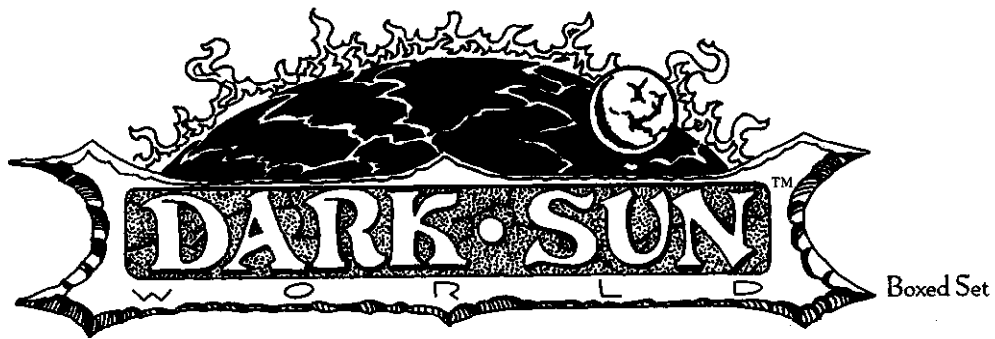
**DARK • SUN**

W O R L D

Accessory

The City-State  
of Nibenay





## The City-State of Nibenay

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Respectfully dedicated to the memory of  
**Curtis Scott,**  
lost tragically in an auto accident August 19,1992.  
He will be missed by the many friends he touched through his writing and gaming.

### About This Book

This book is intended to serve as a source book for DMs on the city-state of Nibenay. You may or may not want to make the material in this book available to your players. There are a number of other DARK SUN™ accessories that refer to Nibenay or describe a particular aspect of life there in more detail. These products are referred to in the appropriate sections of this book. However, everything that you need to base a campaign or run an adventure in the city is provided here.

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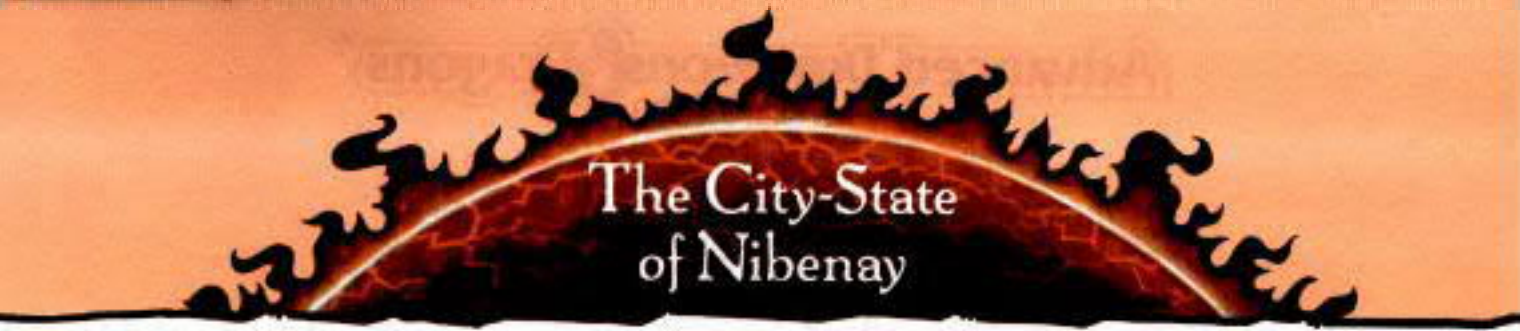
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# The City-State of Nibenay

*Dearest sister,*

*I am so pleased to hear that we may soon become wives in common. I look forward to introducing you to city life. While you will not meet our husband for several years time, I assure you that your decision is sound. I have never regretted a moment since devoting my life to Nibenay. Since we were children you heard stories of the Nagaramakam, the Forbidden Dominion of the king. Let me tell you, dear sister, the secrets of the palace are the least of the secrets you will learn as a priestess and templar to the king.*

*The city is a colorful place that seems to be in constant motion. It does take some getting used to. I think you will find the Nagaramakam a welcome respite from the noise and squalor of the streets. Regardless, everything you discover here will be more interesting than counting slaves in mother; fields.*

*Please accept this word of advice for what it is worth. When you first arrive, some of your sisters in the priesthood will treat you with con tempt, while others will seem in a hurry to take you in to their confidence. Until you become comfortable with your new environment, treat everyone with courtesy and a certain amount of diffidence. Do your job and trust no one. I will be looking out for you.*

*In the Shadow King's name,*

*Alethea*

## Welcome to the City of Spires!

Welcome to Nibenay, where the walls are said to dance. Grand Nibenay, where every inch of the stone towers, cobbled alleys and vaulted streets are carved with bizarre and ornate images from the empire's past. It is the home of the Shadow King, a reclusive ruler who appears only occasionally to violently dispel rumors of his death. It is the home of his templar army, feared for its ruthlessness and respected for its efficiency.

Nibenay is a city of stark contrasts, a volatile place of fleeting fortunes in the shadow of an ancient culture. The merchant houses of this decadent city never close their largest and most opulent emporiums, and any object or experience may be purchased for the right price. Once a city of seemingly limitless possibilities for the free citizen class, opportunities Nibenay are now dwindling.

The city has a distant and stoic past. Its remote noble class, to whom blood is cheaper than water and nothing more precious than the fertile land of their fields, preserves the city's most ancient traditions. In Nibenay, the lucky are rewarded and the rest are swallowed whole.

All around the city is evidence of the ancient culture that Nibenay was built upon. Modern Nibenese construction surrounds and intermingles with ancient ruins and edifices. Some of these old sites are abandoned, but others remain occupied by the city's masses.

Of all the rulers of Athas, the sorcerer-king Nibenay (who gave his name to his city) is perhaps the least involved in the day-to-day management of his empire. He has, over the centuries, established an amazingly competent bureaucracy that allows him to focus his attention on the study of dark magic instead of the mundane matters of government. Nibenay's reclusiveness has earned him the title of Shadow King from his people. He spends virtually all of his time in his walled sub-city, called the Nagaramakam, which lies at the center of Nibenay. From here, his templar-wives manage the day-to-day affairs of the kingdom.

Nibenay believes in the delegation of responsibility and management through precisely designed systems. This belief results in a powerful, impersonal bureaucracy that runs smoothly and destroys those caught beneath its wheels.

Ancient Nibenay was built upon a rigid system of social classes which allowed for very little mobility between levels. An impoverished free citizen class eked out a living as tenant farmers on the land of the aristocracy. Some made a meager living practicing various trades and producing handmade goods. Their paltry earnings were spent buying water from the springs of the nobles. All of this, however, eventually changed.

Attracted to the hardwood of the Crescent Forest and the water of the city's hot springs, traders made Nibenay a center of activity during the rise of the dynastic merchant houses. Alone, Nibenay's two tremendous natural resources could have ensured the city's wealth for centuries. However, the efficiency of the Shadow King's harsh government and his tendency to let his people trade freely accelerated the rise of mercantilism.

Free citizens began to fill the streets of the city, practicing all manner of trades and hawking virtually anything. The traditional Nibenese self-discipline lent itself well to enterprise, and the courteous manner of its citizenry contributed to a socially tolerant atmosphere.

The nobility was the social class least affected by these

# The City-State of Nibenay



changes over the centuries. The nobles continued to hold the water and the land, but slaves filled the fields where the free citizens once toiled. The nobles became conservators of Nibenay's traditional culture.

The increased demand for agricultural production led to a conflict with neighboring Gulg. The city-states both claimed ownership of a six mile strip of the Verdant Belt that lay between them. Increased logging in the Crescent Forest added to the tensions with Gulg. Tensions and the full-scale battle they threatened to ignite, in turn, stimulated more logging for weapons and even more trade to support the growing army of the Shadow King. The tension has continued for centuries. However, the Shadow King's personal agenda has mostly ignored Gulg. The tensions which exist give his citizens something to worry about, but if he truly wished to crush the smaller kingdom he could have done so long ago.

In the city, fortunes were built and lost by free citizen families. Nibenay became the place where anything could be had for the right price. Caravans spread stories of the spectacular city, which brought many travelers to Nibenay. The markets of the Shadow King claimed to be able to satisfy the darkest

desires of any visitors.

After centuries of growth, the marketplaces of Nibenay began to stabilize. The largest merchant houses and most-successful independent traders were well entrenched in the economy. Over the past few hundred years, opportunities for the free citizen class have begun to wane. It has become increasingly difficult for a family to establish itself.

While there is still more trade occurring in Nibenay than in any of the other city-states, business has slowly declined when compared to the days of the ascendant merchant houses. With the decline in trade has come a certain amount of restructuring of Nibenese society. There is now a greater disparity between the wealth of free citizen families than there was in the agrarian past. There is also less mobility from the poorer to wealthier levels than there was during the rise of the merchant houses.

In the face of declining opportunities, many young citizens are now rejecting the values of their parents as opportunistic and grasping. They are rediscovering the ancient traditions of the city and looking to the nobility for their moral bearings. Nibenay remains, however, a city of dramatic contrasts, with plenty of opportunities for those who are willing to take the risks.





# Nibenese Society

The center of traditional Nibenese life is the family. The dynastic merchant houses and the great noble families provide a model for all of Nibenay's people. A person's first obligation is to his family, and only then to himself

In a society where polygamous marital relationships are standard, families can become quite large. A free citizen's family is sometimes so extensive as to be able to completely staff a fairly large business.

Traditional Nibenese self-discipline and acceptance of authority begins in the home. The head of a Nibenese household has complete discretion over the property and welfare of family members. Marriages are arranged, and a child's property rights are controlled by his or her parents until marriage occurs. The head of the household may sell children or spouses into slavery in order to raise money or pay off debts.

Elderly members of a family are held in high regard and often rule the home. Great emphasis is placed on family traditions, meals and activities. Citizens of Nibenay will virtually never betray their families to outsiders. They may agree to such plans quite courteously, but will never carry them out.

## Ancestral Cults

For centuries the ancestral cults of Nibenay's nobility have served to promote social authority continuity, conservatism and order. The free citizens have at various times adopted fashions and postures which emulate the practices of the nobles, but have rarely taken up the ancestral cults for they focus more on family pride than on the trappings of style.

The nobles have many rituals and traditions surrounding the veneration of their forebears. They believe that the spirits of their ancestors can intervene on their behalf with the elemental forces that threaten them. Ancestral spirits, they believe, act to protect the hot springs and the fields which have served as the foundation of every noble family's well-being since the earliest days of the empire. Because of this, non-traditional businesses are considered risky, as well as affronts to ancestral spirits.

Each noble house maintains a library containing histories of family leaders. Wax death masks of these ancestors are displayed in cases in the library. The masks serve ceremonial functions in the rituals for declaring heirs. They are even occasionally worn at funerals and public games.

The veneration of the past even extends to the common greet-

ings used by the nobles. The phrase, "May you be worthy of your ancestors," can often be heard when nobles part.

## Elemental Cults

Elemental cults play important roles in Nibenese society. The earth and water cults, the traditional votive disciplines of the nobility, are always fashionable with city dwellers. The fire and air cults are more popular in the outlying regions of the kingdom where small farms are victimized by the ravages of sun and wind.

For the nobility, the elemental cults are inexorably interlocked with ancestral cults. Many of the rituals center around the earth of the fields or the water of the springs. The emphasis is always on ancestors, for the elements are seen as remote and impersonal forces that can only be tamed through the good will of ancestral spirits.

The elemental cults of the free citizens are oriented toward mastery of the elements and not appeasement. Through the cults, they believe they can harness the power of the elements in order to gain personal benefits. Elemental temples receive many contributions from citizens who require the services of clerics. Nibenay's citizenry gives the elemental cults decidedly pragmatic attention.

## Appeasing the Supernatural

The grisly practice of human sacrifice is much less common in Nibenay than in neighboring Gulg, but it does persist in the traditions of the nobility and among the elemental cults of the countryside. More often, the people appease supernatural forces by appealing to ancestral spirits, making monetary contributions to temples, or by seeking help from the Shadow King's templars.

## The Sorcerer-King

At several times in the city's history, captives, criminals and slaves have been herded into the gates of the Naggaramakam and never seen again. It is believed that the slaves are sacrificed to appease the Shadow King and add power to his magic. These cyclical events are regarded with fear and thankfulness by the populace. They fear the staggering cost in human life necessary to provide the Shadow King with magic to defend the city. On the other hand, they are thankful for the tremendous power which protects them from the savage head hunters of Gulg.



## The Elemental Cults

There is actually very little in the way of ritual sacrifices surrounding the elemental cults of Nibenay. In the countryside, a human (or demihuman) is occasionally immolated on biers to appease the wind and sun. While the elemental priests disavow such practices, many citizens believe that the spirits of sacrificial victims can intervene with the elemental forces on behalf of the community. Since many victims are unwilling to offer up their lives, a small bird that been ritualistically imbued with the community's plea is placed alive in the victim's mouth. When the spirit passes through the elemental planes, it is believed that it will open its mouth to curse its killers. Instead of a bitter incrimination, however, the bird will fly from the spirit's mouth to carry the plea of the community to the elements.

## The Ancestral Cults

The ancestral cults of the nobles often require a sacrifice of a slave to carry a message to the spirits of a family's forebears. The nobles believe that the spirits of their ancestors can intervene

directly on their behalf with the forces of the elements. They will do this, however, only when the traditional family lands or hot springs are endangered.

A slave is also sacrificed by the heir when a house matriarch or patriarch dies. The slave's spirit is expected to carry a promise of sound stewardship on the part of the new house leader to the ancestors.

## The Dragon's Levy

Every year, 1,000 captives and slaves are taken into the salt flats by the king's templars to be offered in service to the Dragon of Tyr. The legends of the region suggest that a time will come when the city will not be able to provide servants to the Dragon. At that time, the springs will boil dry, the fields will turn to dust, the forest will wither and the walls of the city will crumble.

## Dress

Nibenese humans have round faces, tan skin, and straight black hair. Most free citizens favor brightly-colored loose linen shirts



## Nibenese Society

and skirts. They wrap their heads with long scarfs marked with checkerboard patterns called *Aramas*. Most wear sandals, or heavy boots if they work with large animals.

The influx of trade has brought with it a taste for exotic clothing, and people frequently wear imported shoes, jewelry or shirts. This is particularly true in the fashionable merchant districts.

Nobles prefer traditional garb of extraordinarily high quality. They often omit the *krama*, however, or choose headdresses that feature their house patterns.

Beyond its practical value, clothing is considered the refuge of people who are ashamed. The highest ranking of the king's templars often wear no clothing at all, while middle-level officials wear only skirts. Only the lowest-ranking templars and those serving in the military go around fully dressed.

This tradition carries into the noble houses as well. The patriarch or matriarch of a clan often wears little or nothing at all, but this honor does not extend to other members of a noble family.

## Cultural Identity

### Dance

The famous Dancing Gates of Nibenay greet approaching travelers with hypnotic music that sets the rhythm of their visit and celebrates the city's most popular art form. Day and night, music and movement seem to spill forth from every corner of the city. Virtually all ceremonial gatherings, whether formal or informal, noble or slave, are marked by traditional Nibenese dance.

Nibenay's distinctive style of dance is comprised of hundreds of specific stilted postures tied together with passages of stamping feet or flowing arm and waist movements. Each gesture and posture fits within a complex code of signs and signifying gestures. The Nibenese can actually communicate significant amounts of specific information through the metaphors of dance. When words fail them, people of Nibenay often punctuate conversation with gestures from this traditional codex. The very images inscribed on the buildings of the city form a sort of hieroglyphics of Nibenese dance and can be interpreted in detail by the natives.

There are three major styles of Nibenese dance. The *priytuih*, or joyful style, is the most popular, celebrating comic themes. The *liaka-ih*, or dramatic style, deals with tragic subjects. Participants of this style often mark themselves with red paint to symbolize blood. The *wriquo-ih*, or war style, commemorates martial

life. Decorative wooden weapons are often incorporated in *wriquo-ih* dances.

Dancers and musicians often accompany caravans from Nibenay. These entertainers perform for the caravan crew, as well as for residents of the cities and towns they visit. The performers sometimes use psionics to heighten the hypnotic power of the music, and to prey upon the hearts and purse strings of the audiences.

The most spectacular displays of Nibenese dancing occur at the Starlight Pageants which mark the beginning of each new season.

### Sculpture and Architecture

Nibenay is renowned across the Tyr region for its extraordinary architecture. It appears, at first glance, that every inch of the city is intricately carved stone. Spires and minarets of stacked skulls jut across the skyline. Huge faces open their fanged mouths to serve as windows and doorways. Stylized images of the Shadow King support massive public buildings. Everywhere, the history and folklore of Nibenay and its noble families are played out in wonderfully-detailed bas-relief. For the Nibenese, there is no distinction between sculpture and architecture. Among the elves of the Sky Singers tribe, the word for the city of Nibenay is the same as the word for basilisk. They believe that the Shadow King is a basilisk who is slowly turning his city to stone.

The conventions and codes of Nibenese dance are used to inscribe stories throughout the friezes and architectural details. Some of the buildings memorialize the king, others the wealthy individuals who built them. Some public buildings detail great battles and legends of the city. Others display entire families, carved so lifelike that they seem to dance across the surfaces as they reveal their history with sculpted postures and gestures.

Beasts of the forest or forces of nature are also represented. If such creatures ever threaten the city it is believed that the sculptures will please them and the buildings (and their inhabitants) will remain unharmed.

The traditions of Nibenese culture invest a tremendous amount of power in the carvings. By royal decree, all permanent buildings within the walls of the city must be built of sandstone, granite or laterite, and each must be fully sculptured. It is not known when or why this tradition began, but some foreigners attribute the practice to the beliefs of an ancient cult of elemental earth. Nibenay remains a favorite residence for earth clerics, who delight in a city where the stones appear to dance.





## Art

The Nibenese favor murals, intricately woven carpets, detailed frescoes and decorative screens. This is particularly true in the homes of free citizens, where the rooms are sometimes furnished with nothing but carpets and separated only by screens.

While the carpets are generally decorated with geometric patterns, the screens and frescoes often feature stylized images of the forest. Artist slaves are retained to fully illuminate a wealthy citizen's home with frescoes.

## Literature

Literacy is a privilege reserved for Nibenay's nobles and templars. Consequently, popular literature is primarily a body of traditional tales and histories that can be found played out across buildings throughout the city. These stories are well known and are sometimes reenacted in public dances.

Although the hieroglyphic code of dance positions could be construed as a written language that any commoner can read, it

is illegal to recreate these symbols on anything but the walls of a building.

Among the noble class, literature falls under their sense of cultural conservatism. Libraries of histories and personal memoirs of each house matriarch and patriarch are maintained. The study of these documents, usually kept on hide or hardwood panels, is a part of every young noble's education.

Young nobles indulge in another popular form of literature. Amorous poetry is often read aloud at parties and considered a rite of courtship. Humorous variations of these poems are also popular means by which young nobles relate their amorous adventures, real and imagined, to their friends.

## Astronomy

The Nibenese harbor an ancient love of the study of the night sky. Whether it is a discussion of the navigational techniques of the caravan masters or a child's lesson in identifying constellations, the people of Nibenay pursue astronomy with an ardor unequalled among the people of the Tablelands. Astrologers are often retained by noble families to plan harvests and other major projects.



## The Calendar of Nibenay

While each city-state has its own official calendar, the dynastic merchant houses have, over the centuries, come to use a standardized book of days. This has evolved slowly over time as the need to efficiently coordinate activities with trading partners grew. The calendar is generally referred to as the Merchant's Calendar. In the cities, it usually bears the name of the largest merchant house (which also generally receives the credit for inventing it). Thus, the Shom calendar of Nibenay is actually the same as the Wavir calendar in Balic.

Nibenay is the only city to officially adopt the Merchant's Calendar. The heavy amounts of trade occurring in the city and the calendar's astronomical basis make it very appealing to the people of Nibenay.

The Merchant's Calendar divides the 375-day year into three 125-day seasons—High Sun, Sun Descending and Sun Ascending. Each season is divided into four 30-day months made up of six day weeks. A five day long festival week in the middle of each season lies outside the confines of the months. The year begins on the day of Highest Sun, midway through the season of High Sun.

The table below can be used to fill out a campaign calendar with the sample sheet provided. In the table, the seasons are noted as HS (High Sun), SD (Sun Descending, and SA (Sun Ascending).

Season	Month	Days	Star Sign
HS	Dominary	30	Balimarash the Caravan
HS	Sedulous	30	Fiddle the Beetle
SD	Fortuary	30	Hesper the Kenku
SD	Macro	30	Saurus the Lizard
SD	Dessalia	5	on the cusp
SD	Fifthover	30	Hortle the Spider
SD	Hexameron	30	Sylk the Wyrn
SA	Morrow	30	Tasker the Scorpion
SA	Octavus	30	Pyrus the Wheel
SA	Assalia	5	on the cusp
SA	Thaumast	30	The Dragon
SA	Anabasis	30	Tyrospur the Lion
HS	Hoard	30	Scratch the Basilisk
HS	Flagstaad	30	Krawler the Kank
HS	Zenalia	5	on the cusp

## Holidays

The three festival weeks of Desselia, Assalia and Zenalia are celebrated throughout Nibenay. These festivals are considered holidays, but many merchants and vendors remain open to cater to the free citizens who flood the streets during these weeks.

Arena games are held every day of the festival weeks, and noble and merchant houses vie to become sponsors of the games.

## The Starlight Pageant

Each festival week culminates in an all-night dance festival called the Starlight Pageant. During these events, dozens of young female dancers (called aspara) make their way from the Naggaramakam down the High Road to the Reservoir Garden just inside the city wall. Here they perform a meticulously orchestrated series of ballets drawn from a large traditional repertoire. The stories celebrate the city, its folklore, its history and the king. While Nibenay himself does not attend these festivals, his defilers supplement the performances with many colorful illusions that are integrated into the ballet. (For more on the



# THE MERCHANT'S CALENDAR

Month: \_\_\_\_\_ Season: \_\_\_\_\_ Star Sign: \_\_\_\_\_

Year: \_\_\_\_\_ King's Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Oneday	Twosday	Threesday	Fourday	Fiveday	Sixday
1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30

Copy this sheet and fill in the information for each month. Give each festival week a sheet of its own, but only use the first five days.





# The People of Nibenay

## The Free Citizens

The free citizens of Nibenay represent a diverse class. There is a broad spectrum of values and wealth represented among the free citizens. Some wealthy traders have built huge stone compounds to match their lifestyles, while humble laborers scratch out comfort from simple clay-brick shacks built against the city walls. Despite this tremendous disparity, the free citizens of Nibenay have much in common.

## Marriage

Marriages among the free citizens are usually polygamous. One frequently sees women with several husbands and men with several wives. Only the poorest citizens have only one spouse.

Regardless of gender, the head of a household is referred to as the master of the marriage. Within each marriage, a master has one primary spouse. The master of the marriage has complete discretion over the lives and property of his or her children and spouses. To avoid scattering hard earned property into small bequests, only the children of the primary spouse share in the legacy of the estate.

Free citizen families try desperately to accumulate family wealth over the course of generations. They tend to favor patriarchal marriages, with a primary husband and several wives. This form increases the ability of the family to produce children who will eventually contribute to the revenue of the household, not to mention the contributions of each spouse. Some citizens, however, like to emulate the nobility. The nobility favors matriarchal relationships, with a primary wife and several husbands. Regardless of the form, marriage is extremely important in Nibenese society, for only married people may own plots of land.

Nibenay marriages are usually arranged. Each wedding is celebrated with a gift from the master of the marriage to the family of the betrothed. This often-substantial gift is given as compensation for the loss of the betrothed's productive capacity. Marriages that are not arranged (often called "love matches") are scorned. In these marriages, masters are seen as getting something for nothing.

A family heir always assumes the position of master of the marriage. Heirs rarely marry unless a specific alliance needs to be forged between the two families. The children of subordinate spouses are married for financial and political gain, if possible. More often, they are wed simply to relieve a debt or to get

them out of the house.

Because of these customs regarding inheritance and mate selection, there is an entire class of Nibenese who have no real property of their own. They are essentially slaves within the confines of their marriages or families.

Marriages are occasions for celebration. One month prior to a wedding, the master of the marriage spends a week joined to the betrothed by a long scarf attached at their waists. As the month progresses, the mate-to-be must spend at least one day bound to each of the other spouses. This tradition serves as a public sign of commitment. It also provides all members in the marriage with the opportunity to meet the betrothed.

## Ownership of Property

Because of their long history of mercantile traditions, the Nibenese have a strong sense of property rights. Trade is unrestricted, with the notable exception of land sales. No one may exchange land rights without the consent of the state, and consequently land is concentrated in the hands of the noble houses.

The state allows anyone to trade freely. It also recognizes the master of a marriage as the ultimate owner of any property held in wedlock or by children until they are married. A house master may allow spouses and children to accumulate and dispose of property as they see fit, but if disputes ever arise, the state always rules in the master's favor.

## Occupations

Free citizens of Nibenay can be found hard at work producing a wide variety of goods and services. Inside the city walls, most citizens run a family business of one kind or another. These enterprises, staffed by the children and spouses of the owners, produce many of the finished goods which are traded and exported from the city.

Woodworkers, bakers, jewelers, leatherworkers and more operate out of the many family halls which line Nibenay's streets. Other citizens own or rent small plots of land in the client villages outside the city. They make their livings tilling the soil and raising herds.

Some citizens find work in the service of others. Families often hire laborers to attend to work that slaves or family members cannot do. The state also offers various work opportunities to free citizens, including the army.

# The People of Nibenay



Still other citizens become clients of the great noble families in exchange for room, board and a small stipend. Clients of the nobles often take up residence in noble-owned tenant houses or on noble-owned farms. The responsibilities of these citizens vary with their ability. Some oversee slave farmers and laborers, others serve as guards or administrators.

## Typical Residences

Strict building codes regulate new construction in the city. All permanent structures must be built from sandstone, laterite or granite, and must be covered with decorative carvings. The prohibitive costs associated with meeting these requirements prevents many free citizens from building homes. Fortunately, however, any building not made of stone may be registered with the state as a temporary structure. Thus, many citizens rent land from nobles upon which they build simple houses of clay bricks and wood. These simple homes generally consist of a single room and provide shelter for an entire family. Papyrus screens create a number of partitioned living spaces within the structures.

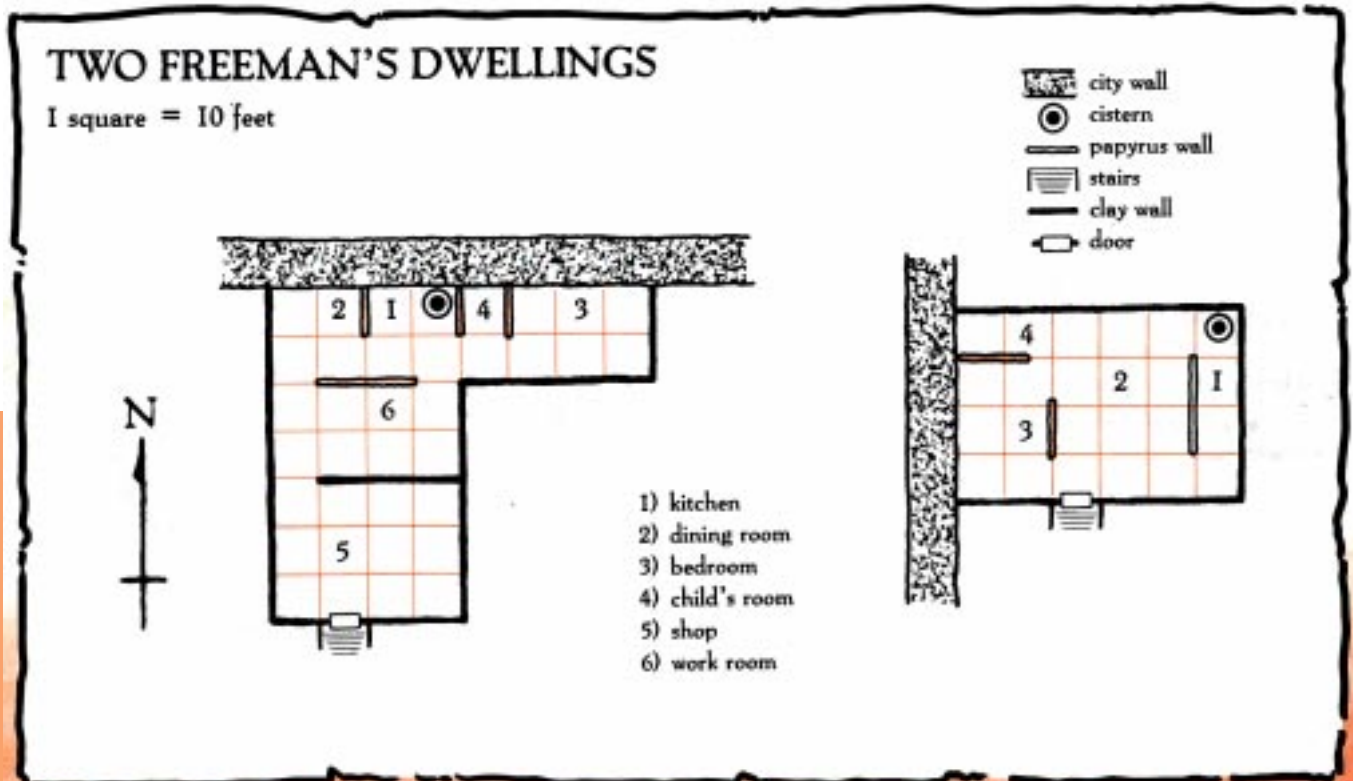
Through the careful management of property and marriages

over several generations, some free-citizen families can eventually afford to build or purchase stone residences. Still others rent apartments from or become clients of noble houses. The poorest citizens construct shanties against the city walls or simply sleep beneath the stone-roof overhangs of the streets and alleys.

Modest rock gardens arranged in intricate patterns complement the courtyards of affluent citizens. Pet birds and lizards are even afforded small mud huts, called *millas*, kept in courtyards and shielded from public view. In the countryside, however, citizens often erect *millas* in plain sight as an ostentatious sign of affluence. Some families construct small *millas* within their homes to protect pets from theft or abuse.

## Routine

Visitors to Nibenay find it difficult to get a feel for the rhythms of a citizen's daily routine. Citizens working in family businesses keep odd hours because of the all-night markets. Families running stores and dining halls that remain open overnight usually live on the premises. Family members sleep in shifts to better attend to customers around the clock.





# The People of Nibenay

## Education

The education of the free-citizen class is informal at best. Children within a marriage are raised in the household. Through the public dance festivals, they become familiar with the codes which allow them to interpret the stories and legends carved into the walls of the city. As they grow older, most young people serve their family businesses as apprentices or seek other work around the city. Beyond vocational training, the emphasis placed on education is strictly at the discretion of each family. Some parents encourage their children to frequent Sage's Square to listen to the debates of scholars. Others consider such esoteric pursuits foolhardy and punish such idlers.

The state sponsors expensive schools staffed by templars, which are a standard part of the education of the noble class. Some free-citizen families save money to send their daughters to these schools, and the state often sponsors poor students who show promise. Any free women admitted to the schools eventually join the ranks of the templars or become scholar slaves in the Naggaramakam.

## Entertainment and Dining

While public festivals and dances provide a source of entertainment for all the people of Nibenay, the free citizens of the city often indulge in a practice of setting animals upon one another in fights. Large wagers are often made at such affairs, and the practice seems to have developed into a habit of keeping pets. The Nibenese delight in crodlu fighting and tembo baiting.

Public games at the arena are often sponsored by wealthy merchants, citizens, nobles, and even the elemental temples. These games are tremendously popular with the people, who love to make heroes of triumphant gladiators.

The dietary staple of the Nibenese citizenry is rice, supplemented by fruit, vegetables, nut pastes, and erdlu meat. Many small meals are eaten throughout the day as opportunities present themselves.

## Funerals

Within the city, all the dead are buried. A priest from the elemental cult of the family is called upon to preside over a funeral and protect the deceased against undeath. Burial is a simple affair among the free citizens, as few can afford the luxuries

indulged in by the nobility. In the countryside, the elevated funeral pyres traditionally associated with cults of elemental fire and air are still common.

## The Nobility

The noble houses of Nibenay are tied to the land and, as such, act as true conservators of the city's ancient culture. Some houses, however, have succumbed to the allure of trade. These houses conduct their affairs with indulgent decadences that rival those of the merchant house Shom. Others are obsessed with the distant, stoic past, performing bizarre rites in veneration of their ancestors. Most, however, continue as they always have, with a strong sense of tradition and responsibility to their family.

## Marriage

Marriages among Nibenay's nobility have traditionally been polygamous and exogamous. In addition to having many spouses, an individual must marry outside the clan or family. This latter practice began primarily as a means of bridging political differences between the factions that divided the noble families.

Once, noble estates were divided among the married children of the primary spouse. Over the centuries, however, the need to retain and build family holding gave rise to a reticence to allow children to dilute property through marriage. Nobles became increasingly unwilling to commit their children to wedlock. This has resulted in smaller noble families. Matriarchal marriages are favored, for they reduce the likely number of potential heirs. Also, young nobles are encouraged to pursue free-floating polygamous relationships outside the formal institution of marriage. These affairs often continue long into adulthood. The idea is to create as many options for the family interests as possible.

Now the holdings of a noble family are generally passed to one child of the primary spouse. Only when the family patriarch or matriarch decides to select an heir are any relationships formalized. Consequently, many nobles are not married off until middle age. They spend much of their youth seeking the favor of the house master.

The state does not interfere with inheritance among the nobles, and property is usually passed on to the most conservative or capable child. Sometimes small parcels are bequeathed to other heirs, but with the provision that they can only be sold back to the family.



# The People of Nibenay

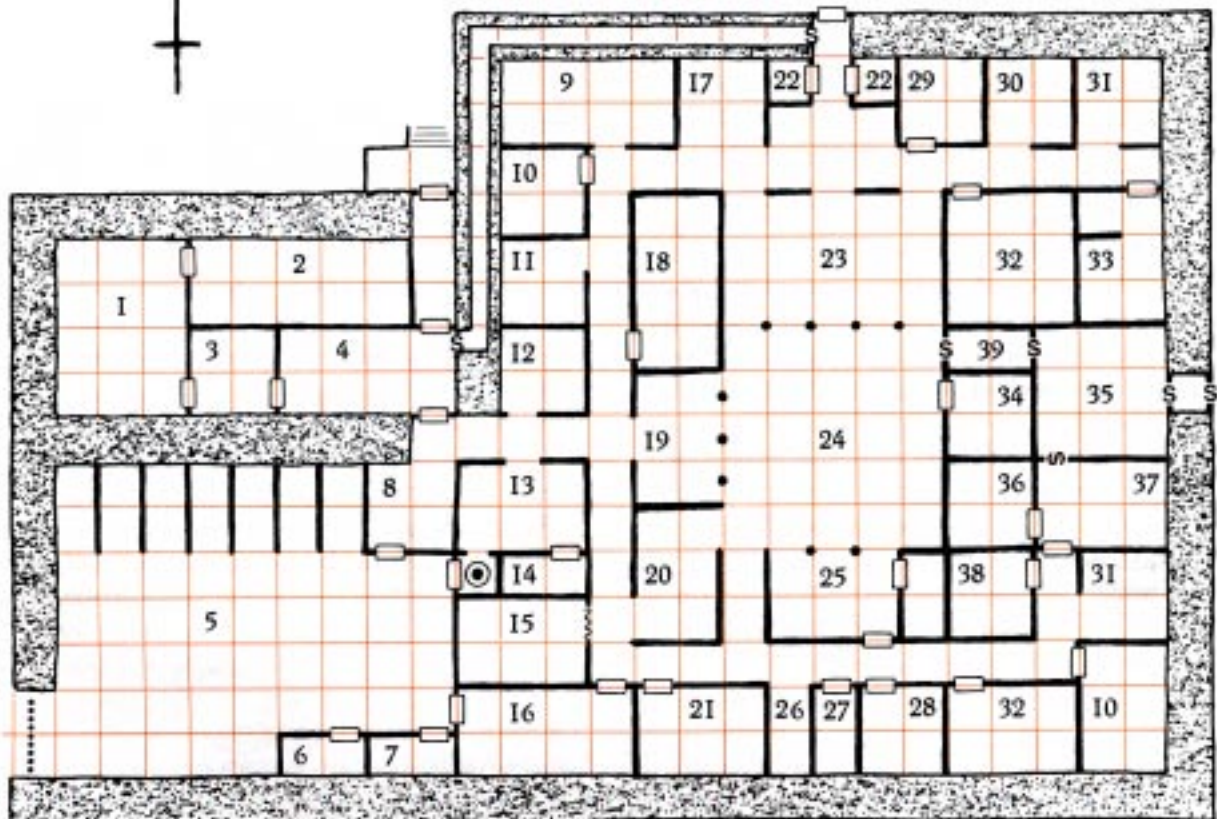


## A NOBLE'S DWELLING

1 square = 10 feet

- laterite wall
- stone wall
- door
- curtain
- well
- secret door
- portcullis

- |                   |                      |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1) office         | 14) pantry           | 27) noble toilet     |
| 2) library        | 15) bath             | 28) storeroom        |
| 3) reception      | 16) guard barracks   | 29) officer's room   |
| 4) waiting room   | 17) chapel           | 30) tutor's room     |
| 5) stable         | 18) conservatory     | 31) handmaid's room  |
| 6) tack room      | 19) atelier          | 32) spouses' room    |
| 7) armory         | 20) children's study | 33) child's room     |
| 8) entry          | 21) library          | 34) garden room      |
| 9) slave barracks | 22) closet           | 35) secret garden    |
| 10) guest room    | 23) main hall        | 36) primary spouse   |
| 11) slave mess    | 24) sculpture court  | 37) master bedroom   |
| 12) laundry       | 25) dining hall      | 38) heir's room      |
| 13) kitchen       | 26) slave toilet     | 39) secret storeroom |





# The People of Nibenay

## Ownership of Property

The nobility of Nibenay is tied to the land. The noble houses of Nibenay own not only the hot springs which irrigate the rice paties surrounding the city, but the fields themselves. Most of the tenant properties in the city and surrounding areas are owned by the nobles as well. The king enforces this stability by requiring that all transfers of land be approved by the state.

Within a noble family, personal property is considered to be titled to the matriarch or patriarch of the house. Family members use this property and acquire their own as the master of the house sees fit.

## Occupations

The nobles enjoy the luxury of wealth—they need not be concerned with the material well being of themselves or their children. The ownership of an endless water supply secures each family's future. While most nobles pursue the traditional responsibilities of their parents, this wealth allows some members of the noble class to indulge in more esoteric pursuits. Consequently, while many nobles busy themselves managing their farms and trying to discover more efficient ways to run their tenant properties, others pursue scholarly disciplines or indulge in the arts.

Traditionally, nobles have not pursued trade beyond selling the produce of their property. Trade is seen as unseemly business for a noble. The work of a noble is considered to be that of conservatorship and the proper administration of traditional family holdings. A common axiom of the nobility is "tend to the land and it will tend to you."

Heirs are generally culled from the more conservative ranks of young nobles. Every generation, however, produces a few energetic and ambitious financiers who speculate in trade and invest in new business. Most nobles disdain such mavericks as crass, while others admire their adventurousness. The nobility has, at one time or another, produced members of every character class from their rank—even gladiators.

## Typical Residences

Noble families dwell in enormous stone compounds throughout the city. Some actually have complexes built deep into the side of the huge bluff that overlook Nibenay's north side.

The palaces of the nobles are generally surrounded by huge

decorated walls topped with minarets and towers. Columns cut to look like stacked skulls and creatures of the forest support balconies and arcades. The huge buildings generally rise three or more stories into the air and sometimes have an equal number of cellars beneath the earth.

Plants thrive in courtyard gardens that serve as homes to exotic pets. Small pools and fountains are fed by water pumped in from the springs. Vines hang from balconies overlooking the courtyards and the streets. These homes are truly remarkable.

During young adulthood, nobles occasionally move away from the family compound and take up residence in apartments owned by the family. Here they enjoy some privacy, and often take on the responsibilities of landlords. Still others travel to the farmland residences when they want to escape the squalor of the city. These buildings, often only one story high, tend to sprawl out over a large area. They are, as a rule, no less impressive than the city compounds.

## Routine

Most nobles have regular responsibilities and positions within the operations of house concerns. If an individual hopes to become an heir, it is especially important to establish oneself as a reliable and integral part of the family. Days begin with a sunrise audience with the free citizen clients of the house. In these meetings, clients are given instructions and their performances are reviewed.

The day continues with a variety of activities until the evening meal, which is generally taken at the main compound in the presence of the master of the house.

Evenings are often filled with study or conversation, and occasionally punctuated by extravagant parties where young nobles advance their free-wheeling social lives.

All enterprises of the noble houses follow the traditional dawn-to-dusk workday. Their clients are expected to report at dawn for work and to return home just before the sun has set.

## Education

The young nobles of Nibenay receive an extensive formal education, both at home and at the state schools. At home, young nobles are trained for the responsibilities of managing family property. They also receive instruction in their family histories and are expected to study and memorize the important writings of their ancestors.

# The People of Nibenay



From the ages of seven to 14, the young nobles of both genders are sent to state schools run by templars. In these schools, they are taught reading, writing, mathematics, military history and astronomy. It is in the state schools that young nobles form habits of patriotism and piety. Here, the templars sift through the rank of the young nobility and steer talented women toward careers in the priesthood of the Shadow King.

The noble houses believe in the value of having highly placed family members among the various organizations and factions within the city. However, they are not likely to send a potential heir to a state school. Such children continue their educations at home under the tutelage of scholar slaves. Some young nobles are placed in the School of Augurs, where they can gain mastery over the power of their minds, or the elemental temples, where they may find a position among the clerisy.

## Rites of Passage

The most significant rite of passage for the nobility is the declaration of an heir. This usually comes sometime during mid-life, when the leader of the house is aging. House rulers wait as long as possible before declaring heirs in order to protect their own lives. They will, however, not risk dying before an heir has been chosen, for this can result in a war between siblings and a potential split of family holdings.

The actual ceremony begins in the middle of the night. A slave wearing the wax death mask of the most ancient family forebear roughly wakens the selected heir. The young noble is then blindfolded and driven out of the city by house guards toward the family fields, which may be many miles away.

Once the selected heir reaches the fields, he or she is stripped and thrown roughly into a dirt field. The heir must eat the dirt and declare, "From this earth comes the flesh of my people. I will defend this earth as I would my own flesh." The noble is then taken to the family-owned hot springs. Here the heir is immersed in scalding water. The noble is given a cup cut from a skull to use to drink water from the spring. "From this water runs the blood of my people. I will defend this water as I would my own blood," declares the noble. Then, to the masked slave and the rough escort of guards, the heir states, "By your leave I will carry the house which you serve with your lives." The initiate is then pulled from the water and a crown of rice stalks is placed upon his or her head. An undyed linen cloth is wrapped around the heir, and he or she is carried by the guards back to the family

compound. The entire family celebrates the conclusion of the rite with a festive party, often attended by other noble houses.

## Entertainment and Dining

Nibenay's nobles take great delight in entertaining, and often use ancestral piety as an excuse to celebrate. They throw large banquets and parties on the anniversaries of various accomplishments and acts of distinction performed by their ancestors. The parties are well stocked with food and drink, and entertainment is provided by the city's bards. (Of course, bards often attend to serve darker purposes as hirelings of rival heirs.) Other nobles, merchant families, popular entertainers, favored gladiators and artist slaves often attend these grand affairs.

The tradition of baiting animals and gambling on the fighting ability of pets is carried to unusual heights by the noble houses. They have even been known to occasionally mount private mekillot fights.

The family life of the nobility centers around a single large meal that the entire family is expected to attend. The meal occurs after sundown, with meat, rice and exotic items from the merchant emporiums serving as the various courses. After dinner, children and subordinates are dismissed from the table, and a review of the issues facing the house begins. These dinner discussions help forge and evaluate the relationships between the heads of the houses and their potential heirs.

Guests are sometimes entertained at the evening meal, but outside business is never discussed at such affairs. Business between the family and an outside source is reserved for midday when conversations can be held "in the full light of the sun." Most other meals, including a small morning snack, are taken privately.

## Funerals

Because the wealth of the nobles is so heavily dependent upon the rice fields and the hot springs which feed them, the noble houses all adhere to the elemental cults of earth and water. When a family member dies, funeral practices are drawn from the traditions of the earth and water cults.

Several districts of the city are completely dedicated to the internment of the dead nobility. Narrow paved alleys lead through rows upon rows of stone mausoleums and vaults. The tombs form maze-like walls of crypts built 20 feet high, one upon another. Each noble house has several block dedicated to their





# The People of Nibenay

family. The dead are all placed on slabs within the chambers, which are then sealed and flooded with water. A cleric of earth or water always presides over the internment in order to protect the body from undeath. Naturally, such precautions do not always work, and visitors are advised not to venture into these areas without the aid of clerical magic.

The ancestral cult of the nobles prescribes a number of observances in addition to the ritual sacrifice of a slave at the funeral of a house leader. The most widely known is the practice of wearing ancestral death masks in the funeral procession.

## The Slaves

Slaves can be seen hard at work throughout the city. From the stoop-shouldered water carriers in the king's fields to the pampered concubines of the wealthy, Nibenay's slave population is diverse. The city demands many different kinds of talent, and virtually anyone can be sold into slavery. Slaves are treated much like animals. Favored concubines and gladiators may receive special treatment, while laborers and household slaves are ignored at best and often beaten if they offend. Visitors to Nibenay should be on guard; no laws protect travelers from being waylaid and thrown into bonds by slavers.

## Marriage

Slaves are the property of their masters. Consequently, mating is conducted at the discretion of owners and generally entered into for profit. Formal marriages are unknown among the slaves of Nibenay. Strong male dwarves are bred with female human slaves for a stud fee in hopes of producing powerful muls. Female brood slaves are bred constantly and their offspring sold to keep the slave population constant or to help it grow.

Slaves occasionally give birth to their masters' children. These offspring may be sold, kept as slaves, or even adopted into the masters' families. Illegitimate children born to slaves always belong to the master of the female. Consequently, promiscuity is encouraged in female slaves, but males are severely punished if caught engaging in such activities.

## Ownership of Property

Slaves may possess property in Nibenay at the discretion of their masters. But regardless of how masters choose to allow their slaves

to acquire property, the state always considers such property to belong to the masters. Consequently, some nobles provide favorite slaves a small stipend while others keep them in corrals like erdlu. Nibenese nobles have even been known to occasionally allow slaves to earn their freedom. Extraordinarily loyal slaves have, at times, been freed, married and even given small plots of land.

Such indulgences are rarely afforded to the slaves of the free citizens. They may take good care of their investments, but would never give them away.

## Occupations

Slaves are found in the employ of every class and profession in Nibenay. Free citizens use slaves to assist in their various businesses. Craftsmen use slaves to cut trees and shape weapons. Builders tie slaves to massive sandstone blocks and make them haul the block miles to the city. Slaves can also be seen carving the elaborate stonework on city buildings. The elemental temples use slaves to tend their fields, and at the School of Augurs, slaves staff all areas not directly related to psionic study.

The slaves of nobles tend the springs and rice fields of the noble houses. Some nobles also purchase scholar slaves to maintain family libraries and to assist in the education of the young.

The Shadow King has collected a large contingent of scholar slaves. They work in a university within the sub-city, studying ancient writings found deep in the Crescent Forest. The state uses slaves in the army, and as laborers and stone-cutters around the city.

Huge numbers of slaves spend their entire lives within the walls of the Naggaramakam. Half the slaves of the sub-city tend to Nibenay and his templars, while the other half build, maintain, and decorate the city.

Stables of gladiators are kept by nobles, merchant houses and the king. High ranking templars may also maintain a cadre of these slave fighters. Individual gladiators occasionally rise to great popularity. Some have even won their freedom through such games.

## Typical Residences

Slaves are kept in a variety of conditions. Some slaves enjoy small individual cells within the homes of their masters. Others live in corrals or barracks where they huddle with other slaves for warmth. As a rule, a slave's accommodations afford little luxury and no privacy.

# The People of Nibenay



## Education

Slaves receive training specific to the tasks they are assigned to do. Only the state may teach slaves to read and write, and once this knowledge is acquired the slaves are never permitted to leave the Naggaramakam. Nobles purchase their few literate slaves from slave traders in the marketplace. These unfortunates are usually former traders who were captured in the desert and had no affiliation with a merchant house to prevent their enslavement.

## Funerals

For centuries slaves were buried in shallow graves in fields set aside for that purpose. A cleric was always paid to conduct the ceremony, for a slave is as susceptible to undeath as a free citizen or noble. Recently, the enterprising abbot of the Temple of the Sun has begun to offer a service to collect and cremate dead slaves for a fee that is somewhat less than the cost of burying them in the fields.

## Right and Duties

In Nibenay, slaves have no rights except those extended by their masters. Masters are free to improve or destroy their property, including slaves, as they see fit.

As in other cities, the Nibenay's slaves are expected to promptly expedite any commands issued by their masters as long as these commands remain within the laws of the state. Nibenese slaves sometimes gain more responsibility than their counterparts in other cities. This is particularly true of the scholar slaves, who are sometimes charged with educating young nobles or studying sensitive documents. Such responsibilities are not always welcome, for more than one slave has been executed for simply knowing too much.

## Becoming a Slave

There are three common ways to become a slave in Nibenay. The first is to be born into slavery. All children of slaves are themselves slaves. The second method is to break the law or fail to pay taxes. The templars of the Chamber of Order are authorized to freely administer penalties ranging from fines to slavery to death. The third method involves being captured by slavers.

While citizens are fairly secure from this fate, visitors to Nibenay only receive the protection of city trade laws. More than one traveler who has had too much to drink in the elven market has woken up on the auction block with a brand burned into their skin.

The head of every family in Nibenay has the right to pawn family members to the state or to other citizens as compensation for debts or in exchange for loans or favors. The labor performed by the family member is considered interest on the loan. If, after an agreed upon period of time, the family head cannot make good on the debt or loan, the family member in pawn is retained permanently by the lender.

Family members in pawn are always treated with civility and not brutalized like slaves may be. They are, however, completely subservient to the lender. If the person in pawn is of eligible age and the family cannot pay the debt, the lender may retain the pawn as a spouse.





## The People of Nibenay

### Kowett's Caravan

Slaves of the Naggaramakam whisper the name of Kowett's Caravan. The legend of Kowett, a former slave of the Shadow King, provides hope and inspires the slaves to dream. The stories describe Kowett as a concubine to a templar. The templar showed him a tunnel deep beneath the palace that leads to the safety of the Crescent Forest. Now Kowett lives with his slave tribe deep in the forest, mounting regular excursions back beneath the city to take more slaves to freedom.

This story is, unfortunately, an invention of Nibenay himself. He has found that slaves are much more productive if given a shred of hope. Occasionally, his templars catch a few slaves searching for Kowett and his tunnel. These slaves are transferred to an outpost far from the palace, and the remaining slaves hear rumors of another successful escape.

### The Elderly

The elderly have traditionally been respected leaders of the home and the community. The blue stain on the teeth that comes from years of chewing betel nut was once a mark of honor. During the rise of the merchant houses, the elderly continued to rule within the noble and merchant dynasties. Free citizens, however, began to see older family members as unproductive burdens or as barriers to their claims to family property. Recently, the resurgence in conservatism among young citizens has returned the elderly to a place of honor. This is not always the case, however, for it is often those elderly citizens who represent the more libertine thinking against which the young are rebelling.

### Outcasts and Criminals

Nibenay is a surprisingly tolerant city. Strangers are more likely to be met with courtesy and curiosity than with fear and disdain. Criminals, however, are seen as a threat to the security of property. The average Nibenese is very likely to point out a thief in a crowd to pursuing templars. Magic-users are liable to be attacked by a mob if they exhibit any spell-casting abilities. Fortunately, the prevalence of psionics has inured most people to supernatural phenomenon, and it will take quite a bit to raise the eyebrows of the locals.

Fleeing criminals are often simply struck down in the street by

templars. Others are taken to the Temple of the King's Law for judgment. Some prisoners are incarcerated in the Temple of Law's holding pens, others are taken to the King's arena dungeons. Magic-users are almost always executed on the site of their arrest because of the difficulties inherent in trying to hold them.

The Temple of the King's Law reviews cases on a last-in first-out basis. Thus, the last criminal captured is always the first to appear before the ruling templar. Consequently, if a person is arrested in the morning, the chances are fairly good that they will be executed or released by the afternoon. However, if the templars do not get to a case by the end of the day, the chances become increasingly remote that the case will come before the ruling templar. There are a few prisoners who were picked up during riots over 20 years ago who have still not had their cases reviewed.



The most heavily-traveled approach to Nibenay is the caravan road through the Blackspine Gap. Here, the rocky badlands give way to rolling fields of sandgrass. Small tenant farms where free citizens cultivate rice and other crops spring up alongside this road. Many small access roads lead from the caravan route to the large farms of the noble houses. Nearer to the city, the sorcerer-king's fields spread out and slave water carriers scurry everywhere. Sporadic and small clusters of clay-brick citizen dwellings are the first indication of the city itself.

Spires within the city rise high above its massive, carved walls. Towers at regular intervals along the walls house templar sentries. The city wall is bordered by the Plain of Burning Water, the hundreds of acres of hot springs owned by the noble houses. On the north, the city is built against a huge rocky bluff where some nobles have actually tunneled their homes.

The sensation of moving through the streets of Nibenay has been compared to wandering through the iron mines on Tyr. The streets are mostly narrow alleyways with vaulted stone roofs that wind their way between the monolithic walls of the city buildings. Sometimes the roof of one twisting alley will support the walkway of another just above it. The streets wind like dark twisting corridors opening up into muggy courtyards that act as intersections. All of Nibenay's streets are paved, and even the cobblestones have been detailed by stoneworkers.

Nibenay's streets are crowded. Only three of the streets in the city can accommodate mekillot wagons. Most are narrow and crowded with the small clay-brick homes of free citizens which huddle against the enormous stone walls of other buildings. Sections of the city are crumbling districts of filth and squalor. Others are magnificent plazas of monumental beauty. All of Nibenay's streets are dangerous, however, and should be explored with great care.

The High Road is an enormous elevated causeway that runs from the south wall of the Naggaramakam to the Reservoir Gate. This road is used by the army to move large units of troops quickly in and out of the city.

One of the more impressive structures is the city reservoir. This enormous covered structure supposedly acts as an enormous cistern for use by the Naggaramakam and, in times of crisis, the general public. No water is actually visible from outside the structure. Rather, it looks like a huge garden built atop the roof of a single-story stone building. The wide, elevated High Road runs from the walls of the Naggaramakam to the roof garden of this low-lying stone structure. The garden is open to the public, and is the only

indication of the huge supply of water beneath it.

The enormous stone edifice called Snake Tower provides access to the mansions of the nobles which are carved at various levels in the sheer earth wall on the city's north side. The tower is carved in the appearance of a tangled mass of snakes and has walkways extending to each noble house, as well as to the city wall that crowns the top of the cliff.

The gladiatorial arena of Nibenay is a unique structure. It is actually excavated from the ground. Its highest benches are at street level and the rest step downward in tiers to the arena floor.

Reportedly, the sorcerer-king maintains a network of tunnels deep beneath the Naggaramakam which he stocks with creatures captured in the salt flats or bred in the palace. Armed prisoners are thrown into this arena dungeon and allowed to fend for themselves in a unique trial by ordeal. It is possible to reach a holding cell beneath the public arena through these tunnels.

Any prisoners to arrive at the cell are fed and cared for until the next scheduled public games. Then they are released into the public arena. If they survive combat with the gladiators and the beasts from the tunnels, they are given their freedom. These events are enormously popular with the crowds.

## The City Gates

There are four gates to Nibenay. The Omnipotent Receivers, a line of huge stylized statues of the King, borders the road approaching the Mekillot Gate. This gate and the Reservoir Gate are the only two large enough to admit mekillot wagons. The Mekillot Gate opens onto a huge stone road that leads to Sage's Square. It is the entrance most commonly used by merchant house caravans.

The Reservoir Gate allows the army of Nibenay to travel the High Road and out across the Plain of Burning Water. This gate is used only by Nibenay's soldiers and templars.

The small South Gate is often avoided because of its proximity to the Hill District. Nibenay's criminal predators often stalk visitors entering the city at this gate. The West Gate opens onto a road leading toward the Verdant Belt and Gulch.

All of Nibenay's are guarded by sentries and toll collectors. Musicians perform from balconies hanging above the gates. The hypnotic power of their music is said to compel even dumb animals to adjust their gait to its seductive rhythm. Visitors to Nibenay often refer to these as the city's Dancing Gates.



## Commerce and the Marketplace

The marketplaces are the center of Nibenese life. From the huge emporiums of the dynastic merchant houses to the seedy tents of the elven market, in Nibenay everything is for sale. Although the city gates are closed at night, many of the marketplaces remain open from dusk until dawn.

With the single exception of land transfers, the state places few restrictions on trade in the city. Additionally, the efficiency of the Shadow King's templars in administering the various taxes and tariffs placed on the exchange and movement of goods helps to keep trade moving at a brisk pace.

Outsiders have long claimed that Nibenese courtesy is mitigated by a willful dishonesty toward anyone outside the family. Actually, the politeness of the Nibenese extends to a willingness to tell people what they want to hear. This is often taken by outsiders for deceit. Visitors are warned, however, to be on their guard in the marketplaces of Nibenay, where there are few constraints on the claims of merchants and distortions of the truth are raised to art form. Few other places in the Tyr region, outside the elf tribes themselves, have common practices so close to the elven mentality.

## The Dynamite Merchant Houses

The emporiums of the largest dynastic merchant houses surround a plaza called Sage's Square. Most of the major houses of the Tyr region have emporiums here, with the notable exception of House Stel of Urik. House Stel's open violence toward House Shom has resulted in a temporary revocation of Nibenese trade permits. The emporiums of Sage's Square never close. Slaves, livestock, timber, rice, and other trade goods may be bought and sold here at any time of the day or night.

The merchant houses in Nibenay have enormous stately emporiums that trade directly with the public and with other merchant houses. Since none of the agents of the dynastic merchant houses may accept citizenship in any city, the houses must lease the property upon which they build their emporiums from the state or from the nobles who own the land. Most merchant houses prefer to deal directly with the state, which has proven to be a more stable and predictable landlord.

Sage's Square gained its name from the scholars and philosophers who traveled from across the Great Ivory Plain to debate ideas in the shade of the enormous agafari trees that once grew there. A recent clash between the king's templars and a fugitive defiler left the entire square a blackened husk. The Shadow King had the dead trees removed and burned with the 100 slaves who had tended them. He has ordered that the now-infertile ground remain barren as a symbol of the public danger which rogue magic-users represent. A fountain in the form of a mantis still fills a stone basin in the center of the desolate square with a thin trickle of water.

## House Shom

Shom is the largest of Nibenay's merchant houses. This family's legacy goes back over 1,000 years and is closely intertwined with the mercantile history of the region. The house has, however, shown no signs of growth for centuries. Its enterprises have been in slow decline. Only the sheer size of the house and its tremendous wealth allows it to continue to dominate trade in Nibenay. There are plenty of opportunities for smaller, more aggressive houses to successfully establish themselves in the city. Shom is generally too large and slow to respond to competitors. While Shom will eventually react to a competitor entering one of its traditional areas of business, it can be relied upon to ignore new markets and ventures.



House Shom is known for the reclusive, decadent lifestyles of its masters. The Shom family is said to have an insatiable appetite for luxury and sensual experimentation. Few people have actually seen a member of the Shom family, for they emerge from their palaces in heavily curtained howdahs carried by slaves.

House Shom is seen as the epitome of the spiritual vacuity and moral erosion that is inherent among mercantile enthusiasts. As if to vindicate the critics, a huge fountain built in the front of one Shom estate endlessly pours water into the sand in a display of excess. (Actually, the fountain recycles its water.)

There has been a recent move for reform within the house, driven by young Jebea Shom. He is currently inspecting Shom's remote outposts to formulate ideas and gather supporters in an effort to reverse the fortunes of the house. For more information on House Shom, see the *Dune Trader* accessory.

## Psionic Trade

The Nibenese School of Augurs is looking for new ways to generate revenue. One trade practice is a telepathic message

delivery service. The school maintains a network of telepaths throughout Nibenay, and the city-states and major towns of the Tyr region. Psychoportationists are trained to carry small objects or teleport them to other central locations. They will also teleport travelers to other cities and locations, although this service is only available when the psionics have enough power—and when the travelers can pay the exorbitant rates they charge. Patrons have complained of being *probed* by the psionics they hire, who are believed to see whatever valuable information they discover to interested parties.

## Citizen Businesses

While the dynastic merchant houses began the practice of the all-night emporiums, many small Nibenese businesses soon followed suit to support the heavy traffic from the merchant houses. Food vendors and small shop owners were the first to respond. Now almost every concern surrounding Sage's Square conducts business around the clock, with a brief two hour break around midday.







### The Elven Markets

It has been said that Nibenay is a good place for elves to do business. The elven tribes of the Ivory Triangle set up their markets in districts of the city which have been abandoned by the rest of society. Several areas in the city contain ruins of huge palaces that were once home to noble families that ran afoul of the Shadow King. Other buildings have been left vacant by families who moved to another part of the city. They retain the property rights out of fear of offending their ancestors, but often rent the space to independent operators such as the elves.

One ruined palace, called the Hill, is so ancient that the Nibenese cannot even speculate about its origin. This structure has carvings that predate the conventions of Nibenese dance imagery and sometimes portray fantastic scenes of forest creatures and people who defy the imagination. This now-decaying structure (and others like it around the city) has become den to a large portion of Nibenay's predator classes.

Elves set up their bazaars in the outer wards of this citadel. The bards quarter is just beyond in the inner wards of the Hill. Gangs of thieves establish bases of operation in the deep recesses of this district and there are rumored to be tunnels used by smugglers here that actually penetrate deep beneath the city walls. The few things which a person cannot find in the merchant emporiums are likely to be found here. Poisons and spell components can be purchased in the Hill District, if one is willing to risk entering the area.

The elf tribe called the Sky Singers maintain a market in the Hill District. A small emporium almost always has wares for sale, while the huge bazaar only opens when the bulk of the tribe comes to the city.

### Client Villages

The client villages of the nobles and state depend upon their patrons for the majority of their needs. However, the residents often make personal purchases from passing caravans. Clients will occasionally travel to a merchant house outpost or send to the city for an unusual item. Nomadic tribes of elves occasionally set up marketplaces outside villages, but in general there are no permanent marketplaces in the client villages.

### Citizenship

Both the king's templars and the citizens of Nibenay enjoy three simple rights. However, these manifest in very different ways:

- **The Right to Defend Nibenay.** For the people of the city-state, this right justifies virtually any transgression against a non-citizen. In Nibenay, a foreigner cannot technically be murdered, they can only be damaged beyond repair. Consequently, while a citizen may be forced to pay a heavy fine for killing a non-citizen, they will never be executed.

The templars invoke this right to press citizens into military service and to justify killing citizens who offend them. Anyone that a templar deems to be an enemy of the state may be destroyed without recrimination.

- **The Right to Sovereignty Over Property.** Nibenay is possibly the only city where citizens enjoy a legal claim to their own property. In matters of dispute, an individual's property is considered to belong to the master of their household. Barring any disagreements, however, a person is free to exchange property or services in any way.

The templars use this right to tax the movement and sale of goods, as well as restrict the activities of individuals. According to the King's Law, the city gates and streets belong to the king. Thus, the templars are free to tax their use and to restrict specific people from using them.

- **The Right to Invoke the King's Law.** Over the centuries, the Shadow King has established a system of basic codes and principles from which all legal decisions can be precisely derived. There is a regard for precedents, and a templar of the Chamber of Order may rule freely within the constraints of the King's Law. This is the very essence of the Chamber of Order's activities.

For a citizen, this right means little except it provides the assurance that most disputes will be resolved consistently.

### Becoming a Citizen

The Nibenese are considered citizens from birth. Foreigners who wish to become citizens can purchase citizenship if they meet the criteria. Only people with steady earning potential may purchase citizenship. The price of citizenship is two gold pieces: the cost of 20 erdlu or one mekillot. Templars will only accept gold, not its equivalent value in ceramic pieces. Upon being admitted to the rolls of citizenry, a person is immediately assessed a minimum tax which they will be expected to pay at the end of the following year. Some people spend a lifetime saving for citizenship.



The greatest value of Nibenay citizenship is protection from avaricious slavers. No citizen may be enslaved in Nibenay, except by the specific will of the state. Unless a person is on the rolls of citizenship, however, the templars have no way of knowing if a traveler is a slave or freeman. Consequently, they will make no effort to enforce a foreigners claims that they have been unjustly enslaved due to their citizenship status in another city-state.

Citizens also benefit from security of property Unless a victim is from an influential merchant house or is a citizen of Nibenay, templars are unlikely to be concerned over the theft of property

Finally, only married citizens may own land in the Nibenay or the surrounding territory.

## The Citizens' Rolls

The Chamber of Order maintains a library of scrolls containing the names of every family and citizen in Nibenay. These documents, called the Citizens' Rolls, are used to assess taxes but are also referred to when a person's citizenship is questioned.

The templars may also resolve such a dispute unequivocally by taking the person in question to the Temple of the Law. Here, the statue which the king uses to hold personal audiences is psionically empowered and magically enchanted. A templar may present an individual to the statue and ask if the person is a citizen. The statue will respond truthfully.

## The Farms

The Plain of Burning Water is several acres of hot springs owned by the noble houses of Nibenay. These springs are used to irrigate the rice fields which surround the city. The Shadow King believes that people will take the best care of what belongs to them. Consequently, the state owns only enough farmland to feed the army and the templars. The king prefers to allow the self-serving noble houses to control the land and to simply assess taxes on the produce which these fields yield. The city does accumulate rice and grain. When drought drives prices up, the city floods the market with grain from its stores to drive prices back down.

The noble houses of Nibenay own huge tracts of land in the surrounding areas, although there are many small parcels held by individual free citizens. Some nobles rent land to tenant farmers who pay the nobles with rice. The elemental temples also own small fields which are maintained by slaves or clients.

The transfer of land is the one activity which the state regu-

lates closely. A landowner must be a married citizen in order to hold title with the state. The king has tacitly implied, through the actions of the state over the centuries, that he believes that the land should remain in the hands of the nobility.

A territory nearly six miles wide running 18 miles from the Crescent Forest to the edge of the Great Ivory Plain, is a disputed border between Gulg and Nibenay. This area is part of the Verdant Belt and yield fruitful crops to those who are willing to risk cultivating land that may be overrun by Nibenay's undead war beetles or Lalali-Puy's head hunters before harvest time.

Technically, the noble houses of Nibenay lay claim to this land, but it is not considered productive land for purposes of taxation. Nibenay rules that farmland not cultivated for three years returns to the state unless other arrangements are made. The king has used this provision to lay claim to the noble's land in the disputed territories and to use it to make land grants to adventurous citizens.

Nibenay imports much of its livestock. Erdlu are in greatest demand, although tenant farmers in the scrub plains sometimes maintain herds of kip, ztal and jankz. Few Nibenese will waste the Verdant Belt's fertile soil on large herding enterprises when most herd animals thrive just as well in the scrub plains.

Rice is the staple of Nibenese agriculture, but cotton, beans and other grains are also cultivated. Athasian rice requires a steady supply of water but does not require that fields be flooded. Flooding does seem to improve yields, however, and can help retard weed growth. Slave water carriers and wooden sluices are employed to regulate the water flow to the plants. The rice is planted by slaves using wooden hand drills.

The rice yield has steadily increased in response to better soil preparation, water control, and crop rotation. Rice in Nibenay is harvested by slaves using sickles and knives. The stalks are tied and left to dry in the sun after cutting.

Cotton, beans and other grains are used primarily as rotation crops and the yields are significantly less than those for rice. Rice can sometimes generate three harvests in a single year.

House Shom once bred inix in large numbers, but this enterprise has dwindled through mismanagement and neglect. Crodlu and heavy crodlu are probably the most commonly used beasts of burden in the Nibenay region, although the merchant houses and some nobles rely on heavy mekillot wagons for transporting goods. The king has experimented with using driks to pull enormous plows guided by dozens of slaves. So far the time and cost associated with managing this unwieldy process has prevented any gains in productivity from being realized.



## Life in the Shadow King's Court

Life in the Shadow King's court is as remote from the everyday lives of the people of Nibenay as are the obsidian mines of Urik. No free citizen has ever seen the palace of the king, nor could any confirm rumors of the life therein. The closest any citizen has come to Nibenay's court is the dungeons beneath the arena.

All of Nibenay templars are women, who are said to be the wives of the Shadow King. According to whispered legends, templars only meet the king on their wedding nights. Thereafter, they see him at high sun observances and occasionally during times of war or rebellion. Others are called regularly to his chambers, but supposedly he only takes counsel from his five high templars.

### The Naggaramakam

The Naggaramakam, or Forbidden Dominion, is the name given to the walled sub-city which serves as Nibenay's center of government. The square structure appears to be a massive keep with walls over 50-feet high. Above the walls, the tops of enormous agafaris trees can be seen rising out of the king's gardens. To the casual observer, this enormous wonder appears to be a well-defended garden.

The interior of the sub-city is rumored to consist of beautiful temples and plazas, but no freeman can say for sure. The palace itself said to be sculpted in the form of a stylized head of the Shadow King. Thousands of sculpted dancing women form columns that appear to be locks of the king's hair, each carved to resemble one of his templar wives.

The interior of the palace, legends have it, is a honeycomb of dark mazes filled with the fog of thick incense and the hypnotic chanting of templars reciting their devotions.

### The Templars

The templars of Nibenay are perhaps the second most efficient and disciplined priests in the seven cities, after Hamanu's warrior priests in Urik. Their power is strictly defined and carefully controlled by a smooth autocratic machine. The Shadow King is a great believer in systems. He enjoys designing them and allowing them to operate freely. He believes that organizational problems are a result of poorly defined processes. By implementing the correct punishments and rewards, an institution will run in an efficient and predictable manner. He has, over the centuries, become a remarkable student of human nature. Currently, he entrusts virtually every aspect of city management to his subordi-

nates and becomes involved only when a major crisis arises.

This as a owe am ambitious templars to build small bureaucratic empires within the government. Occasionally, such priestesses come to odds with one another. Nibenay feels that the competition is healthy unless a templar's personal interests become inconsistent with those of the city. In such situations, Nibenay ruthlessly destroys the offender and restructures her areas of responsibility.

All of the Shadow King's templars are women. With the exception of the lowest ranks, they are all his wives. Whether this was a custom begun to ensure loyalty among his priesthood or simply a result of his insatiable appetites is unclear.

The marriage ritual occurs within the walls of the Naggaramakam when the initiate reaches the age of 16. After the consummation of the marriage, templars can call upon the king for spell-casting power. No family members are present at the ceremony, but a wooden token with the Royal Cilops on one side and the name of the child on the other is presented to the family. This token is carried by the head of the household and is used as an official indication that a bearer is related to the royal family. More than one free citizen has escaped death by proving that his daughter is a templar.

Most templars live within the walled sub-city. The apartments in the Naggaramakam range from modest barracks for the lower-level templars, to entire wings of the palace for the high templars. However, many administrators and law enforcers are permanently stationed throughout the city and abroad. These templars live in comfortably-appointed state buildings.

The king allows his wives to take concubines of their own from among the slaves of the Naggaramakam as long as such diversions do not interfere with the performance of their professional or wifely duties. It is not known whether the king's wives bear him children. If they do, the children have never been seen in the city. Some people believe that the templars bear only daughters, who in turn become wives to their father. This story is unlikely but was given some credence when an heir to the throne did emerge from the Forbidden Dominion.

Dhojakt, a horrible beast that appeared to be half man and half cilops, is recognized as the Prince of Nibenay. He recently disappeared from public view after driving a defiler from the city. It is not known whether he has left the city to attend to his father's business, or whether he is simply spending his time in the palace.



Life in the Shadow King's Court





# Life in the Shadow King's Court

## Ownership of Property

Templars are part of the royal family. Consequently, property is treated much as it is in any marriage. The Shadow King allows his high templars to delegate the distribution of state property among their subordinates. Thus, the high templar of the Chamber of Fire may assign a quartermaster to provide bedding of a certain quality to lower level officers and better bedding to higher ranking officers. The high templar of the Chamber of the Earth may assign a templar to allocate quarters to her subordinates. This templar may allocate some barrack for the low level priestesses and individual apartments for the higher-ranking women.

Within the Naggaramakam, virtually all of a templar's material needs are provided for. Templars have no want of food and slaves attend to all menial tasks. The king, however, allows his wives to accumulate and dispose of small gifts and private property freely. They do enjoy small objects of personal interest. Thus a young templar may possess an heirloom pillow, or may be given a small plot of land by her parents. The king himself occasionally bestows gifts to his wives for acts of exceptional devotion.

## Education

The education of most templars begins in the state schools run by higher-level templars. Here, young templars are taught reading, writing, mathematics, military history, astronomy and basic organizational skills. They are also provided with simple combat skills and basic military training. Young nobles traditionally spend at least seven years attending the schools, starting around the age of seven. Talented female citizens often receive sponsorship from the state.

These schools are used both to enculturate the young to the values of the state and to identify talented women for spots in the priesthood. Nibenay likes to draw templars from across the social and geographical spectrum of the kingdom. This ensures that a certain number of families throughout the city are loyal to the crown.

At the age of 14, after seven years of study, qualified women are initiated into the priesthood and begin to receive intense military training in the Chamber of Fire. Girls who do not pass muster after seven years are taken into the Naggaramakam to serve as scholar slaves.

The noble families believe that dedicating a child to the priesthood is a political necessity, but they never allow their most

talented children to enter. They consider it a poor life and one which puts a person's loyalties at odds with their family. Some free citizens believe that a child accepted into the king's priesthood is a political windfall, while others despise the state's bureaucrats and would disown a child who aspired to its rank.

## Dress

A templar's dress can be considered an informal indication of power in the hierarchy. The highest level templars, and those closest to the king, wear no clothing. Middle level priestesses wear only skirts and sandals, while the lowest level functionaries wear full saramis.

This system is only useful in observing the women at their civilian duties. All military personnel and city guards wear protective gear and tabards.

## Funerals

Miles of catacombs extend deep beneath the Naggaramakam, containing the tombs of Nibenay's wives. The death of a templar is commemorated by a somber ritual in which 12 templar mourners carry the body to an underground temple that opens into the catacombs. Here, the mourners bathe the body and lay it upon a platform teeming with ock'n snails. The attendants mourn silently outside the room until the snails have completely covered the body with a thick resin. This resin will eventually harden and seal the body. This process usually takes about 12 hours. During this time, it is believed that the king himself comes to the temple and mourns the death of his wife. The mourners then begin to sing an elegy as they lift the body and carry it to a tomb where it is sealed in a warded sarcophagus.

## Government Structure

The structure of Nibenay's government is unique. There are four hierarchical organizations, each of which is symbolically named for one of the elements. A fifth organization has its own chain of command, as well as a lateral structure that cuts across the other four.

The Chamber of the Earth, or Temple of the House, administers all activities which Nibenay considers necessary for keeping the city's "house" in order. This includes the reservoir, the city grain supply, the public work, the king's fields, the roads, public festivals and the collection of taxes. The Chamber of Earth is

# Life in the Shadow King's Court



also responsible for managing the slave laborers and concubines within the Naggaramakam.

The Chamber of Fire, or Temple of War, is the military organization of Nibenay. Through this institute, 1,000 half-giants are drilled in formation, giant watroaches are slain and hollowed out as battle platforms, and campaigns are launched against Gulg. Every young templar is trained first as a soldier in service of the Chamber of Fire before being considered for other careers.

The Chamber of Water, or Temple of Trade, is responsible for the administration of the city gates, tariffs, licenses for business, and relations with the dynastic merchant houses. This department also coordinates the purchases and sales of government property, including grain and slaves.

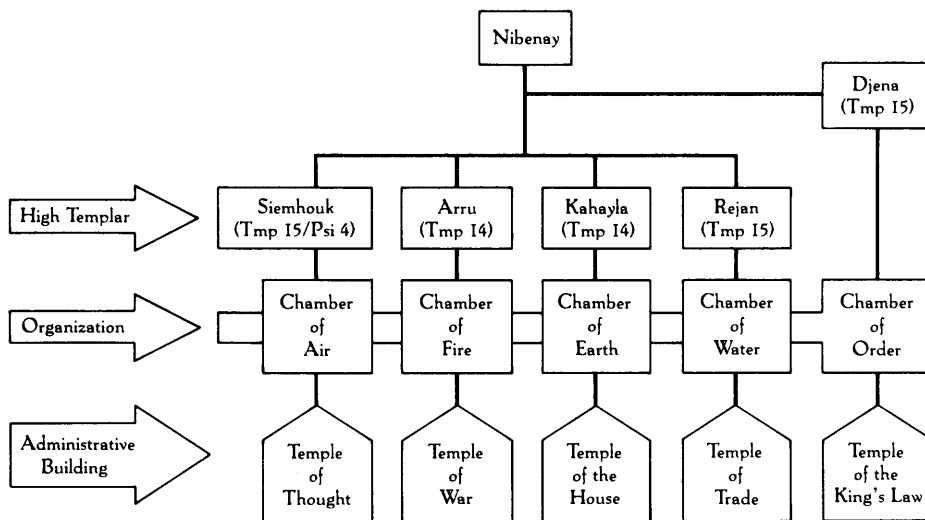
The Chamber of Air, or Temple of Thought, represents what is sometimes called the university of the Naggaramakam. This branch is responsible for magical training and research for both the king's priests and defilers. The training and research conducted in psionics and psionic enchantment also occurs within this structure. Under this organization, Nibenay launches special projects including his college of scholar slaves who have been set to the task of translating some ancient writings unearthed in a

ruin in the Crescent Forest. The Chamber of Air also manages the state schools in the city.

The Chamber of Order, or Temple of the King's Law, is feared even more than the military. This organization has sweeping power both within the government and the society at large. The Chamber of Order is directly responsible for the supervision of law enforcement, the administration of justice, and the maintenance of the rolls of citizenry. The Chamber of Order polices the community, resolves disputes, and manages the prisons. The Myrmeleon program, designed to infiltrate the Veiled Alliance in Gulg, is also run by the Chamber of Order.

In addition to its own structure, this group has officials posted throughout the other government organizations. They serve as watchdogs and facilitators, administering the law within the government and wielding powers of accusation against other templars. A templar from the Chamber of Order may commandeer resources or subordinates from any lower-level templar in any other government agency. The city watch is generally run by Order templars with soldiers commandeered from the Chamber of Fire. Each organization may propose taxes and it is the responsibility of the Chamber of Order to balance and approve their implementation.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF NIBENAY'S GOVERNMENT\*



\* Chart reflects traditional structure. In reality, Djena has no authority over Siemhouk.





## Life in the Shadow King's Court

### Administration

The government organizations are each headed by a templar who reports directly to the Shadow King. The high templar of the Chamber of Order directs the other four high templars.

Each chamber of the government maintains an enormous temple in the city for conducting public business. An enormous statue of the king rests in the main hall of each temple. The Shadow King actually uses these statues to hold audience with petitioners and prisoners when it becomes necessary. People tell of an intense blue glow radiating from the eyes of the statues and a deep voice resonating from the very walls at such times. Thus, the king remains in seclusion even when affairs of state demand his attention. Nibenay only emerges from the Naggaramakam to lead his army and to personally suppress rebellions.

### Males in the Government

Male free citizens are employed throughout Nibenay's government, but they are never given decision-making power. Many males enlist in the army and serve under the command of the templars. Others find work as laborers or guards.

### Siemhouk, the Child Priest

The highest ranking templar in Nibenay's court is the thin, spectrally quiet 1 CC-year-old girl named Siemhouk. Born within the Naggaramakam to a high templar who died in childbirth, Siemhouk was raised by the Shadow King. Since infancy, the child has shown extraordinary psionic and magical abilities. Under Nibenay's tutelage, the girl has traveled across the Tablelands and into other planes as she gained mastery over her talents. She has shown a greater command of templar magic than any of Nibenay's wives. Her progress in psionic disciplines has been impressive, but can only advance as quickly as her maturity allows. If her present capabilities are any indication, however, she will one day equal the powers of Nibenay's most skilled augurs.

The girl has displayed an unprecedented psionic wild talent known only to herself and the Shadow King. She has the ability to allay bestial rages, and may be able to calm even those states that seize dragons as they advance toward maturity. Nibenay hopes to move through the bestial stages without having to leave or destroy his city.

Siemhouk is formally the *Pandita*, high priestess of the Cham-

ber of Air. Traditionally, the high templar of the Chamber of Order would have authority over her. However, the Shadow King has made it clear that this is not to be the case.

### Nibenay's Army

The army of Nibenay commands fear and respect among the people of the Ivory Triangle. It is best known for its disciplined core of over 1,000 half-giants. The military enterprises of the Shadow King are replete with undead units and slaves. The king takes an interest in devising new war machines to further the devastating efficiency of his forces. Battle platforms constructed from undead watroach and rezhatta beetles are often seen lumbering across the salt flats.

The Nibenese army prefers to engage its enemy in the open salt flats, where its war machinery faces no obstacles and the speed of its half-giant infantry can be used to greatest advantage. The judaga of Gulg, with their stealth and hunting training, have a decided advantage when skirmishing in the Crescent Forest.

The Nibenese army accepts any citizens who can pass the rigorous physical and ideological exams conducted by the templars of the Chamber of Fire. The king has entertained the idea of starting a unit of expatriate foreigners, but has not yet pursued this course of action.

For BATTLESYSTEM™ scenarios, the Shadow King may draw from a11 of the units listed in the Sorcerer-King's Horde entry in the *Dragon Kings* hardbound. Nibenay uses kanks for their cavalry because of their hardiness. Use the list of point values attributed to each unit type in the "City-State of Gu1g" book when constructing these scenarios.

There are two infantry unit types which are unique to Nibenay, one of which does not impact on BATTLESYSTEM play. Nibenay employs teams of trained telepaths for scouting and reconnaissance work. These teams are trained to stay in constant contact with one another and to communicate information to their headquarters. These scouts are often assigned guard duties in sensitive situations. The other specialized unit is Nibenay's devastating half-giant infantry:

**Half-Giant Infantry**      2 stands (40%)  
AD 10 AR 10 Hits 3 ML 12 MV 15 Points 16  
(second rank can attack with agafari long spears)



## The Monastic Movement

There has, over the past 200 years, been a gradual resurgence in Nibenay's ancient monastic tradition. The monastic cults which are believed to be the training ground for the Shadow King's original templars were at one time an integral part of Nibenese society. These cults taught the quiet acceptance of authority, and that suffering could be eliminated through mental discipline and extinguishing the self. This state of peace is called *vihear*, or sanctuary, by the Nibenese.

Male and female monks stay in separate monasteries at opposite ends of the city. The two orders (Exalted Path and Serene Bliss) both pledge loyalty to the king. Nibenay regards the monasteries with amused tolerance. He sees their philosophy as the intellectual equivalent of sticking one's fingers in one's ears and pretending that not to hear what you don't want to listen to. On the other hand, he feels the monasteries provide a valuable social function by turning potential wolves into sheep.

As the rise of trade created more possibilities for the free citizen class and people became less inclined to submissively accept their lot in life, the role of the monasteries diminished. For

centuries the monasteries became the refuge of eccentrics and psionics. Over the past 200 years, however, the monasteries have once again begun to fill with the ranks of the free citizen class. Young people reacting to the recalcification of Nibenese society and their own diminishing opportunities have begun to regard their elders as materialistic. Rebellious freemen, bored nobles and even an occasional jaded merchant will turn to the monasteries to hear teachings that will pacify their frustrations.

The monks grow food, study rigorously, and meditate. Monks of both genders wear bright orange robes and shave their heads and eyebrows. Some of the monks train in stonecutting and painting. Female monks often petition to join or serve the ranks of the templars. The monks are once again enjoying the respect with which they were regarded in the past, rather than just the idle curiosity of recent years.

While most monks are not psionics, the monasteries have become havens for students of the Unseen Way. Young psionics who have no interest in the practical and profit-minded emphasis of the School of Augurs have turned to the openness of the monasteries as a means to pursue their mental disciplines. The psionics have little interest in the teachings of the old monks, and view the monastery simply as a place to advance in psionic ability. This small sub-culture within the population of the monastery is of increasing concern to both the older monks and the officials at the School of Augurs.

A practice which had faded into antiquity, but has enjoyed a resurgence in recent years, is the dwelling. The dwelling is a 30-day period during which a child is sent to the monastery to live and learn. Young freemen have begun to return to this practice with their children, but it has not caught on among the nobles. Historically, even slave children were sent on a dwelling, but there has been no sign of this practice returning except among the most reactionary citizens.

## The Order

Kayardi Drasad is an extraordinarily powerful telepath and initiate of the Order. He is the leader of the psionics in the monastic movement. From his cell in the Monastery of the Exalted Path he teaches young mentalists to discipline their minds.

He has used his psionic abilities to dominate Thong Nal, the abbot of the monastery, and to become his second in command. Kayardi believes that with a simple ideological makeover the monasteries could popularize the ideas of the Order.



## Life in the Shadow King's Court

So far, his superiors in the Order regard his impulses as potentially dangerous. Only his self-discipline in refraining from implementing his plan until he receives approval has kept him in good standing with his psionic masters. If they do ever decide to allow him to take over the monastery, Thong Nal will be the first to go. Au Treng, the abbottess of the Serene Bliss Monastery, suspects that something odd is afoot at Exalted Path but has not inquired further.

### The Veiled Alliance

Nibenay's Veiled Alliance focuses its effort on protecting the city's preservers, rather than concocting acts of sedition against the crown. This group will go to great lengths, however, to root out and destroy defilers. The public, naturally, does not distinguish between preservers and defilers, and is equally hostile to both. Public animosity for wizards is particularly high following the incident in Sage's Square which resulted in the destruction of an ancient grove of agafari trees (see *The Amber Enchantress* novel).

The Nibenese Alliance is particularly suspicious of strangers and is as likely to attack strangers attempting to contact the Alliance as it is to assist them. The easiest method for contacting the Alliance, short of publicly casting spells, is to attend the seasonal Starlight Pageants. Wizards in the audience tend to show an inordinate amount of interest in the performances of the king's defilers. A discreet recognition sign may help a stranger establish contact.

### The Zwuun

An ancient spiritual entity manifesting the collected life force of a long dead group of preservers appears in the form of an amorphous cloud of steam above the hot springs in the Plain of Burning Water. The *zwuun*, as Nibenay's Alliance refers to this phenomenon, appears occasionally to inquisitive preservers who wait politely by the shore of the spring and sing to it. It appears to have the ability to answer virtually any question accurately, but it does not always have the inclination. It seems to have a fickle playfulness that can, at times, become malicious. The *zwuun* will sometimes provide deliberately misleading information to inquirers. For more information on the *zwuun*, see the *Veiled Alliance* accessory.

### Bribery in Nibenay

People hoping to bribe the templars of Nibenay would be well advised to do their homework in advance. Because of their material well being and the interdependent nature of their everyday lives, the priestesses react unpredictably to such offers. Templars serving in the Chamber of Order are the most likely to arrest a person for offering a bribe. The templars of the Chamber of Water, however, often consider such offers as gratuities for excellent service.

Lower-level templars are likely to respond to small bribes as long as they are not asked to break the law. Thus, a low-level templar may look the other way when a merchant's mekillok blocks an intersection if the merchant offers a few coins in appreciation of the templar's patience. Higher-level templars may act amicably toward people who extend gifts of personal taste. A permit to open a business may be approved more quickly if a rare butterfly is delivered to a templar who collects such creatures.

### Smuggling Spell Components

The templars of Nibenay find that the arduous inspections required at the city gates to try to control the flow of spell components are prohibitively inefficient and slow legitimate trade. They prefer, instead, to inspect only particularly suspicious travelers and instead target their anti-magic campaign toward infiltration of the preserver community. Operating on tips and investigations, the Chamber of Order has assembled a faceless network of spies. Fashioned after the cell structure of the Veiled Alliance itself, the templar Myrmeleons work to infiltrate and destroy the preserver community. They have succeeded in creating enough paranoia within the Nibenese Alliance that the preservers have actually killed a few of their own, suspecting them as spies. Their success has been compounded by a string of tips which, unknown to them, were provided by Poortool and his followers (see "Poortool's Horde" in *The Ivory Triangle* book). The Chamber of Order also mounts sweeps through the elven markets of the Hill District.

All templars involved in anti-magic activity are trained to identify signs of magic use and to safeguard themselves against it. They can easily identify the material components required for wizard's spells but will arrest a suspicious character regardless of whether the victim is carrying any.



# Races and Characters in Nibenay

## Races in Nibenay

Nibenay is a tolerant city, both culturally and racially. While most citizens are human, many dwarves can be found employed throughout the trademen's districts. While an elf might not be invited to dinner among polite company, there are certainly no barriers to trade for these nomads. Half-elves are often sought after as hard workers who generally have something to prove. There are probably more free muls than in other city because of the Nibenese tendency to allow exceptional slaves to work off or purchase their own freedom. Half-giants enjoy special favor from the templars, who like to recruit them for the infantry and the city guard. The unusually high half-giant population in the army seems to attract more of these beings who so enjoy the company of their own kind. The few halflings in Nibenay enjoy the traditional courtesy extended to strangers, as well as a bit of well meaning curiosity. Thri-kreen are admitted freely in the city and are treated respectfully, but are regarded with some apprehension. This stems simply from their somewhat unpredictable nature and well-known dietary habits.

## Character Classes in Nibenay

This section describes how the character classes participate in Nibenese society. Each description explains how the public perceives such people, and where they can be found. Visitors to the city may find this helpful when trying to hire talent, or looking for like-minded professionals who can offer assistance.

### Fighters

Fighters can be found throughout Nibenay. There are always opportunities for mercenaries on trade caravans or in the private armies of the noble families. The state will hire soldiers and guards from among the citizenry, but will not take on foreigners except as slaves.

### Rangers

Rangers are always in demand by the woodcutters of Nibenay. The free citizens in a lumbercamp will often pool their resources to hire a ranger to help defend them from the predators of the forest and the headhunters of Gulg. The templars also use rangers as scouts for the army.



### Gladiators

Nibenay is one of the few cities that allows free gladiators to enter public games. Such a gladiator must, however, receive sponsorship from a merchant house, noble family, temple or the state. Gladiators can find work and an opportunity to train at any of these places.

### Wizards

The public views independent mages as greedy and dangerous individuals who have power that would best serve the entire community under the direction of the king. Any sign of spell casting is likely to result in stoning or lynching by a mob. Magic-users keep low profiles, and if they must cast spells, they try to make them look like psionics or clerical magic. The merchant houses know the value of a talented magic-user, and some hire preservers and defilers alike.

If a preserver is caught by the templars, the wizard is likely to be killed on the spot. The templars are, however, willing to cut deals in exchange for the betrayal of other wizards. Defilers are



## Races and Characters in Nibenay

handled with equal severity. A defiler can sometimes hope to find work in the service of the Shadow King.

### Clerics

Clerics are respected in Nibenay, but not revered in the way that they are in the countryside. The people tend to view clerical abilities very pragmatically and will often try to get a few spells cast for free. The Temple of Elemental Fire in Nibenay has become a bit of a commercial enterprise. The high priest has been offering to pick up and cremate dead slaves for a fee. This turn seems somewhat out of character for the clerisy, and some people suspect that there may be more to this project than is immediately apparent.

### Druids

There are very few druids in Nibenay. Several captive druids tend to the gardens of the reservoir and the Naggaramakam. There is little else in this city to hold a druid's interest.

The Nibenese logging camps deep in the Crescent Forest have caused tensions with the druids who are concerned about the reckless clearing of the woodlands. Nibenese nobles deeply respect druids and take great delight in their company when the opportunity arises. They will always ask for a druid's advice on how to better tend their fields and hot springs and will offer a tour of the property if the druid will consent. A druid can easily become a permanent house guest of a noble family if he or she is so inclined.

### Templars

Templars from other city-states are expected to declare themselves at the city gates. If they follow this procedure, they will be shown diplomatic courtesy and offered quarters within the city, but not the Naggaramakam itself. If a foreign templar is caught sneaking into the city or the Naggaramakam, he will be killed on the spot.

### Bards

Bards can be found beyond the elven market in the inner ward of the Hill District. This squalid collection of mud-brick huts and old buildings is the home of Nibenay's most deadly predators. Among these dancers, musicians, singers and storytellers, a visitor

can find poisoners and assassins. Young nobles and freemen have been visiting the bard's quarter in search of a paralytic poison that promises a near death experience to thrill seekers.

Potential heirs within a noble house will sometimes resort to hiring bards to eliminate rivals. Some bards have gained such popularity from their performances or amassed such fortunes from their illicit activities that they are able to retire in comfort.

### Thieves

Nibenay is a thief's paradise—so much wealth and so many hiding places. The Hill District is home to gangs of thieves who operate throughout the city.

The templars tend to ignore sporadic attacks on foreigners, as long as they do not threaten trade. Any assaults targeted against a major merchant house or noble family will not only raise the templar's attention, but also the private armies of the victims.

Most convicted thieves have a hand removed as punishment. A second offense results in sending the thief to the king's arena dungeons.

### Psionicists

The School of Augurs is the center of psionic activity in Nibenay. The schoolmaster, Djef, is a pragmatic dwarf with an eye for profit. He is constantly trying to develop new ways to generate revenue from the abilities of his students.

The Exalted Path monastery has become a somewhat more clandestine but free meeting place for psionicists.

Psionic power is common on Athas and many people are familiar with frequently used sciences and disciplines. It is considered rude, however, to use intrusive telepathic or clairsentient abilities without asking permission.

# NPC Master Table

Name	CL	AC	MV	HD	# A T	Damage (penalties & bonuses included)	AL THAC0*
Caravan guard, human	F4	7	12	4d10	1	1d6+1 (bone spear)	N 17
Citizen of Nibenay, typical	—	10	12	1d6	1	1d4-1 (bone dagger)	Var 20
Cleric of the Earth, typical**	C5	10	12	5d8	1	1d6 (obsidian club)	N 18
Dancer, typical	B5	10	12	5d6	1	1d6 (bone wrist razor)	N 18
Elf, typical	Th3	9	12	3d6	1	1d8-1 (bone sword)	N 19
Elf chief	F7	2	12	7d10	3/2	1d8 (steel long sword)	NE 14
Gith of the Blackspines	—	6	10	3d8	1	1d6-1 (obsidian-headed spear)	CE 17
Gladiator, half-giant	F4	9	15	4d8+12	1	1d4 + 4 (quabone)	N? 16
Guard, half-giant	F3	6	15	3d8+12	1	1d6+4 (stone club)	N? 17
Merchant, typical	Th5	10	12	5d6	1	1d4-1 (bone dagger)	N 18
Noble, typical	—	10	12	1d8	1	1d4 (metal dagger)	Var 20
Preserver, typical**	P5	10	12	5d4	1	1d4-1 (bone dagger)	NG 19
Psionicist, typical†	Ps5	8	12	5d6	1	1d6-1 (bone short sword)	LN 18
Slave, human	F2	10	12	2d10	1	Punch/wrestle	Var 19
Slaver, typical	F5	4	12	5d10	1	1d6 (stone club)	NE 16
Slaver, leade†	F7	2	12	7d10	3/2	1d8+1 (obsidian sword)	NE 14
Soldier, half-giant	F3	9	15	3d8+12	1	1d6+4 (agafari spear)	N? 17
Templar defiler**	D6	9	12	6d4	1	1d4 (metal dagger)	LE 19
Templar, low-level**	T4	8	12	4d8	1	1d6 (agafari spear)	LE 18
Templar, midlevel**	T6	5	12	6d8	1	1d4 (metal dagger)	LE 18
Templar, master**	T10	2	12	10d8	1	2d4 (metal broad sword)	LE 14

\* THAC0 does not include penalties or bonuses due to Str or weapon material.

\*\* Possess spells.

† Passes wild talents or other psionics.





# Command Performance

by Lisa Smedman

"Drinks all around, barkeep! Another crock of your best ale, if you please!"

A cheer filled the crowded bar as customers drained their clay tankards and waved them in approval. Lanky elves; unkempt halflings with feral gleams in their eyes; stocky, sun-bronzed dwarves—all joined in the revel that followed the closing performance of a successful stage-story.

Suni surveyed the room, trying to count heads. The party at the Tippling Kank was for performers only but, as usual, quite a number of Salt View residents had squeezed into the tavern, fibbing their way in past the dimwitted half-giant who served as bouncer. One brazen soul from a rival theater had even come in a costume that clearly marked him as part of another production. But his character, that of the Buffoon Templar, was a popular one. None of the ex-slaves of Salt View could resist the way he lampooned their former masters.

Suni sighed. It was going to be an expensive evening.

"Bravo, Suni! A fine performance!" Someone thumped her on the back, and Suni's ale slopped down the front of her leather jerkin. Brushing the foam from her chest, she was about to chastise the fellow for being so clumsy, but then she saw who it was.

"Xaynon!" She swept the cap from her head and touched it to her heart as she bowed to the village leader. "I thought I saw you in the audience at the theater arena. I'm glad you enjoyed the story."

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## Command Performance

Xaynon had once been a champion of the gladiatorial pits. Like all muls, he was a combination of dwarf and human, bred for combat. His completely hairless body was heavily muscled. The pain of his former slave life had wrought harsh lines in his face, but now his eyes sparkled. "Enjoyed it! I tell you, Suni, that *Julatta and Rosario* is your best stage-story yet. I loved the part where the young lovers murder their evil parents and make it look like suicide. Your prose rivals the work of Kilay."

Suni blushed. To be compared to the great bard whose stage-stories or "plays" as they were known locally) had made him a legend in his own time was high praise indeed.

"You must have made a fortune on your tour," Xaynon continued. "The elvish herders pay top coin to see a good tragedy, especially one about their own kind."

"After tonight, I don't think I'll have a ceramic bit left," Suni said.

"You're probably right," Xaynon laughed. "But that's my good fortune. I was worried that you might think yourself too wealthy to go on tomorrow night's raid."

"Too wealthy?" It was Suni's turn to laugh. "With this mob, my coin is disappearing faster than water in the desert sun. And I never turn down a chance to test my talents." Suni struck a pose, one hand fluttering to her forehead, the other hidden behind her back. "Oh please, kind caravan master. I am a lost soul, parched and weary, abandoned on the salt flats to die by my cruel stepmother. Pray, show some mercy. Help me to return to my wealthy and loving father." She fell into a make-believe swoon, and when Xaynon responded, reaching out to catch Suni as she fell, she twisted ferociously in his grasp, bringing forward the hand she had hidden behind her back, to bury an imaginary obsidian dagger in his throat. Then, realizing that she might have insulted Salt View's leader, she backed up a step, her face flushed. The ale had made her foolish.

"Will you be leading the raiding party?" she asked.

Xaynon pretended to remove a dagger from his throat. "I can't. My own play begins its run tomorrow." He held the imaginary dagger hilt-first over his forearm, offering it to Suni like a barkeep flourishing a bottle of fine wine. "You'll have need of this weapon, madam. The gith tribes are down from the Blackspine Mountains, and are themselves raiding the plain."

Suni mimed the motion of sheathing a dagger. "Those lizard-spawn don't frighten me. I'll go."

"And Gaib?"

Suni looked at her leading man, who was dancing a noisy jig on a table with the Buffoon Templar. The handsome elf was quite inebriated, and his feet were nearly slipping out from under him with each step. Only a firm clench on the "templar's" robe kept him upright. Seeing Suni, he waved in her direction. "Another round, barkeep!" he shouted. "Our story-shaper will pay!"

"He may feel a little rough tomorrow," Suni told Xaynon. "But he's never missed a 'performance' yet. He likes a good raid as much as I do."

The crowd shouted Gaib's name, clapping and urging him to perform. In the uproar, it was getting ever more difficult to hold a conversation. Xaynon pulled Suni closer. "The raiding party will assemble at the double salt pillar at dusk tomorrow!" he told her. Then he turned for the door, pressing his way through the throng.

Gaib stood alone on the table now, weaving slightly but otherwise holding his liquor well. The tavern patrons shouted for him to perform an encore from tonight's performance, each calling out their favorite parts. Others pushed forward Yasmilla, the young elf who had the role of Julatta. "The oasis scene!" someone shouted. "The part where Rosario sneak into the Bitterleaf camp!" Soon every voice was calling for the same thing. Gallantly, Gaib helped the tipsy Yasmilla onto the table. She burped, and the crowd laughed. The tips of her gently pointed ears went pink, but she quickly covered her embarrassment, bowing and accepting their mock applause.



"Oh, Rosario," she crooned, clutching Gaib's hand. "You are of the Jura Dai tribe and I am a Bitterleaf elf. But why should our names be of more consequence than our love? What are names but words? The sun by any other name would burn as hot and bright."

Rosario was supposed to interrupt his love at this point. The audience waited, hushed, for him to speak his dramatic line. But instead Gaib was gesturing frantically at Suni. She pushed her way to the table, and the performer flipped something at her with a flick of his thumb. Suni caught it and smiled. Gaib's ring. Like all performers, the elf was incredibly superstitious. He refused to even practice *Julatta and Rosario* while wearing the ring, saying it was bad luck. Suni shook her head. Some performers refused to allow anyone to spit backstage; others panicked if two prop swords crossed when placed on a table.

"Then I shall renounce my name—and my tribe!" Gaib fell to his knees, slipping easily into character. His tavern audience gasped, though every one of them had heard the line before. An elf who renounced his tribe was an outcast, forced to wander the desert alone under Athas's blazing sun. No other tribe would fully trust and accept him, and his own tribe would forever close their tents to him. The lines were especially poignant for Suni, a half-elf who was accepted neither by her father's tribe nor by her mother's human kin.

"And I too shall renounce my tribe!" Yasmilla answered, making the ritualized severing gesture with one hand. "No longer will I be a Bitterleaf elf! But Rosario, why have you come to this oasis? If any of my tribe find you here, this sand shall become your tomb."

"I came to swear my love for you."

"Then swear!"

"By the moons?"

"Nay, not them," Yasmilla shook her head. "That is a braggart's oath." When the scene was performed on a stage, two mirrors, carefully hung from wires and lit by hidden torches, would cast "moonlight" onto

her silver-blond hair. Here in the bar, there was only the dim flickering of oil lamps, but the crowd was every bit as reverent.

Suni could sense the mingled emotions of an audience as if they were her own. It was this ability, more than anything else, that allowed her to refine a stage-story until its every line rang with emotional resonance, plucking at their heartstrings. Ever since she had been a child, she had been able to read the joys and fears of others.

Gaib pretended to think. "By the ancient gods?"

"Nay, their temples remain, but the gods themselves have vanished."

Gaib was supposed to pace across the stage at this point, as a breeze, conjured by a cleric who worshiped the elemental plane of air, stirred the leaves of potted trees. Instead he swayed as he stood on the tabletop, as if a breeze were shifting him. After a brief pause, he licked his fingertips and held them up to the imaginary wind. "What is this?" he asked himself. "A wind?"

Suni winced at the way he slurred the lines, but the tavern patrons were watching avidly, oblivious to the finer points of delivery.

Gaib assumed a dramatic pose before Yasmilla, pretending to have been struck by sudden inspiration. "I shall swear," he said in a deep voice, taking her hand, "by the four elements. That my love for you will remain as firm as the earth, as clear as the air, as bright as burning fire, as sustaining as water, forevermore. It will never change. I will always be yours, for as long as the wind shall blow."

"Oh, Rosario! Thou art truly mine, Rosario!" Yasmilla flung her arms around the handsome elf and kissed him.

Gaib returned Yasmilla's kiss—a little too passionately, Suni thought. The heat of her performers' emotions made her own heart start to beat a little faster.

The tavern patrons applauded wildly as the performers took their bows.

At the first opportunity, Suni yanked Gaib from





## Command Performance

the table. "I need to speak to you," she hissed, dragging him to a quieter corner of the tavern. "Jeliah is going to want payment for that last keg of ale, and I'm down to ceramic pieces."

"Yes? And?" Plucking his ring from Suni's hand, Gaib slipped it back on. His eyes wandered to Yas-milla's generous bosom.

Suni grabbed him by a pointed ear. "You're the one who ordered the Palewater ale—not that this mob would notice its quality, drunk as they are. I think *you* should pay for it."

"I'd love to. But unfortunately . . ." He made a show of turning his money pouch inside out. A single wedge-shaped ceramic bit fell out. "I'm a little short of funds after my dice game."

"How could you lose twenty gold pieces? And how are we supposed to pay for all this?" She glanced over her shoulder and saw Jeliah staring at them. The bartender had a worried frown on his wide face.

The elf twisted out of Suni's grip. "I'll fix it! Don't worry," he said, rubbing his ear. "Give me your pouch."

"But there's only ceramic pieces in it," Suni protested. "That's hardly enough."

He plucked the pouch from her hand. "Oh, but it could be," he said. Then he turned away from Suni and muttered a few words she couldn't hear.

Thinking he was going to gamble away what little coin she had left, Suni placed a hand on his shoulder and spun the elf around. "Where do you think you're—?"

She stopped in midsentence as Gaib grabbed her hand and upended the pouch over it. Glittering coins spilled out. She held one up and saw it gleam in the lantern light. It had the familiar pattern of a ceramic piece, but—she bit the coin—it was gold.

Her voice fell to an awed whisper. "How did—?" She looked into his mirth-filled eyes. "Gaib! You haven't taken up sorcery, have you?" The last sorcerer who had brought defiling magic into Salt View had wound up spitted on Xaynon's sword. Like everyone else on Athas, the ex-slaves feared the dark magic that

sucked its power from the life of the land itself.

"My little parlor trick is hardly sorcery." Gaib tossed his head in mock affront and gave her a seductive wink. "Be my Julatta tonight, and I'll tell you my secret."

Suni snorted. "I've heard that line before," she told him.

"Of course you have," he answered easily. "You wrote it. And now," he licked his lips, "more ale, I think." He plucked a few of the gold coins from her hand. "You know what Xaynon says: 'Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow, we raid.'"



The caravan was easy to spot on the wide expanse of the salt flats. Absolutely level and hard as stone, the flats were a blazing white that stretched from the Mekillot Mountains to the yellow smudge ahead that was the beginning of the scrub plain. Two black dots that wavered in the shimmering heat would be the wagons of the caravan.

Suni peered ahead, her eyes shaded by a fold of the checkered krama scarf loosely wrapped around her head. The kank she was riding shifted, crunching salt crystals under the claws that tipped each of its six legs. Suni clucked to the antlike insect and settled into a more comfortable position in her saddle. Under the heat of Athas's huge sun, the kank's jet-black exoskeleton was uncomfortably hot, even through Suni's loose white trousers. She was sweating in the stiffened leather jerkin that served as armor, but as quickly as the moisture formed, it was sucked away by the fierce desert heat.

"Looks like Xaynon's information was correct," Gaib said. The elf stood beside Suni and the other mounted raiders, breathing hard from his run across the desert. Like all of his long-limbed, vigorous race, he never rode. He took a long drink from a gurgling waterskin before continuing. "The gith raids have driven the traders away from their normal route. Instead of taking the road out of Nibenay, they're



veering across the salt plains.”

“If that is the House Shom caravan, it’s awfully small,” another of the raiders said. “Just two wagons? We’ll have to hope the shipment of hardwood weapons is on one of them. And where are the outriders?”

Suni shrugged. “Perhaps the gith killed them.”

“Which performance will we use, Suni?” another raider asked. “Shall we be thirsty travelers? Mercenaries seeking employment? Religious pilgrims?”

“Hmm,” Suni thought a moment. As story-shaper for the raiding party it was her job to choose the subterfuge that would get them within striking range of the wagons. “I think we should be ‘beleaguered survivors,’ victims of a gith attack. We have the wound dressings, and in my face-paint kit I have some fake blood. If we hide our weapons until the last moment, I think it will work.”

“I’m going to enjoy this,” a female halfling named Podni chuckled. “I have an old score to settle with House Shom. When I escaped, I told those slavers I’d be back one day to eat their hearts.” She slipped a stone into her sling and twirled it slowly at her side.

Suni could feel the halfling’s anger. It burned even brighter than the sun, and Suni’s hands involuntarily clenched. With an effort, she pushed the emotion from her mind.

“Remember Xaynon’s law, Podni. The object of a raid is to take the ‘tribute’ owed for the years stolen from us by slavery. We kill only those we have to.”

“Unless they’re slavers,” the halfling reminded her, slapping the end of her sling against her free hand.

As the raiders rode their kanks forward at a walk, approaching the caravan from one side, details came into focus in the shimmering heat. There were, indeed, only two wagons, each trundling across the plain behind a pair of matched mekillots. The giant lizards’ tongues flickered in and out of their mouths; it was clear they were underfed and hungry. On the salt flats, there was no forage for the mekillots, no water holes at which they could drink.

A handful of mul warriors, some bandaged and limping, marched beside the wagons, well back from

the mekillots’ questing tongues. These pitiful survivors of the gith raids would hardly be a match for the two dozen raiders from Salt View.

The wagons the lizards pulled were low and wide, the size of small houses. The House Shom banner—white dragonflies on a red and black field—flew over each. The first was a conventional trader’s wagon, with thick wooden sides and crossbow fortifications on the roof. Scarred by flame and with several hastily patched breaches in its sides, it limped along on squeaking wheels.

The wagon that followed it was little more than a cage on wheels. Inside, fully exposed to the blistering rays of the sun, lay a dozen individuals of various races, their arms and legs cruelly bound. It took all of Suni’s stage skills to keep the disgust from her face as she hailed its driver and guards.

“Hail, traders from the House of Shom!” she called to them, pretending it was all she could do to raise her bandaged arm. “We too are traders, but have lost our caravan to the gith.”

The human driving the wagon eyed the riders suspiciously as they walked their kank forward. “Traders of what house?”

“House Aykbard,” Suni called back, making up the name on the spot.

“Never heard of it!”

“We are a small house, not nearly as great as Shom. But I think it would be to the advantage of both houses if we were to join forces and journey together. The gith are following us; our trail will lead them straight to your caravan anyway. You look as if you could use reinforcements, even if they are only weakened ones.” As she spoke, her eyes searched the damaged wagon. There was still no sign of movement at any of its crossbow fortifications.

The driver squinted across the plain. “The gith are following you?”

The raiders’ kanks were almost up to the wagons now. Time to put the final act of this performance in motion. Time for Gaib’s line.

“Behold!” the elf shouted, pointing. “There, on the



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horizon! The dust cloud that mark the approaching gith!"

As one, all of the caravan guards and both wagon drivers turned their heads.

"Slavers of Shom!" the halfling screamed, twirling and releasing her sling stone in one smooth motion. "Prepare to be eaten!"

The raiders were supposed to have struck the first blow silently, while the muls' heads were still turned, but at the sight of the slave wagon emotions were running high. The rage of the other raiders howled in Suni's mind like a dust storm, prompting her to scream her own battle challenge. Driving the long, hook-shaped spur on her boot into the soft spot between her mount's abdomen and thorax, Suni sent her kank charging forward. Pincers snapping, it scuttled to the attack, while all around Suni the other raiders voiced their war cries.

Startled by the sudden attack from wounded travelers who had cast off their bloody bandages and drawn weapons from nowhere, the mercenary guards were able to land only a few glancing blows before being struck down. "Slaves of Shom, arise and throw off your bonds! You are slaves no more!" one of the raiders shouted. It was a line from one of Kilay's stage-stories.

Suni was less than a handful of paces from the cage-wagon when she realized her mistake. All at once, the bars of the cage shimmered, then dissolved as if they had been only a mirage caused by the heat. At the same time, the slaves inside the wagon vanished. With a groan, the plain wooden sides and back of the roofless wagon, revealed now, fell open to form ramps from the wagon to the ground. On the platform inside stood six slaving beasts with ridged backs. About waist-high to a human, the scaly creatures stood on four legs that ended in padded feet with cruel claws. Their square ears swiveled above tiny eyes in blunt faces, and their nostrils flared as they caught the raiders' scent.

"Tembos!" Suni shouted. "Back! Back! We've been tricked by an illusion!"

But it was too late. The tawny-colored tembos charged down the ramps, teeth gnashing.

Suni stood in her stirrups and hefted her spear as one of the tembos charged by. Mustering all her strength, she plunged the weapon down at the beast as it rushed past her kank, but her spear missed the tembo entirely. Expecting to feel the thud of the spear hitting home, Suni nearly fell from her mount. Then she realized what had happened. The tembo had not been in the spot she had aimed for, but a pace or two away. The animal had displaced its image.

Wheeling her kank around, she saw a second display of the tembo's unique abilities. One of the beasts had closed on Podni, and Suni was certain she was about to see it rend both the halfling and her kank with its claws. Instead, the tembo skidded to a stop a short distance from the halfling, sat back on its haunches and—

"Podni! Get away from it!" Suni shouted.

But her warning came too late. The halfling and her mount were caught in the tembo's mental attack. As rider and kank crumpled together to the salt-white ground, the stone rolled from Podni's sling, uncast.

Grimly, Suni charged the beast. The tembo's so-called "death field," she knew, also drained energy from the animal itself. Here was her chance. Stabbing with her spear as her kank tore at the tembo with its poisoned pincers, she at last felt the obsidian spear point sink home. At the same time the tembo turned, reared back on its hind legs, and slashed with clawed forefeet at her kank. Her mount went down, mandibles clacking furiously, as the tembo's magic sucked the life from it.

Rolling away from the dead kank, Suni drew her bone sword. It was a double-edged weapon, tipped with shards of obsidian. Before the tembo could turn, Suni slashed the sword's serrated edge across the beast's neck, tearing a lagged hole. The tembo fell heavily to the ground.

Suni had suffered only bruises and scrapes so far. The other raiders were not faring so well. All around Suni, tembos tore the other raiders from their kanks,





rending them with all four clawed feet at once. The first wagon, which had seemed almost deserted when the raiders made their charge, was now sending down a deadly rain of crossbow bolts. Worse yet, the mekil-lots that had drawn the illusion-disguised wagon had been set free by their driver and were feasting on the raiders, swallowing whole any who were unwary enough to get within range of their long, prehensile tongues.

Suni looked wildly around at the tattered remnants of the once-proud raiding party. Was she the only one still standing? No. There beside the first wagon. Gaib!

The elf was locked in battle with a tembo that had just clawed a dwarven raider into bloody strips. Using a forked spear, Gaib was fending off the beast's attacks. The tembo shimmered, and its scaly hide began to pale. Within the space of a few heartbeats, it was the same glittering white as the sand-crust ground beneath its feet. Almost invisible now, it resumed the attack.

Running through a hail of crossbow bolts that whizzed past her, Suni charged the flickers of white that marked where the tembo stood. Swinging her sword, she screamed to draw the beast's attention, then ran forward, her sword cleaving down.

The tembo started to turn toward Suni as her sword bit into the flicker of motion that was its tail just as Gaib jabbed at the tembo with his spear. Enraged, it spun around and set upon him even more fiercely than before. Its first swipe tore open Gaib's leg. Its second blow ripped his arm. Weakened more by the tembo's magical ability to sap the life essence from its victims than by the wounds themselves, Gaib staggered. The tembo's third blow found the elf's neck, and Gaib collapsed.

Suni slashed down at the nearly invisible creature. Again and again her sword found its mark. At last the creature shimmered back to its normal dun color and fell sideways onto the ground.

Suni sank to her knees beside Gaib. Blood was bubbling from the wound in his neck, and his face

had turned an ashen gray. Suni gently lifted his head, and in seconds her hands were slippery with blood.

"Gaib," she said in a choked whisper.

A faint smile came to his blood-flecked lips. "Suni! You still care." He glanced down at the blood that stained the salty ground. "I'm dying."

"No, Gaib," Suni insisted. "You're not. You'll live!" Furiously, she tore off her headwrap and pressed it to his throat to stop the bleeding. She could feel his pain and fear, feel his life slipping away bit by bit. This time, her gift for sensing the emotions of others had become her curse. "You'll live," she said, her voice breaking, but Suni knew she was denying the inevitable.

Weakly, Gaib shook his head. He pressed something into Suni's hand, and her fingers clenched around his ring.

"Take it," he said, his voice growing ever fainter. "It's magic. The other night in the tavern . . . the ceramic pieces. It changed their substance."

"Don't try to speak, Gaib," Suni answered. "Save your strength." His face swam before her as Suni's eyes filled with tears.

"The command word . . ." His words were mixed with a horrible bubbling noise now, as the blood puddled in his lungs. He trembled in her arms and Suni could feel his regret at having ignored her while pursuing Yasmilla.

"Your stage-story . . ." Blood foamed on Gaib's lips. "In the tavern, the scene with Yasmilla . . ."

"Hush. You don't need to apologize," Suni started to say.

Suddenly, his eyes went flat. Suni knew he was dead.

"Don't move!"

Something sharp jabbed the back of Suni's neck. She turned slowly and saw one of the mul caravan guards aiming a crossbow at her at point-blank range. If she so much as twitched, she was dead. A second guard joined the first. One arm was bloody, but in his good hand he held an agafari-wood club. "She's pretty," he said. "Should fetch a good price."



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The words stung Suni. Slavery! Back in Salt View, she had always agreed with the other ex-slaves that death would be better. But now, with the sharp point of a crossbow bolt a hand's-breadth from her eyes, she wasn't so sure. Still, she wasn't going to surrender meekly.

"Filthy slavers," Suni gritted between clenched teeth.

The mul with the club knocked her to the ground. The blow made the world spin crazily around. As Suni struggled to regain her wits, the two muls ripped the money pouch from her belt and began to pat at her pockets. Spitting, she pretended to wipe the salt from her face. At the same time she slipped Gaib's ring into her mouth and tucked it firmly between her cheek and teeth. Gaib's ring was one thing she'd never let them take from her.

"She has the accent of a woman from Nibenay," one of the muls said. "I wonder . . ." Rough hands yanked at her sleeve, tearing it open. Suni rolled, trying to hide the brand on her shoulder, but the men had already seen it.

"A templar's slave mark!" one said, hissing with surprise. "She'll fetch a good price indeed."

They bound Suni's hands behind her and tossed her inside the hold of the armored wagon. She was their only prisoner. Of the two dozen ex-slaves of Salt View who had set out on the raid, all but Suni had either been killed outright or put to death where they lay. A wounded captive would only consume precious food and water before dying.

The wagon rolled steadily across the desert. The only break in the monotony of sitting in the dark, sweltering hold was when one of the mul guards slid open a small door near the floor to push in food and water or to change the slop bucket that served as a toilet. The door that led to the outside was kept locked and barred. Only the sunlight that seeped around its edges told Suni whether it was day or night.

After the first day, the familiar smooth crunch of wide wheels across the salt flats was replaced by a series of slight bumps and dips. They had reached the

scrub plains. Two days later, Suni smelled the sulphur of hot springs and knew their destination. The House Shom wagons, having served their purpose of decoying the Salt View raiders to their doom, were returning home to Nibenay.

It was the last place on Athas she wanted to be: Nibenay, realm of the Shadow King.

Suni's mother had been born in that city but left it to follow her elven lover in his wanderings across the desert. The love affair had lasted until Suni was eight years old. Then, without warning, her father had run off into the desert night. He'd left to rejoin his tribe, Suni's mother had said. And so they began the long trudge back to the city.

Nibenay hadn't felt like home. The customs of her mother's people were strange to Suni, and her own kin rejected her. Aunts and uncles blamed Suni for the mischief their own children caused, while those cousins called her "half-trash" behind their parents' backs. Suni's ability to sense emotions had only made their insults cut that much deeper. And after her father's tribe visited the market and refused to acknowledge the girl, the taunting only increased. If her father had been there . . . But she never saw him again.

When Suni was fourteen, her mother died and she was sold into slavery. Because she had a keen mind, the templars trained her as a slave-scribe, teaching her to read and write. As she grew into womanhood, they noted her emerging beauty. Suni was chosen to enter the forbidden dominion, to become one of the personal slaves of the Shadow King. It was a great honor, the templars had said.

Suni knew otherwise. Slaves who entered the king's palace never returned; they were mourned by their families as dead. The very touch of the Shadow King was said to burn a woman alive.

Escaping had been a combination of calculated bluff and fleetness of foot. Carefully copying the handwriting of the chief scribe and falsifying his seal with a blob of candle wax, Suni sent herself on an errand to oversee the mixing of a new color of ink.



The false document had gotten her close to the edge of the city, and a mad dash through the streets at dusk completed her escape.

Having fled the city itself, Suni's chances depended on her remembering the routes her mother and father had traveled when she was just a girl, but her childhood memories proved unreliable. Suni had been near death, after drinking at one of the poisoned waterholes that dotted the salt flats, when traveling performers from Salt View found her. They might have left her to die, if they hadn't noticed the slave brand on her shoulder. Instead, they had accepted her without reservation into their village. When Suni felt the friendship and warmth radiating from them, she knew she had found a home. In Salt View, no one cared that she was a half-elf. In the eyes of the other ex-slaves, she was a person. An equal.

The stink of sulphur reminded Suni how close she was to the city. She had to escape before the wagon entered Nibenay itself. But how? Suni spat out Gaib's ring and studied it in the dim light of the hold. It was gold, with four gems set in a row across the band—a brown stone she did not recognize, a diamond, a ruby, and a sapphire. It looked like a normal ring, yet Gaib had said it was magical. There was no inscription, nothing to indicate what the command word might be. Suni squirmed around until her bound hands found the ring, then slid it onto one finger. Keeping her voice low, she tried every possible phrase she could think of.

"I command you to change these giant's-hair ropes into spider silk," she whispered.

Nothing happened.

She pressed her hands against the outer wall. "I wish these boards were made of paper."

Still nothing. If only she had heard what Gaib had muttered that night in the tavern!

"This be rope, now make it air."

She kept trying until dusk fell, but it was useless. Without the command word, the ring would not function.



Some time later that night, the wagon wheels clattered across cobblestones. Suni felt her heart sink. No matter what words she used, the ring had failed to work. Still, she thought, it might prove a useful bribe to encourage a guard to look the other way while she escaped.

After rolling to a halt, the wagon sat for the better part of the night. Occasionally, Suni heard voices, muffled by the thick walls of the wagon. House Shom would be arranging for her sale, but to whom? Heavy footsteps approached the outer door of the slave hold. Quickly, Suni slipped the ring off her finger and let it fall to the boards. She was just able to pluck it up with her lips before the outer door opened. A massive arm snaked in, and Suni was pulled roughly from the hold. Blinking in the torchlight, she staggered to her feet.

She stood on a cobblestone street, flanked by two half-giants holding torches. Agafari clubs hung on their belts. Each kept a huge hand on her shoulder, preventing Suni from running.

The wide street was lined with clay-brick buildings, their facades ornately sculpted in the images of fabulous monsters. Every desert horror was represented: horned braxat, feather-maned kluzds, t'chowbs with their oversized heads and beady eyes. There were monsters of every description, including a nightmare beast with its curving tusks and formidable fangs. Even the paving stones beneath her feet were carved with grotesque faces or images of the smaller horrors of Athas: agony beetles, swarming locusts, and worm-like horrors. Everything the people of Nibenay feared, they put on their facades, in the belief that the monsters would be flattered by their representations and would leave the city alone.

Above, looking down upon the darkened streets, were sculpted portraits of the nobles who owned these homes and shops. Their haughty stone eyes seemed to look right through those made of lesser stuff. Although the streets were empty of people, Suni felt





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as if she were being watched from every side.

From around the corner of the wagon, Suni heard the sound of clinking coins and low voices. The mul guards were talking with someone, fixing a price. As well as the muls' voices, Suni heard those of two women. She shuddered. All of the templars of Nibenay were female. If a templar saw the slave brand on her shoulder—

Suni's heart caught as she heard one of the women laugh. The cruel chuckle was all too familiar. No, Suni told herself, it couldn't be . . .

The muls climbed back inside the wagon and it rolled away, revealing two figures. Templars! Suni cringed as one of them stepped forward to examine her new purchase. Suni's ears and memory had not deceived her. It was Kolistá, the woman who had selected Suni out of the pool of scribes to become a personal slave to the Shadow King, more than twenty years ago. Would the templar recognize her former slave?

Kolistá had a round face and long dark hair. She was beautiful, with sensuous lips and delicately arched eyebrows. Yet her eyes had a hard edge that betrayed her ruthless nature. Tucking her hands into the sleeves of her loose linen blouse, she studied Suni as the torches crackled.

"I thought so," Kolistá's voice dripped like honeyed venom. "Welcome home, slave. Prepare to face the wrath of our lord king—he whom you might have called husband."

"Husband?" Suni's mouth fell open. She cast her mind back to the day Kolistá had selected her from the ranks of the slave scribes. Suddenly, Suni realized what Kolistá had intended for her. "You mean I was to be a bride of the Shadow King—to become a templar of King Nibenay?" The knowledge stunned her. If she had known a position as a templar awaited her, how different her life might have been. She might have found acceptance within their rank.

"Be silent, half-trash!" Kolistá slapped Suni's cheek hard enough to jerk her head around. Suni tasted blood where the concealed ring had bitten into

her cheek. "You are not worthy to speak the Shadow King's name!" the templar spat.

Suni's teeth ground together with the anger she thought she had forgotten years ago. The templars might call themselves sisters, but she saw now that they would never have treated her as one.

Kolistá laughed ominously. "I think, for daring to reject the favors of our lord king, a slow death is in order." She made a motion to the half-giant guards, who lifted Suni between them until her kicking feet barely touched the ground.

"Wait!" The other templar stepped into the torchlight. She was a younger woman, barely out of her youth. Motioning for the guards to lower their prisoner, she took Suni's chin in her hand.

"You have purchased an even greater prize than you imagined, Kolistá. This is Suni, the story-shaper. The one who wrote *The Gaj Tamers* and *The Merchant of Raam*. The oasis towns still rave over the performances. And yet, when she was asked to perform here, she spurned our invitation."

"I was, in fact, bringing House Thespia to Nibenay," Suni said, trying to make her voice sound natural. "But a few days ago, our troupe was overrun by the slavers of House Shom. They killed my entire company of performers and took me as a slave." Suni smiled, hoping that her lie would hold. "If you set me free I could form a new company and return to Nibenay to perform for your people."

Kolistá laughed out loud at the suggestion, but the younger templar caught her arm and whispered briefly in her superior's ear.

"You're a proud lot, you Thespians," the younger templar told Suni, a hard look in her eyes. "Too proud to perform for templars and nobles. Too proud to answer the Shadow King's summons."

"But now we have a story-shaper at our command," Kolistá's voice was smooth as the whirl of a hurrum beetle. Her eyes met those of the younger templar and glinted in the light. "Perhaps we can use you to please our lord king, after all."



“You want me to teach these lizard-spawn to perform a stage-story?” Suni looked incredulously at the seven huge gith who stood hunched before her. They were grotesque creatures, about the height of a human due to their curved backs. They looked like a horrible blend of lanky elf and green-skinned lizard, with protruding jaws filled with sharp teeth. They stood staring at Suni, their three-fingered hands opening and closing, revealing wicked claws.

The younger templar who had recognized Suni as a story-shaper pushed her into the windowless stone room that served as a prison. “You have no choice. You do it-or you die. Have these creatures ready to perform in time for the twin moon dance and you’ll have earned your chance to give a performance for the Shadow King himself. If our lord king likes the stage-story, you will have regained your chance to become one of his brides.”

Suni didn’t believe it for one instant. Right now, she might be useful to the templars in currying favor with their lord, but when the Shadow King tired of this new form of entertainment, Suni would have outlived her usefulness.

“And don’t try to escape,” the young templar said, pausing in the doorway to make an arcane gesture with one hand. “This room is warded.”

“But the ceremony is only fifteen days away!” Suni protested. “These monsters don’t even speak our language! How can I teach them when—”

The heavy agafari-wood door slammed behind the templar. Suni heard the sound of a bar falling into place.

“We ssppeak.” A bony hand touched Suni’s shoulder. She spun around wildly and sank into a defensive crouch. Even with her training, Suni stood little chance against the giths’ formidable claws and teeth. Their legs might look spindly, but they were capable of making huge leaps that could carry them in and out of striking range before a warrior could retaliate.

“We not monssterss,” another gith said. “We are

warriorss. Perhaps we kill you, puny elf.” A chorus of rough laughter came from the other gith.

Suni could feel a strong emotion radiating from the gith. Pride? In these ugly, misshapen creatures? Yes, and shame. Suddenly, she understood why the templars had set her this task. It wasn’t just to impress the king with a stage-story no other story-shaper could hope to duplicate. It was to cause humiliation—either to the gith, who would be forced to prance on stage like trained animals, or to Suni, should all her talents prove useless. But perhaps there was a way both she and the gith could win.

“You’re not warriors any longer,” she told the gith. “You’re slaves. Your captors no longer respect you. They laugh at you instead.”

The creatures hissed with anger, and Suni tensed, thinking her life was about to end. She plunged on. “But there is a way to become warriors again. And that is by participating in my stage-story. I am the only one who can teach you how to force the people of Nibenay to respect you once more.”

Several of the gith were still baring their teeth, but Suni’s gamble had worked. After a long pause, one spoke. “You teach uss, then, and we will be warriorss.”

Over the days that followed, the gith proved to be the worst lot of would-be performers Suni had ever had the misfortune to work with. They seemed incapable of remembering even the simplest of lines, and range of emotion was an impossible concept for them to grasp. Instead they projected only rage and anger. Suni concentrated on what they seemed to like best—the fight scenes from *Julatta and Rosario*—adapting them to incorporate gith tribal names and sorting the performers out by tribe so they would have an easier time remembering their roles.

At first it seemed to work out well, but when it came time to practice the scenes, the gith took their roles a little too seriously.

“Take that, Blood Drinker!” one gith smacked the other over the head with a practice sword made from a bundle of dried reeds.

“Have at you, Sspear Ssticker!” the other growled,



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smashing its fist into the other one's mouth. Blood sprayed as the blow connected, and the first gith's head snapped back.

"No!" Suni shouted as the two started scratching each other. "You're supposed to use your swords. And there's more dialogue than that. You there—is it Gatra? You say, 'My friend is dead by your hand, his soul freshly departed. Either your soul or mine shall join it.' And you, Choma, you answer with, 'It shall be your bones the sun bleaches.' "

One of the gith standing beside Suni growled. "Blood Drinkers never fight fair!" With a leap that carried it across the length of the room, it joined the fray.

"Hey!" Suni hurriedly consulted the scribbled pages of her improvised stage-story. "That's not in the script! You don't enter until Gatra says—Hey! Stop fighting!"

Rogath, a gith whom two of the others followed slavishly, picked up a pit from one of the fruits they had been given for lunch. He hurled it at the pair, who were fighting in earnest now. The pit blurred, then raced toward the gith from the Blood Drinker tribe with the magically enhanced speed of a sling stone. It struck one of the struggling gith on the forehead with a loud crack, and the target collapsed in a heap.

Suni's jaw dropped. Rogath, it seemed, had powers the other gith did not.

The gith divided along tribal lines. Rogath did not fight, but instead used mental powers to even the odds. When a rival gith grabbed a torch and tried to shove it in another's face, Rogath simply frowned at the torch wielder, who began to jerk like a puppet on strings. Grimacing, the gith fought to keep its own hand from shoving the flaming torch into its face. Just when it seemed the gith would succeed in the battle of wills, the torch flame flared to twice its size. The burned gith shrieked with rage, at last hurling the torch to the floor. The others ignored the burned one's cries, attacking in a fury of teeth and claws.

"Help!" Suni pounded on the door. "The gith are

killing each other!"

A half-giant guard unbarred and opened the door. When he saw the gith fighting, he let out a bellow of rage. Wading in, the half-giant started flailing with his club, trying to beat the gith into submission. Another stood in the door, making sure none escaped.

When it was all over, two of the gith were unconscious and one was nursing a broken jaw. The four Blood Drinkers were on one side of the room, the three Spear Stickers on the other. Broken props littered the floor.

Suni paced back and forth between the two groups. Her ability to read others' emotions was again proving a problem. Anger flared at her from every side, and it was all she could do to keep from succumbing to her own frustrations.

"I thought you said you liked that scene!" she screamed at them. "Only three days to go before we take the stage, and look at what a shambles you've made!"

"We do like sscene," Gatra growled. "Like to ssmash Blood Drinker's face!" Its leer nearly set things off again.

"You're impossible. All of you!" Suni raged at them. "Are you too stupid to see what this story is about? It's about the divisions we set up between ourselves. About how love can overcome them." Suni shook her head in frustration. "You gith probably don't even know what love is."

"Love?"

Suni grabbed one of the gith's oddly shaped hands and hauled the creature to its feet. "Listen, Blood Drinker—Hrath, isn't it? What are you? A man or a woman?"

"Ssss?" The creature screwed up its ugly face, not understanding.

"Do you bear children or don't you?" Suni persisted. "Offspring. Babies. Eggs, for all I know!"

"Ah, eggss. Yess."

"Then you're a woman." Suni turned to the other side of the room. "And you Spear Stickers. Which of you provides the seed . . ." Suni stopped when she saw





their blank looks. "Which of you doesn't lay eggs?"

"I lay eggss. And that one. Rogath, no eggss."

"Good," Suni said. "Now supposing Rogath was in love with . . . uh, wanted to marry . . . to help Hrath—the one from the Blood Drinker tribe—to lay eggs . . ." Her voice trailed off. How could she possibly explain romantic love to a gith? These creatures probably mated indiscriminately and then left their eggs in the sand to hatch or be eaten by predators, whichever came first.

Rogath's face twisted in a grimace. Any other observer would have been at a loss to know what the expression conveyed, but Suni could feel understanding slowly awakening in his mind.

"To ssit on the eggss?" he asked. "To chew food for the hatchlingss? For a Blood Drinker?"

"Yes! That's it!" Suni said excitedly. "The tribe wouldn't like you, because you're a Spear Sticker, but you *love* those eggs and hatch them anyway. Because they're yours."

The other gith burst into their rough laughter. "Sspear Sticker come into Blood Drinker lair, it be dead!" one called. "Jusst as we be dead after stage-story endss. Humanss will never let uss go. Kill uss all, ssend our headss to Chattering Sskull tribe as treaty gift. Better to kill each other. Die as warriors."

But Rogath looked at her with something approaching intelligence in his eyes. "Love," he said gruffly.

"Love," Suni echoed, at last relaxing and slipping a hand into the pockets of her trousers to caress Gaib's ring. "Like in the oasis scene, when Rosario promises he will change for Julatta. When he swears his love to her by the four elements . . ." She stiffened in surprise. A spot on the ring felt as hot as an ember freshly sparked from a fire.

Pulling the ring from her pocket, she turned so the gith wouldn't see it and peered at it closely. The red ruby was winking fiercely, as if there were a fire inside it. The blue sapphire was cool as water from a deep well. The diamond emitted a faint whispering of wind, and the brown gem had grown soft to the touch.

Suddenly, Suni understood what Gaib had been trying to tell her.

The oasis scene. The command word for the ring was somewhere in Rosario's dialogue. If Gaib had spoken the words with the ring on his finger, the magical sparkle from the ring might have drawn unwanted attention to it.

She slipped the ring on her finger, then picked up the fruit pit from the floor. "By the four elements," she said aloud. "Earth, air, fire, and water. Change this seed to iron."

Tingles shot through Suni's hand. For an instant, it felt as if she were holding fire and ice, flowing water and solid stone. Her hand jerked open, releasing the suddenly heavy pit. It fell to the stone floor with a clang.

"Metal!" one of the gith said, snatching it up. "You make metal from fruit pit!"

"Yes, I did," Suni said, her thoughts tumbling as an idea struck her. "And that's how we're going to escape. But it will mean learning your lines. Let me explain how it will work."



The twin moon dance was celebrated in Nibenay three times each year. This performance commemorated the recent bloody flare-up of Nibenay's always-simmering war with the city of Gulg. The holy aspara dancers were performing the wriquo-ih, or war dance.

Suni and her gith cast watched from the edges of the platform that had been set up just inside the city walls, in the king's sacred grove. Behind the chest-high stage, the wall was carved into a huge portrait of the king. When he wanted to view his subjects, the carving would animate and the king would watch through its glowing eyes, all the while remaining safely hidden in the shadows of his palace. Fortunately, Nibenay's ruler rarely took an interest in events that transpired beyond his palace walls.

The audience had packed the area between the raised platform and the ornately carved buildings



## Command Performance

that crowded the city wall. As musicians below blew into ryls and banged on drums, the aspara dancers twirled on stage, their faces hidden behind grotesque masks. Templars, standing off to the side, gestured surreptitiously from beneath the trees, outlining the dancers with sparkling lights, creating a hallucinatory forest as a backdrop for the mock battle.

Watching the dance, Suni could see where the roots of her own craft lay. Stage-stories blended ritual dance and music with traditional storytelling, then went a step further, dividing the story into roles and adding painted backdrops and props. So far, only the inhabitants of Salt View had refined this new art form, but in time, Suni knew, other cities could not help but discover the art of story-shaping.

The wriquo-ih dance would continue all night, increasing in pace until it spilled down into the crowded streets below. Now the masked women were flowing from the stage for a temporary break in the dance. It was time for Suni's gith to go on.

As the first of the gith sprang out from behind the papyrus screen that hid them, leaping all of the stairs at once, the half-giant guards beside Suni tensed. A fear-filled murmur swept the crowd. Even the old folk stopped their incessant betel-nut chewing. In the ensuing silence, the unrolling of the weighted, painted curtain that formed the backdrop for the stage-story seemed overloud. But when Rogath began to speak the language of the people of Nibenay, the audience gasped.

"What is that light that sshines through yonder cavern mouth?" the gith began in its guttural voice. "Is it the ssun?"

Suni signaled, and one of the gith behind the screen touched a candle to a group of torches at the back of the stage, making them flare brilliantly. With a jerky motion, the leading man flung a three-fingered hand up before its eyes. At the same time, a second gith—the one named Hrath—leaped to the stage, appearing as if by magic to the light-dazzled and blinking audience.

"Why no!" Rogath cried. "It iss she! The warrior

who blazess as fiercely as the ssun! Yet ssee how gently she layss her eggss upon the sand."

Hrath bowed deeply before the audience, then growled fiercely when they did not applaud. Suni felt amusement rippling through the crowd.

Gesturing frantically, Suni caught Gatra's eye. "The eggss!" she whispered loudly.

At last the creature remembered. Picking up three oblong "eggss" that had been stitched together out of erdlu bladders, the gith rolled them across the stage. They bumped against Hrath's scaly feet, and she continued her lines. "Oh Rogath! Come, Rogath! Sit upon my eggss!"

"I sshall hatch them for you, Hrath," he said, settling upon the eggs, which flattened with loud pops under his weight. "For I love you."

Now the audience was openly laughing and pointing at the creatures on stage. Suni caught both the merriment of the people below and the rising anger of her gith performers.

Rogath's last line was Suni's cue. Striding up the stairs onto the stage, she bowed to the audience, then began her narration.

"These two misshapen creatures do indeed love each other," she said in a loud, clear voice. "But they are from warring tribes—the Spear Stickers and the Blood Drinkers—tribes that hate each other as fiercely as you of Nibenay hate the people of Gulg. And thus begins our story. With a battle that will pit gith against gith."

Suni paused to draw breath, and to gauge the reaction of the audience. She hardly needed to use her empathic ability. Quite contrary to what she had expected, they were now howling with laughter as Rogath clutched one of the flattened eggs to his chest. She pressed on with her lines, almost having to shout.

"Do not be afraid at what is about to unfold. The gith on stage are fierce warriors, but they will not hurt you. The fight scenes you are about to see are all illusion—something we of House Thespia call . . . a play." Bowing a second time, Suni stepped to the rear of the platform. Easing a hand into her pocket, she



slipped on the ring. Then she peeked behind the curtain at the huge bust of the Shadow King that was carved into the wall, and heaved a sigh of relief. Its eyes were still blank stone.

"Sspear Ssticker sscum!" Three of the remaining gith leaped up on stage, wooden swords in their hands. "You sshall not defile cavern-born eggss with your sscaly bottom! Have at you, Rogath!"

Two more gith leaped out from behind the screen on the other side of the platform, also carrying wooden swords. "It is your eggss that defile him, Blood Drinkerss!"

As the gith began the mock fight, Suni shot a look at the templars. Several were wary—despite the fact the giths' swords were made only of softwood, but Kologista and the younger templar were smiling, pleased with what they saw.

"People of the mountains, people of the caverns, I beg of you to stop this fight!" Suni strode forward, one hand raised in supplication, the other, with the ring on it, tucked deep in her pocket. It was an odd pose, but all eyes were focused on her empty hand. "I entreat you to lay down your swords."

"No!" One of the "cavern" gith cried. "This intruder musst die!"

Suddenly, all seven gith leaped for Suni, forming a tight circle around her. As she had arranged, the orchestra below the platform struck an ominous chord, sustaining it for several long heartbeats.

It was just enough time for Suni to feverishly whisper the command phrase seven times, turning each of the softwood swords to shining steel. The gleaming metal held a deadly edge.

The four half-giant guards at the edges of the stage crowded closer, trying to see what was happening at the center of the huddle.

"Die, big-human sscum!" one of the gith screamed. As one, they leaped outward from the circle, attacking the guards. Between their slashing swords and the spinning kicks that raked the half-giants with their clawed toes, the gith soon had the upper hand. In no time, the stage was running with blood.

"Have no fear!" Suni shouted to the audience. "This is all part of the performance!"

The citizens of Nibenay panicked. Screaming, they fled in every direction at once, running right over one another and even daring to dash through the sacred grove in their haste to escape. Some of the templars wasted time in hurling spells at those who dared trespass under the Shadow King's trees, but a few had the presence of mind to instead direct their spells at the platform. One of those was Kologista.

Chanting, she gestured toward the stage. With a rush of searing wind, a wall of fire sprang up on all sides of it, trapping the gith and their story-shaper at center stage. Suni stumbled back, arms raised to protect her face, nearly tripping over the arm of a dead half-giant. "Rogath!" she cried. "Shrink the fire!"

"Can not do it!" he yelled back, slapping out flames that had leaped up onto his tunic. "Iss magic fire."

The other templars were hurling spells at the gith now. One of the gith was rooted to the stage, trembling with the effort it made to break the magical spell that held it immobile. Another was fighting a hammer that had materialized out of thin air. The hammer rained a series of deadly blows, but there was no wielder to strike at.

As the roaring flames began to catch on the wooden platform, spreading in toward Suni and the gith, washing them with heat, Kologista walked forward into the flames. They raged around her but did no damage. "Now you will die, slave," she said, her gestures conjuring up a spell. A pea-sized ball of impossibly bright light began to form at her fingertips.

"Rogath!" Suni cried. "Use your powers. Now!" She pulled from her pocket the bit of iron she had created from the fruit pit and hurled it at the templar. Just before it reached the flames, it blurred, racing toward Kologista with deadly speed as the gith gave it a mental push. It struck the templar square in the forehead and her head lolled back. Kologista crumpled onto the flaming stage, and her clothes started to smolder.





## Command Performance

"We kill resst of humans now!" Rogath growled.

"No!" Suni insisted, glancing at the back of the stage. The painted curtain that had hung there had been consumed by the fire, revealing the carved statue of the shadow lord. Was it beginning to move? She didn't remember its eyes as looking in that direction. "We escape." She wrapped her arms around the gith's bony back. "Jump!"

Rogath crouched and sprang straight up into the air. Landing on the very lip of the wall, he scabbled for purchase. Then the gith crouched, and leaped out into the blackness beyond. Suni closed her eyes as they fell, then was knocked from Rogath's back by the force of their landing.

"Run!" Rogath hauled Suni to her feet and pushed her in the direction of the desert. "Run!"



Suni and the surviving gith reached the edge of the salt flats just as dawn broke. Only a crescent-shaped wedge of Athas's huge red sun crested the horizon ahead, but already the heat waves were shimmering across the flat white expanse. For an ordinary traveler, the almost featureless terrain ahead meant a slow, painful death. Suni, who had often crossed this desolate an with raiding parties, knew its secrets—knew which salty, bitter trickle of water was poisonous, which parts of the plain featured cracks wide enough to give shelter from the blazing sun. Having made it this far, she stood a good chance of eluding their pursuers.

There were four gith left, two from each tribe.

"Elf leave uss now," Rogath said.

Wearily, Suni turned to face the gith. "I'm not an elf."

"Human travel alone now."

"Not human, either. Half-elf, half-human."

The gith screwed up its bony face to peer at Suni, then shrugged. "All look ssame to me."

One month ago, Suni would have said the same about the gith. She still couldn't tell male from

female, although she could distinguish individual faces. And they, too, saw her as an individual now—not simply as prey. Perhaps a treaty could be struck with the Blackspine gith, a mutual agreement between their tribes and the ex-slaves of Salt View not to attack each other.

"Where will you go?" she asked Rogath. "Back to the Blackpine Mountains?"

"Yess," Rogath replied.

"To the Blood Drinker or the Spear Sticker tribe?"

"Whichever pair winss fight getss to go home."

The other three gith were drawing their swords. Suni could hear them growling faintly as they faced each other, divided along tribal lines.

"But, Rogath!" Suni cried. "I thought you understood the message of the play! If you work together, you'll *all* survive."

"Rogath undersstand. But iss as much chance of gith of different tribess working together as there iss of treess of Forest Ridge growing on ssalt plain," he said, as if that explained everything. He grimaced at her, and Suni caught an echo of the grim laughter inside his head. "Now run! Before we remember you are human and kill you, too."

He meant it.

Suni ran, stumbling across the cracked ground. Was that a cloud of dust on the horizon, back in the direction of Nibenay? She whispered a prayer to the elements that their pursuers would not find her—and that Rogath, at least, would live.

Exhausted though she was, Suni was already thinking ahead to her next production. Rogath's final words had given her an idea for a new stage-story. " 'Till the forest of the ridge do come to the great salt plain,' " she said through parched lips, testing the line. That would make a nice bit of dialogue for a prophecy, spoken by a gith. With a little bit of face paint and padding, it just might work.





## A Traveler's Guide to Gulg

### APPROACHING THE CITY

When approaching Gulg, you should feel free to camp off the People's Road. Be aware, however, that elf tribes often camp off the main road and prey on foreign visitors. There are also tribes of primitive hunters and gatherers in the forest who do not speak the common trade language. They are not necessarily hostile but will attack if they feel threatened. If visiting Gulg, it is well worth the time and effort to learn a few of the city's customs. More than one visitor has found himself in the oba's dungeons for unwittingly offending the locals.

### THE CITY GATES

While there are several gates to the city, foreigners must enter through the Queen's Gate. This is the largest gate; it lies at the end of the People's Road. Merchants refer to this as the caravan gate. You will be required to declare what you are carrying, in what quantities, and why you are coming to the city. Do not lie to the gatekeepers—the guards are overseen by clairsentient and telepathic templars. These servants of the queen are able to quickly determine the veracity of any entrant's claims. Also, it is a crime to resist telepathic contact from a templar. If you attempt to close your mind psionically, you will be arrested immediately on grounds that you are hiding something. The toll to enter the city is 5 bits per leg. Thus, both a man and a crodlu are one ceramic piece each, while a mekillot costs a ceramic piece on its own.

### WHERE TO STAY

When visiting Gulg you should stay in the dagada of a friend if at all possible. Here you will be extended the courtesies and protection of your friend's neighborhood. If you don't know anyone in Gulg, you can stay in one of the public dagadas, which offer a daga and a meal for 5 bits per night. These public places serve as the inns of Gulg and are run by the oba's templars. The Dagaous, or House of Outsiders, is a fairly reputable place, although public dagadas in general are much less secure than the residential areas and tend to attract vagrants, freebooters, outcasts, and adventurers. A few public dagadas are run along the People's Road outside the city. These dagadas are run by private individuals who are often expatriates from other lands. The Kaponome Dagafari, which means Ancestral Tree Home of the People Without Ancestors, is a good public dagada. It is not actually a treehouse but simply a clay-walled dagada. Staying in one of the public dagadas outside the city is sure to decrease your chances of attracting the attention of the templars.

### WHERE TO BOARD YOUR MOUNT

The public dagadas will allow you to board a bank or crodlu if you are staying there. Otherwise you are advised to keep your mount with you to avoid theft.

### WHERE TO FIND SOMETHING TO EAT

The sellers in the evening market clearings will have bread and watered wine for sale. Do not attempt to purchase any, for you will run the risk of being imprisoned for black marketeering. However, a friend who is a citizen may buy such goods for you and give them to you as a gift. If you know no one, the merchant camps outside the city will sell food to travelers as will any of the public dagadas.

### WHERE TO SHOP

The widest variety of goods is available outside the city in the merchant camps. Native goods from Gulg can be found in the market clearings on market days, but foreigners are required to trade only in the Queen's Trade House. This operation is set up primarily to deal in large quantities with exporting merchants, but on a slow day the templars will deign to conduct business with individuals.

### WHERE TO BUY MAGIC COMPONENTS

The best place to find magic components is in any elven dagada that you can find. The number of elves varies, and sometimes there is no elf tribe in the city. You can try to find some elves camping outside town, but be advised to be on your guard. If you are a preserver, you may also try to contact the Veiled Alliance. Defilers may seek magic by checking for employment with the queen, but such positions are always permanent. If a particular component is required and you are having no luck finding it, you can always hire a thief.

### WHERE TO BUY POISONS

If you find yourself in need of poison you can take your chances in the Drum Circle, a bard dagada. This place is filled with heady incense and hypnotic drumming. Do *not go in alone!*

### WHERE TO FIND WORK

While the exchange of goods with foreigners is strictly controlled, services are more freely traded in Gulg. Craft dagadas will provide a room and board to foreign craftspeople if they display enough ability. The city-state makes occasional use of mercenaries, particularly for short missions away from Gulg. The best place for a foreigner to find work, however, is the camps of the foreign merchant houses. They often hire people for short-term jobs and offer the potential of a longer career for trustworthily and competent agents.

### WHERE TO GET HEALED

The elemental temples will provide care for injured travelers in exchange for a fee or service. There is no temple of water in Gulg. Be wary of Umjai, the high priest of the House of Sky. He is closely connected with the queen's templars. Note that only



druids and templars have the power to raise the dead; they are unlikely to perform the rite on a stranger unless there is an extraordinary benefit to the spellcaster. Lalali-Puy personally reviews the case of any person a templar wishes to raise.

#### WHERE TO TRAIN

Most professionals can train for a fee within Gulg. Only foreign fighters and rangers will be unable to find willing masters to help them advance. This is not due to the lack of those professionals in the city, but rather to the belief that such skills are not something that can be learned independently of Gulg culture. If you are willing to fully enter Gulg society, you may find a mentor. Any person seeking training is advised to learn enough of Gulg's customs to appear extraordinarily gracious.

#### DEALING WITH OFFICIALS

Gulgs distrust foreigners by nature. You are advised to avoid the oba's templars if at all possible, but if you must encounter them, try not to lie. Providing incomplete information is much safer than lying to the templars, for they often have the psionic ability to detect such things. Bribery can be effective, but *only* if a personal relationship has been established over several meetings before a "gift" is offered. To hurry such a procedure will offend the official and probably land you in the dungeons.

### Customs in Gulg

Gulg life is replete with rituals that constrain every activity. It is important to observe the basic rites surrounding daily life so that you can avoid imprisonment or deportation-or sometimes even death.

#### GREETINGS

Among citizens, making a fist with the right hand and briefly raising it to the lips is the gesture used for both arrival and departure. The phrase "dotome" (or "you again") indicates pleasure in greeting another person. Templars and respected persons are greeted by flashing two open palms at the individual. This seems a carry-over from the sign of harboring no weapons.

#### FAREWELLS

Although no gesture is associated with departures, the phrase "latolo" is, which translates literally as "talk later." The phrase is actually an abbreviation of "Mola tomay lotana," which means, "We will have more time to keep talking about these things later on when we have more to talk about." The phrase may seem cumbersome and even comic to an outsider, but it has a certain poignancy, particularly when used by troops before battle.

#### EXCHANGES

Reflecting the belief that all property belongs to the oba and that all citizens are equally entitled to its use, a purchaser interested in an item will always begin, "I would like my share of what you are holding." In an attempt to entice prospective buyers, a seller will offer, "Would you like your share?"

#### MEALS

Before eating people are always expected to wave the food in front of themselves, as if offering it to the others present. To forego this pleasantry is to paint oneself as a miser.

#### ENTERING A HOME

Upon entering a home people are expected to tap their feet against the outside wall. This is meant to shake away any ill will or bad spirits clinging to the people. If visitors enter a home without observing this formality, it is looked upon as an act of aggression.

#### EXITING A HOME

When leaving a home people are expected to again kick the wall before leaving. This is meant to make sure that any good luck in the house stays behind and does not leave with the visitor.

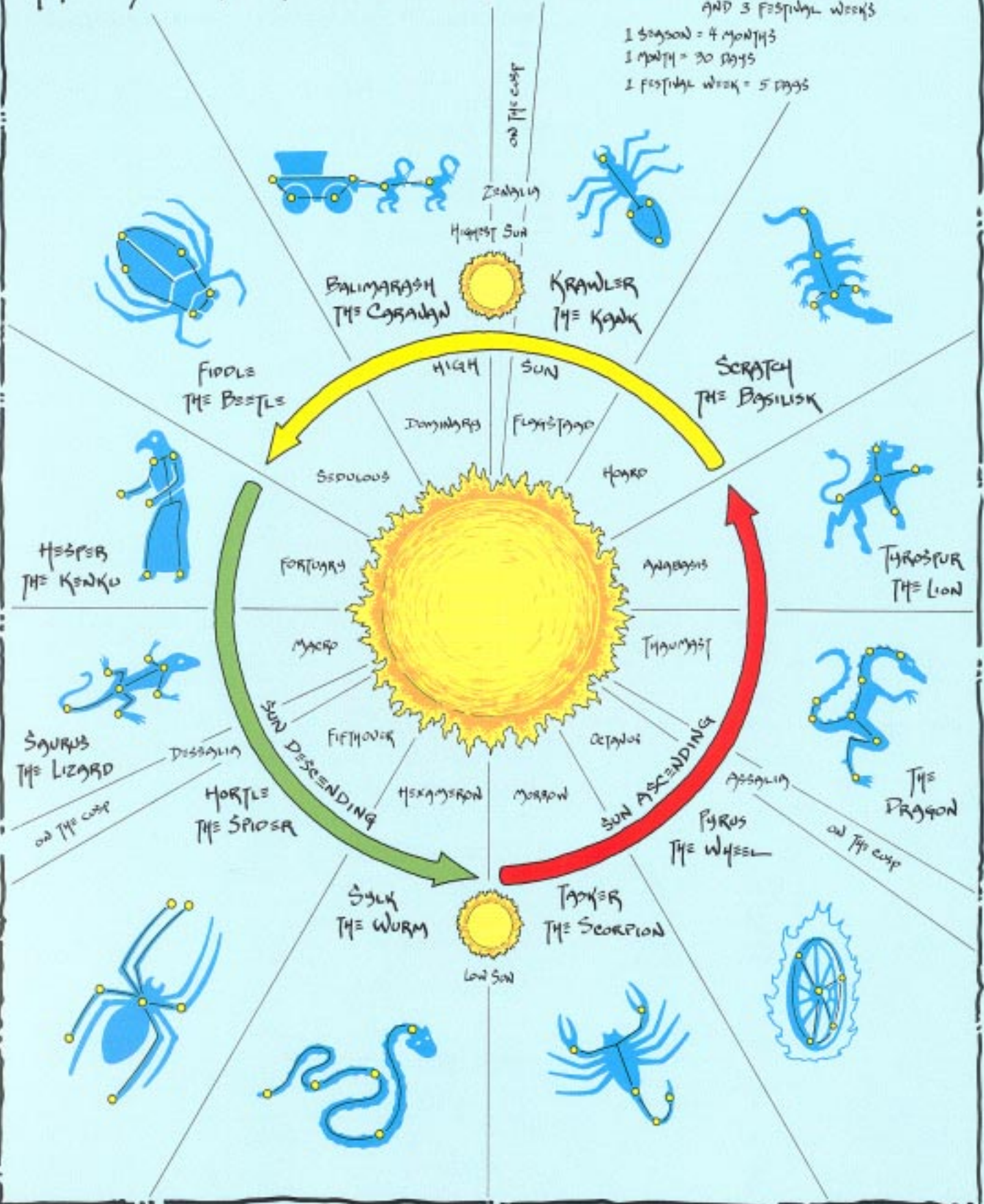
#### THE QUEEN

Perhaps the crime that lands most foreigners in prison is looking directly at the Sunlight Home. Everyone except the queen's templars must avert their eyes when approaching the palace. If a visitor is unfortunate enough to have an audience with the queen, he or she is expected to lie prostrate on the ground before the queen until she bids the person rise. The visitor still may not look directly at the queen until she bids otherwise.



# THE MERCHANT'S CALENDAR

NOTE:  
 1 YEAR = 375 DAYS / 3 SEASONS / 12 MONTHS  
 AND 3 FESTIVAL WEEKS  
 1 SEASON = 4 MONTHS  
 1 MONTH = 30 DAYS  
 1 FESTIVAL WEEK = 5 DAYS



## Frequency and Chance of Wilderness Encounters\*

Terrain Type	MC	Encounter Chance	Time of Day					At Least 1	
			7-10 AM	11 AM-2 PM	3-6 PM	7-10 PM	11 PM-2 AM		3-6 AM
Deep silt	—	1	—	—	X	—	—	—	10 %
Silt	—	1	X	—	—	—	X	—	19 %
Salt flat	1	1	—	—	X	—	—	X	19 %
Sandy waste	3	1	X	—	X	—	X	—	27 %
Stony barren	2	3	—	—	—	X	—	—	30 %
Scrub plain	2	1	X	—	X	X	—	X	34 %
Verdant belt	2	2	X	—	X	—	—	—	36 %
Rocky badland	3	2	X	—	X	—	X	—	49 %
Boulder field	4	2	X	—	X	X	X	—	59 %
Mountain	8	3	X	—	—	X	X	—	66 %
Forest	3	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	74 %
Forest Ridge	6	3	X	X	X	X	X	—	83 %
Mud flat	8	4	X	X	X	X	X	X	95 %

\* This table should be used instead of Table 56 from the *DUNGEON MASTER™ Guide (DMG)*. The instructions described there for use of Table 56 can be applied to the use of this table.

**MC:** This refers to the terrain cost for overland movement in a given terrain. The movement costs should be used as described in the Time and Movement section of the *DMG*. These numbers are provided so that you may have the information at your fingertips.

**Encounter Chance:** This lists the number or less that must be rolled on 1d10 for an encounter to occur.

**Time of Day:** If an x appears under a specific time of day, an encounter check should be made. This does not ensure an encounter, only that a check be made.

**At Least 1:** This is the percentage chance that at least one encounter will occur during a day spent in a specific terrain type. It is not meant to be used in play, but rather as a reference when designing your own terrain types.

*Note:* Inland dust basins should be treated as silt for determining encounters. Creatures that cannot cross land, such as silt horrors, will not be found in the inland basins. The forest statistics should be applied to all wooded terrain in the Tablelands, including the Crescent Forest. The Forest Ridge stats should be used in that area and in any junglelike terrain only.







## Prices in Nibenay

This table can be used when shopping for supplies or services in Nibenay and in other areas of the Tyr region. If you would like to adjust prices for regional differences, the Dune Trader accessory provides guidelines for modifying the prices of trade goods. The monthly and weekly wage rates assume the use of the Merchant's Calendar. A ceramic piece can be broken into 10 equal bits. Coins are exchanged at the following rates: 1,000 bits =100 ceramic pieces (cp) =10 silver (sp) =1 gold (gp).

<p><b>CLOTHING</b></p> <p>Belt 3 bits</p> <p>Boots, riding 3 cp</p> <p>Boots, soft 1 cp</p> <p>Breeches 2 cp</p> <p>Brooch, plain 10 cp</p> <p>Cap/hat 1 bit</p> <p>Cloak 8 bits</p> <p>Girdle 3 cp</p> <p>Gown, common 12 bits</p> <p>Hose 2 cp</p> <p>Jacket, silk 80 cp</p> <p>Knife sheath 1 bit</p> <p>Pants 8 bits</p> <p>Pin 6 cp</p> <p>Robe, common 9 bits</p> <p>Robe, embroidered 20 cp</p> <p>Sandals 1 bit</p> <p>Sarami 5 bits</p> <p>Sash 2 bits</p> <p>Shoes 1 cp</p> <p>Surcoat 6 bits</p> <p>Sword scabbard 4 cp</p> <p>Tabard 6 bits</p> <p>Toga, coarse 1 bit</p> <p>Tunic 8 bits</p> <p>Vest 6 bits</p> <p><b>FOOD &amp; LODGING</b></p> <p>Ale (1 gal) 2 bits</p> <p>Banquet (per person) 10 cp</p> <p>Beer (1 gal) 1 bit</p> <p>Bread 1 bit</p> <p>Cheese 4 bits</p> <p>City room (per month): common 20 cp</p> <p>6 bits</p> <p>Egg or fresh vegetable 5 bits</p> <p>Honey 5 bits</p> <p>Inn lodging: common/day 5 bits common/week 3 cp poor/day 1 bit poor/week 2 bits Kank feed (daily) 5 bits</p>	<p>Meals per day: good 5 bits common 3 bits poor 1 bit Meat for 1 meal 1 bit Separate latrine/month 2 cp Soup 1 bit Wine (pitcher) 2 bits</p> <p><b>HOUSEHOLD PROVISIONS</b></p> <p>Butter (lb) 2 bits</p> <p>Cider (250 gal) 8 cp</p> <p>Dry rations (per week) 10 cp</p> <p>Eggs (per 2 doz) 2 bits</p> <p>Eggs (per 100) 8 bits</p> <p>Figs (lb) 3 bits</p> <p>Fire kit 2 bits</p> <p>Firewood (per day) 5 bits</p> <p>Herbs &amp; lb) 1 bit</p> <p>Nuts (lb) 1 cp</p> <p>Raisins (lb) 2 bits</p> <p>Salt (lb) 1 bit</p> <p>Spice &amp; lb): exotic 15 cp rare 2 cp common 1 cp</p> <p>Sugar, coarse (lb) 1 bit</p> <p>Water (250 gal) 10 cp</p> <p>Wine, good (250 gal) 20 cp</p> <p><b>SERVICES</b></p> <p>Bath (clean water) 40 cp</p> <p>Bath (used water) 4 bits</p> <p>Clerk (per letter) 2 bits</p> <p>Doctor (leech or bleeding) 3 cp</p> <p>Guide in city (per day) 2 bits</p> <p>Laundry (by load) 2 bits</p> <p>Messenger in city (per message) 1 bit</p> <p>Messenger (telepathic) 3 bits</p> <p>Minstrel (per performance) 3 cp</p> <p>Mourner (per funeral) 2 bits</p> <p>Teamster (with wagon) 1 bit</p> <p>Torchbearer (per night) 1 bit</p>	<p><b>TRANSPORT</b></p> <p><i>Chariot:</i></p> <p>1 kank or crodlu, 1 warrior 100 cp</p> <p>2 banks or crodlu, 2 warriors 250 cp</p> <p>4 kanks or crodlu, 3 warriors 500 cp</p> <p><i>Howdah:</i></p> <p>inix 10 cp</p> <p>inix, war 100 cp</p> <p>mekillot 20 cp</p> <p>mekillot, war 500 cp</p> <p><i>Wagon, open:</i></p> <p>1,000 lb capacity 10 cp</p> <p>2,500 lb capacity 20 cp</p> <p>5,000 lb capacity 30 cp</p> <p>10,000 lb capacity 50 cp</p> <p><i>Wagon, enclosed:</i></p> <p>1,000 lb capacity 15 cp</p> <p>2,500 lb capacity 25 cp</p> <p>5,000 lb capacity 40 cp</p> <p>10,000 lb capacity 60 cp</p> <p>Wagon, armored caravan 1,000 cp</p> <p><b>ANIMALS</b></p> <p>Crodlu 100 cp</p> <p>Crodlu, heavy 120 cp</p> <p>Erdlu 10 cp</p> <p>Inix 100 cp</p> <p>Kank, trained 120 cp</p> <p>Kank, untrained 50 cp</p> <p>Mekillot 200 cp</p> <p><b>TACK &amp; HARNESS</b></p> <p><i>Barding:</i></p> <p>inix, leather 240 350 cp</p> <p>inix, chitin 400 500 cp</p> <p>bank, leather 70 150 cp</p> <p>bank, chitin 120 350 cp</p> <p>mekillot, leather 1,000 5,000 cp</p> <p>mekillot, chitin 1,600 7,500 cp</p> <p>Bit and bridle 3 15 bits</p> <p>Cart harness 10 2 bits</p>
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Halter		1 bit
Pack saddle	15	5 cp
Riding saddle	35	10 cp
Saddlebags, small	5	3 cp
Saddlebags, large	8	4 cp

ARMOR	WT	PRICE
Brigantine	35	120 cp
Hide	30	15 cp
Leather	15	5 cp
Padded	10	4 cp
Ring mail	30	100 cp
Scale mail	40	120 cp
Studded leather	25	20 cp
Shield:		
buckler	3	1 cp
small	5	3 cp
medium	10	7 cp
body	15	10 cp

METAL ARMOR	WT	PRICE
Helmet, bassinet	5	8 gp
Helmet, great helm	10	30 gp
Banded mail	35	200 gp
Bronze plate mail	45	400 gp
Chain mail	40	75 gp
Field plate	60	2,000 gp
Full plate	70	7,000 gp
Plate mail	50	600 gp
Splint mail	40	80 gp
Shield, metal	15	10 gp

MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT	WT	PRICE
Backpack	2	2 cp
Barrel, small	30	2 cp
Basket, small	0.1	1 bit
Basket, large	1	3 bits
Bell	—	1 cp
Belt pouch, small	0.5	7 bits
Belt pouch, large	1	1 cp
Blanket	3	5 bits
Block and tackle	5	5 cp
Bolt case	1	1 cp
Bucket	3	5 bits
Candle	0.1	1 bit
Canvas	1	4 bits
Chain, light (per ft)	1	300 cp
Chain, heavy (per ft)	3	400 cp
Chalk	0.1	1 bit
Chest, small	10	5 cp
Chest, large	25	10 cp
Cloth (per 10 sq yds):		
common	10	7 cp
fine	10	50 cp
rich	10	100 cp

Crampons	2400	cp
Glass bottle	0.1	10 cp
Grappling hook	4	80 cp
Holy item	0.1	25 cp
Hourglass	1	25 cp
Iron pot	2	50 cp
Ladder, 10 ft	20	1 bit
Lantern:		
paper	2	3 cp
hooded	2	700 cp
bullseye	3	1,200 cp
beacon	50	15,000 cp
Lock, poor	1	2,000 cp
Lock, good	110,000	cp
Magnifying glass	0.1	100 cp
Map or scroll case	0.5	8 bits
Merchant's scale	1	100 cp
Mirror, small metal	0.11,000	cp
Mirror, small obsidian	0.1	30 cp
Musical instrument	2	50 cp
Net	5	4 cp
Oil (per flask):		
lamp	1	1 cp
greek fire	2	10 cp
Paper (per sheet)	—	2CP
Papyrus (per sheet)	—	8 bits
Parchment (per sheet)	—	1 cp
Perfume (per vial)	0.1	5 cp
Piton	0.5	3 cp
Quiver	1	8 bits
Ring, signet	0.1	500 cp
Rope (per 50 ft):		
hemp	30	1 cp
silk	8	10 cp
giant hair	30	100 cp
Sack, small	0.1	1 bit
Sack, large	0.5	2 bits
Sealing wax (per lb)	1	1 cp
Sewing needle	0.1	5 bits
Signal whistle	0.1	8 bits
Soap (per lb)	1	5 bits
Spyglass	1	1,000 cp
Tent:		
small	10	5 cp
large	20	25 cp
pavilion	50	100 cp
Thieves' picks, bone*	1	30 cp
Thieves' picks, metal	1	3,000 cp
Torch	1	1 cp
Water clock	200	1,000 cp
Whetstone	1	1 bit
Wineskin	1	8 bits
Writing ink (per vial)	0.1	8 cp

10%. There is also a 10% chance that they will break every time they are used.

#### WAGES

DAILY WEEKLY MONTHLY

#### Military:

archer	1 bit	6 bits	3 cp
cavalry, light	2 bits	1.2 cp	6 cp
cavalry, medium	1 bit	8 bits	4 cp
cavalry, heavy	3 bits	2 cp	1 sp
engineer	5 cp	30 cp	15 sp
footman, irregular	—	1 bit	5 bits
footman, light	—	2 bits	1 cp
footman, militia	—	1 bit	5 bits
footman, heavy	—	5 bits	2.5 cp
shield bearer	—	1 bit	5 bits

#### Professional:

unskilled labor	—	2 bits	1 cp
skilled labor	1 bit	8 bits	4 cp
classed labor	3 bits	1.8 cp	1 sp

\* Bone thieves' picks reduce the likelihood of successfully picking a lock by



## DM's Summary Statistics for the City-State of Nibenay

### NIBENAY

Capital of the Shadow King's empire. Nibenay is named after the Shadow King. Natives are called Nibenese.

### WHO RULES

Nibenay (LE male 23rd-level Dragon) is a recluse with a "hands-off" approach to his rule.

### WHO REALLY RULES

Siemhouk (LE human female, age 14, Tel 15/Psi4) is the Pandita, or high priestess, to the king. She devotes her time almost exclusively to mastering her psionic talent, which may one day help her tame Nibenay's bestial rages as he advances in power. She is also responsible for the Temple of Thought. The affairs of the city are primarily administered by Arru (NE human female Tel 4), High Courtesan of the House; Kahaylah (N human female Te1 4), High Courtesan of Trade; Rejan (NE human female Tel 15), High Courtesan of the Army; and Djen (LE human female Tel 5), High Courtesan of the King's Law.

### POPULATION

24,000 (60% human, 12% half-giant, 10% dwarf, 10% elf, 4% half-elf, 3% mul, less than 1% thri-kreen and halfling).

### EMBLEMS

The royal seal is the Cilops, a gigantic centipede with one eye. Nobles and merchants use stylized images of the sorcerer-king, their ancestors, and themselves. Some use various creatures, real and fantastic, that come from Nibenese folklore.

### ECONOMY

Nibenay's largest imports are gold, iron, spices, and livestock. The major trade exports from the city include rice, timber, hardwood weapons, and copper. There is also brisk trade in dried fruit, vanilla, and betel nut as well as linen and dyes.

### ARMED FORCES

The army of Nibenay is known for its disciplined core of 1,000 half-giants. This fast-moving force can be devastating on the field. Nibenay is also reputed for its frequent use of horrific undead war machines such as rezhatta beetles and watroaches. Including the city watch and the templars, there are approximately 5,000 people employed in the Chamber of Fire's army.

### AVAILABILITY OF EQUIPMENT

The equipment shops of Nibenay are perhaps the most well stocked in the Tablelands. Most merchants are adept in the non-weapon proficiency of bargaining.

### NOTABLE MAGES

- The Zwuun is a manifestation of the spirits of a group of preservers who lived centuries ago. They appear in the form of an amorphous cloud to patient mages who sing to them. The Zwuun can answer virtually any question but sometimes can be deliberately misleading. (VA)
- Thayga Phon (LN human male P17) leads Nibenay's Veiled Alliance. He is an extremely private individual who has an interest in military history, engineering, and mathematics. His bitter hatred of defilers borders on obsession, and some people suspect that there may be more behind his hatred than his claim that his wife was killed by a defiler. He places little value on personal hygiene, and his one permanently dilated eye gives him an unsettling appearance. Thayga shows a kindness toward animals that he rarely exhibits toward people. (VA)
- Poortool (LN half-elf male P10/Psi10) is a former student of the king's defilers who has set up a community near the Black-spine Mountains in order to research and practice magic openly. He recruits from the Veiled Alliance and often causes problems for them to drive more members from their ranks.

### NOTABLE TEMPLES

- Temple of the Earth, High Priest Orloron (LE dwarf male Gel 4); the priest lives in this temple, which is dug deep into the cliff that overlooks the city's north side. Orloron is called the Prophet of the Stone by the nobles who frequent this temple for his powerful psionic wild talent that allows him to foresee one aspect of a person's future when he first meets them. There are 40 resident priests here.
- Temple of Water, High Priestess Kira Tin (LN human female Cw1 6); this priestess lives on an ornate site attended to by her 12 husbands, who are also priests. Kira's husbands are often called upon to assist with problems at the hot springs. The temple is entirely supported by the contributions of the noble houses. Kira is a pensive woman of regal beauty. She highly values the traditions of her cult and is fairly removed from the day-to-day life of the freemen.
- Temple of the Sun, temple of elemental fire, High Priest Fetch (CG half-elf male Cf10); 20 priests, 20 followers. Amid huge stone braziers and continually burning pools of oil, Fetch administers to the needs of the freemen in both the city and the countryside. Fetch has recently begun to offer a service in which his priests collect dead slaves and then cremate them for a fee. He has been promoting this service very aggressively, which has caused some raised eyebrows around the town.
- Temple of Air, temple of elemental air, High Priest Hanathos (NE human male Cal 3). His 20 acolytes are often called into the countryside, where many tenant farmers consider the windstorms to be the greatest threat to their livelihood.



#### NOTABLE ROGUES AND THIEVES' GUILDS

The *Drywell Consortium* is a mixed-race gang of con artists and extortionists who specialize in robbing and cheating would-be investors and merchants. Their money-making enterprises are generally nonviolent, but they will not hesitate to eliminate-with bloody efficiency-any threat to their security. The *Hill Children* is a tribe of elves that has camped in the Hill District of Nibenay for so long that other elf tribes consider them to be only half-elf. Their thievery extends across the city. The *Shadows* and *Sky Singers* tribes also conduct a significant amount of business in and around Nibenay.

- Soleste (NE half-elf female B18) is a retired assassin and dancer. During her youth she amassed a handsome fortune between her ruthless killings and sensual performances. Now in her late middle-age, she is still a strikingly beautiful woman. She has become a leading citizen and patron of the arts in Nibenay, where people only speculate about her sordid past.

#### NOTABLE MERCHANT HOUSES

*House Shom*. Once the largest merchant house in the Tablelands, Shom as slowly declined while its leaders have become preoccupied with their decadent lifestyles. Still the leading faction of Nibenay, the house is a dim shadow of its former greatness. The emblem of Shom is three white dragonflies on a red-and-black diagonally divided field. (DT)

- Giovvo Shom (N human male Tr20) was once a formidable trader who was determined to turn House Shom around. Now he is a corpulent recluse whose love of luxury has become an obsession. Rarely seen except at Shom's lavish balls and the gladiatorial games, Giovvo's appetites are costing the house a fortune.
- Temmnya Shom (NE human female D15), heir to the leadership of the house, is a pure hedonist. She has little interest in business and prefers to spend her time experimenting with sensual excess. She is planning to either discredit or dispose of her brother Jebea.
- Jebea Shom (LN human male Tr12/F5) was sent to a distant outpost as a child by his older sister Temmnya, who wanted to eliminate a potential rival for leadership of the house. Jebea grew up to be a competent and reform-minded trader. He is currently touring outposts in an attempt to gain support for his plan to pull the house out of decline.
- Farlahn Mordis (CE human male Th12) is Shom's leading agent. He is a corrupt individual with expensive tastes. He has entered into an alliance with Temmnya to discredit or destroy Jebea Shom, whose plans for reform threaten Farlahn's life of pleasure.

#### IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

- Thong Nal, abbot of the Exalted Path monastery (LN aged human male Ca3), has encouraged the growth of the monastic movement in Nibenay. Several years ago he came under the psionic domination of Kayardi Drasad.
- Kayardi Drasad (LN human male Psi21) is an initiate of the Order. Posing as a young acolyte at the Exalted Path monastery, Kayardi has dominated the abbot and created a haven for young psionicists within the walls of the monastery.
- Au Treng, abbottess of the Serene Bliss monastery (LN human female Ce4), supervises the population of female monks. It is rumored that she once tried to become a templar but was refused under mysterious circumstances. She has noticed the subtle changes in Thong Nal since he has come under Kayardi's influence. She does not suspect the true cause of the changes as she rarely sees the abbot.
- Djef (LN dwarf male Psi15) is the master of Nibenay's School of Augurs. The profit-minded dwarf has established a telepathic message delivery service and a teleportive service for transporting passengers and small packages. Quite a few students have left the school to avoid Djef's pragmatism; they continue to study at the monasteries.
- Horga-at-Horg (CG halfling female F5/Psi5, 16hp) is the self-appointed defender of Thayga Phon. The halfling has terribly pocked skin and is very bulky for her race. Her monstrous appearance, however, belies her kind nature. She is fiercely protective of Thayga Phon and assumes all strangers are potential enemies. Horga has never explained why she left the Forest Ridge. (VA)

#### IMPORTANT FEATURES IN THE CITY

*The Naggaramakam*. The Forbidden Dominion (the king's walled palace complex) is an actual walled city in the center of Nibenay. No freeman has ever seen the palace itself, which is said to be carved in the likeness of the king. All Nibenay's templars live within the Naggaramakam, but they conduct business from the administrative temples in the city.

*The Omnipotent Receivers*. This is a line of huge statues of the sorcerer-king bordering the main road leading to the city.

*Plain of Burning Water*. Just south of the city's outskirts lie hundreds of acres of bubbling hot springs, the Plain of Burning Water. These springs have been owned by the noble houses for centuries and have insured their wealth for as long.

*The City Reservoir*. This is an enormous stone bunker capped with a lush garden. The reservoir is used by the king and is intended to supply the city with water in the event of a siege.

#### Key:

B=Bard

Ca=Cleric (Sphere of Air)

Ce=Cleric (Sphere of Earth)

Cf=Cleric (Sphere of Fire)

Cw=Cleric (Sphere of Water)

D=Defiler

Dr=Druid

F=Fighter

G= Gladiator

P=Preserver

Psi=Psionicist

Te=Templar

Th=Thief

Tr=Trader

(AG)= from *Astician Gambit*

(DT) = from *Dune Trader*

(VA) from *Veiled Alliance*



## A Traveler's Guide to Nibenay

### APPROACHING THE CITY

When approaching Nibenay, avoid camping in the fields off the main roads. Within 10 to 15 miles of the city, virtually every inch of ground lies under someone's claim. To avoid being imprisoned (or worse) for trespassing, you are better off finding a room at an inn, a caravansary, or at one of the client villages of the noble houses. The nobles abide by traditional customs of courtesy toward strangers and will often give travelers shelter in the slave barracks for a small charge. Nibenay is a city of incredible opportunities, but be advised that it is unwise for foreigners to travel the streets alone. There are many dangerous characters, and some of the city's laws don't extend protection to visitors.

### THE CITY GATES

One of the many delights of the city of Nibenay is its "dancing gates." Each of the city's elaborately carved gates has a stone balcony hanging across it, with Nibenese musicians continually playing hypnotic melodies. The music has the power to compel people to walk in rhythm to the performer's music. Animals respond in a like manner and seem to become calm as they approach the city. The sight of huge caravans and lines of porters all swaying to the songs of the minstrels has earned these gates their moniker.

Of the city's four gates, only the Reservoir Gate is restricted to use by the templars and the army of Nibenay. The Mekillot Gate is wide enough to accommodate a huge argosy; it leads to the merchant emporiums of Sage's Square. The South Gate should be avoided because of its proximity to the thieves of the dangerous Hill District. The West Gate is smaller and opens into the shops of the freemen merchants and tradespeople.

Entry into the city is a fairly straightforward matter of paying a toll. Only the most suspicious characters are detained by the templars here.

### WHERE TO STAY

There are a large number of inns and boarding houses throughout Nibenay that will meet a wide variety of tastes. If you are conducting business in the city, it is not unusual to be invited to stay at the home of the person with whom you are dealing. This may not always be in your best interest, however. Druids may find themselves welcomed at the house of a noble if they are willing to survey the noble's property and tend to any problems that might be developing in the fields or hot springs. Clerics can find temporary shelter in the temple of their votive element. If you are neither druid nor cleric, however, and have absolutely no money, quite a few vagrants simply sleep in the tunnel-like alleyways beneath the shelter of the stone-vaulted roofs.

The Open Door is a popular inn near Sage's Square. The proprietor, Baylee Baran, caters to merchants and traders. The Borderstone is a cheap place near the elven market run by a

half-elf named Pottooth. He has a reputation for minding his own business.

### WHERE TO BOARD YOUR MOUNT

Most inns have facilities to board kanks and crodlu. Inixes and other larger animals must usually be taken to a livery stable.

### WHERE TO FIND SOMETHING TO EAT

The mazelike streets of Nibenay are often cluttered with vendor stalls and small shops of freemen huddled against the carved walls of the city. Rice is the staple of the Nibenese diet and can be purchased throughout the city. Exotic foods of all kinds can be found in the all-night marketplaces. Be wary of drinking too much in unfamiliar establishments. Many slavers troll the streets late at night in search of wayward travelers to add to their "stock."

### WHERE TO SHOP

Many of the market districts in Nibenay conduct business at all hours. The center of trade in the city is Sage's Square, a large plaza of gray ash surrounded by the largest and most opulent emporiums of the dynastic merchant houses. Virtually anything that people are willing to pay for—from the Ringing Mountains to the Sea of Silt—can be found in the markets of Nibenay at any time of the day or night.

### WHERE TO BUY MAGIC COMPONENTS

On the east side of the city an ancient and deserted walled palace called the Hill has been taken over by the predator classes of the city. The elven market in the outer ward of the Hill District is a source for virtually any easily transported material component of spells. Naturally, the buyer should exercise the caution appropriate to conducting business with elves.

### WHERE TO BUY POISONS

Deep within the crumbling inner courtyard of the Hill, the bards of Nibenay have built a squalid nest of mud-brick shacks. Virtually any poison can be purchased for the right price if you are adept at negotiating with these dangerous people.

### WHERE TO FIND WORK

There always seem to be opportunities for the enterprising in Nibenay. Merchant and noble houses frequently require mercenaries and specialists. The woodcutters in the Crescent Forest will gladly hire groups to protect them from predators and headhunters from Gulg. Tradespeople will often take on apprentices or hire people to deliver orders to remote areas. The templars at the Temple of Trade can help enterprising newcomers establish businesses of their own. The king's templars also occasionally hire outsiders for work, particularly when such work involves a mission to a foreign city.

#### WHERE TO GET HEALED

The elemental temples all offer healing services to travelers. The temple of elemental water sits on a small island surrounded by a water-filled moat near the south wall of the city. This temple administers almost exclusively to the noble houses. The temple of earth, built deep within the cliffwall overlooking the city's north side, is also supported primarily through the contributions of the noble families. These relationships stem from the nobles' traditional ties to the land and the hot springs. The temples of elemental fire and air administer to the free citizen class of the Nibenay region. Their priests are often called out to the tenant farms to mitigate the effects of a windstorm or drought. In general, the Nibenese freemen are very pragmatic about the elemental cults and look to them strictly for material well-being.

#### WHERE TO TRAIN

It is not difficult to find people willing to train you in Nibenay. Warriors can find a number of public combat halls in the city as well as in the gladiatorial stables of the noble and merchant houses. The merchant houses are particularly happy to allow a visitor to train with their gladiators if the subject is willing to pay. Like warriors, rogues can often find a master who will train them—though often it is in exchange for an unusually dangerous service.

Clerics can turn to the elemental temples for additional training. Druids, on the other hand, may have some difficulty locating a mentor. There is a chance, however, for the persistent seeker to find a master in the Crescent Forest. Occasionally, a druid can be

found in residence at a noble house, but these priests are less likely to have any interest in teaching initiates.

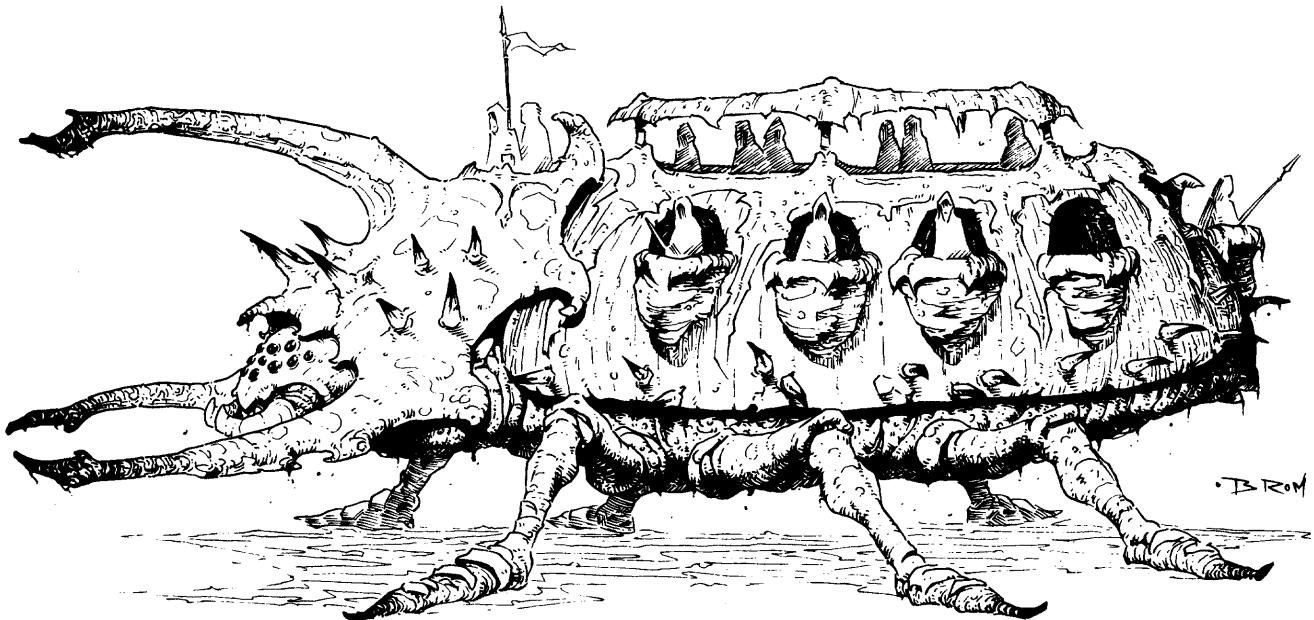
Wizards will face all the difficulties that they face elsewhere on Athas. Persuading a mentor to train you in spellcasting requires a long period of finding a wizard, let alone establishing his or her trust. The Veiled Alliance is rumored to be active in the city, but they are very distrustful of strangers. There is also talk of another organization that is said to offer a safe haven to even defilers.

#### BRIBERY IN THE CITY

Nibenay is a city that thrives on trade. Bribery is a common part of everyday life in the city. You can often bribe freeman merchants and guards. Agents of the dynastic merchant houses are generally loyal, however, and will not compromise the interests of their house. Low-level templars will accept monetary bribes, but they will not break the law or jeopardize the security of the state. Higher level templars will occasionally show favor to those who send them thoughtful gifts.

#### LYING TO CITY OFFICIALS

Templars of the king are used to the distorted claims of merchants and consider the testimony of any freeman somewhat questionable. They are, however, quite adept at torture and psionic interrogation when it is important to extract the truth from someone. If you are caught lying to a templar in regard to an important matter, you may find yourself tossed into the arena dungeons of the Nag-garamakam.







## DM's Summary Statistics for the City-State of Gulg

### GULG

Capital of the oba Lalai-Puy's empire. Natives are called Gulgs.

### WHO RULES

Lalali-Puy (LE female 21st-level Dragon) has the support of her people who call her oba, which means forest-goddess.

### WHO REALLY RULES

The Paper Nest, a secret society of templars, hunter nobles, and community leaders who are hand-picked by the queen to assist her in a ritual to make paper. During this ritual she seeks advice from this circle on affairs of the state.

### POPULATION

13,500 (*race*: 80% human, 7% eli 5% dwarf, 3% mul, 2% half-elf, 2% thri-kreen, less than 1% halfling and half-giant slaves; *class*: 34% slaves, 26% judaga soldiers, 7% templars, 5% hunter nobles, 16% freemen, 4% foreigners and visiting merchants, 8% miscellaneous).

### EMBLEM

The hegbo, a lizard known for fiercely defending its young. Many decorative patterns incorporating the hegbo are used to indicate occupation and station throughout Gulg society.

### ECONOMY

Gulg's economy is state controlled. The culture is based on hunting and gathering but the economy is actually driven by agriculture and herding. Citizens may barter freely within the city, but outsiders may only deal with the templars at the oba's trading house. Exports include spices such as clove and vanilla, copra, kola nuts, jewelry, feathers, livestock, textiles, and some furs. Gulg imports gold, silver, and iron.

### ARMED FORCES

The army of Gulg is known for its judaga head hunters. The infantry is comprised of 1,500 spearmen and 1,500 short bowmen. The archers use deadly poison on their arrows. Another 1,000 troops make up the specialist units, which include the crodlu cavalry, hunter nobles, and light charioteers. The warriors of Gulg typically behead their victims to prove their fighting prowess; further, unless specifically ordered to do so, they do not take prisoners.

### AVAILABILITY OF EQUIPMENT

Beyond basic provisions, baskets, and simple wood and cloth items, there is only a 50% chance of finding anything on the equipment list in Gulg. Nothing metal or containing metal components can be found in the city markets or in the queen's trading house. In the merchant camps outside the city, the likelihood of

finding an item on the list increases to 75%. Metal items can also be found there.

### NOTABLE MAGES

- Aukash-Pad (LG human male P14/Cw3) single-handedly leads the Veiled Alliance in Gulg on a foolhardy mission of restoring Athas to arcadian splendor. An inconsistent leader, Aukash pretends to report to a secret governing council of the Alliance. He actually takes orders from "The Shadow Tree," a *tree of life* harboring a malicious spirit that Aukash believes to be a reborn deity. (VA)
- Habban-Puy, Keeper of the Fetish, (NE human male D15) is the queen's chief defiler. He is responsible for guarding the queen's personal idols and magical items. He is very unsure of his position with the queen and jealous of any who gain her ear. (AG)

### NOTABLE TEMPLES

- The House of Sky, temple of elemental air, High Priest Umjai (N human male Cw13); 9 attendant priests at temple, 20 students not in residence. Umjai's small network of priests live in dagadas across the city and keep him abreast of undercurrents in the community.
- The Temple of the Sun, temple of elemental fire, Shaman Tolom (LG dwarf male Cf14); 10 priests, 22 students and followers not in residence.
- The World Daga, temple of elemental earth, High Priestess Pokkit (LE human female Ce18); 6 attendant priests, 15 students and followers not in residence.

### NOTABLE BARDS' AND THIEVES' DAGADAS

The Drum Circle is a bard dagada that specializes in percussion. The head drummer, Ken-kenku Vek (NE half-elf male B12), possesses both *drums of deafening* and *drums of panic*. Ken-kenku will kill for money or magical items. His preferred method of assassination is to immobilize his victims with a blowgun dart tainted with paralytic poison. He then sits down and either tells a story or performs the drums for his victims while he drains their blood in a bowl in front of them. The victims feel no pain, and they literally watch their own life ebb away.

### NOTABLE ELVEN DAGADAS

The Salt Stealers, a nomadic tribe from the Tablelands, have occupied a vacant slave dagada in Gulg for more than a year. They claim to sell only handicrafts, but actually sell magic components as well. They are careful to keep their business discreet and within the walls of the dagada. When dealing with foreigners they will often sell contraband to strangers and then track them to steal it back. The elves are certain their victims won't complain to the templars.

## NOTABLE MERCHANT HOUSES

*House Inika.* Gulg's largest merchant house is small by the standards of its rivals. The foreign merchant houses, however, only maintain small emporiums in Gulg to deal directly with the queen's templars. Inika is known for its small fast caravans with high margin cargo. They are nonconfrontational by nature and tend to evade rather than combat rivals. Their emblem is a plain gold circle on a black field. (DT)

- Andiamo Inika (LN human female Tr19) has been house matriarch for 18 years and has led Inika to its greatest prosperity in generations. Her friendly but firm manner has earned the unquestioning loyalty of her family and agents.
- Ranis Inika (N half-elf female B18) is the most trusted and dangerous member of the House Inika. She was adopted into the family after saving Andiamo's life. Ranis travels the Tablelands in the guise of a bard collecting intelligence and stealing trade secrets.
- Shallin Losya (N human female Psi18) is the chief psionist of House Inika. She is responsible for training younger psionists, but occasionally undertakes a mission, accompanies a caravan, or works at an Inika outpost.
- Tomah Reslin (LN mul male G19) is the chief bodyguard to Andiamo Inika. She purchased him from the gladiatorial arena and gave him his freedom. In exchange he has served her faithfully.

*House Riben.* Once the largest of Gulg's merchant houses, House Riben was bought out by the oba. Its facilities and staff provided the foundation of her trading house.

*Other Dynastic Merchant Houses.* The other merchant houses have small trading houses in the city and maintain larger, semipermanent encampments and caravansaries outside the city walls, where they trade more freely with visitors.

## IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

- Mogadisho (NE human male Tel5) is the brutal high-ranking templar and chief warlord to the queen. Mogadisho is as fanatically loyal to the queen as his men are to him. He disdains politics of the court and prefers the company of warriors. Mogadisho is a member of the Paper Nest. (AG)
- Hoopidjo, Gatherer of Gulg (LE human female Tel 5), is the high templar who manages and administers the internal affairs of the city, including the slave labor force, the fields, and the trading house. A tireless worker, Hoopidjo is one of the few people whom the queen respects and takes regularly into her confidence. Hoopidjo is a member of the Paper Nest.
- Shala, Hunt Mistress of Gulg (NE human female F15/Psi10), heads the cult of hunter nobles in the city. Shala lives in the

Sunlight Home and is a regular member of the queen's court. She rules on all matters affecting the hunter nobles and supervises the Red Moon Hunt. She is the sole liaison between the queen and the noble class. Shala is a member of the Paper Nest. (AG)

- Taibela, Chief of Thieves (CE human female Th14), serves the queen by stealing items the oba desires. Taibela spends time in Gulg's dungeons interrogating imprisoned thieves in order to improve her knowledge and ability. (AG)
- Spunt (CE halfling female Psi8), the palace clown, is considered a slave by the oba but not by Spunt. A mean-spirited mischief maker, Spunt has been known to taunt visitors into breaching court etiquette, which lands the victims in the dungeon. (AG)
- Agafari (LN half-elf female Psi20) is an entrant of the Order and the leader of the Seer's Dagada. She busies herself supervising the training of young clairsentients and telepaths and has received instructions from the Order to observe the oba closely. She has not been able to gain the oba's trust. The oba refuses to meet with psionists on any regular basis if they will not open their minds to her.
- Extambolan (N mul male Dr15) guards the sacred Grove of Mysteries outside Gulg.
- Chkak-a-kakk (N thrikreen Dr7) guards the baobab grove from beneath which Aukash-Pad runs the Gulg Veiled Alliance. Chkak-a-kakk sees the oba as the Crescent Forest's only hope against eventual destruction at the hands of Nibenay's defilers and woodcutters. The thri-kreen will betray anyone whom it believes may jeopardize the oba's safety or power. (VA)
- Dargua (CG human male R15) is, other than Shala, the most dangerous of the elite hunter nobles. A loner by nature, Dargua spends much of his time prowling the forest. He considers the welfare of the hunting and gathering tribes of the area his concern. He has an extremely strong sense of personal honor.

## IMPORTANT FEATURES

*Mohti Wall.* A wall of brambleweed that surrounds the city. The Mohti Wall is impenetrable by nonmagical means. It is patrolled on the outside by judaga warriors.

*Sunlight Home.* The palace of Lalali-Puy. It is a complex of huts and lashed walkways ways built amid the branches of an enormous agafari tree.

*Daga-faris.* Ancestral homes of the Peoples (or ancient tribes of Gulg). Most consist of two or three huts built in the branches of an agafari tree. These buildings are used primarily for charitable purposes.

### Key:

B=Bard

Ca=Cleric (Sphere of Air)

Ce=Cleric (Sphere of Earth)

Cf=Cleric (Sphere of Fire)

Cw=Cleric (Sphere of Water)

D=Defiler

Dr=Druid

F=Fighter

G=Gladiator

D=Reserver

Psi=Psionist

Te=Templar

Th=Thief

Tr=Trader

(AG)= from *Astician Gambit*

(DT)= from *Dune Trader*

(VA)= from *Veiled Alliance*



# DARK SUN

W O R L D

## THE IVORY TRIANGLE

TM



SILVER SPRING

	mountains		forest		cities
	rocky mountains		wooded plain		river
	spicy savannas		desert plain		spicy river
	shady valleys		cave		excavated pyramids
	ring dunes		labyrinth		
	dark plains		ford		

## THE TABLELANDS

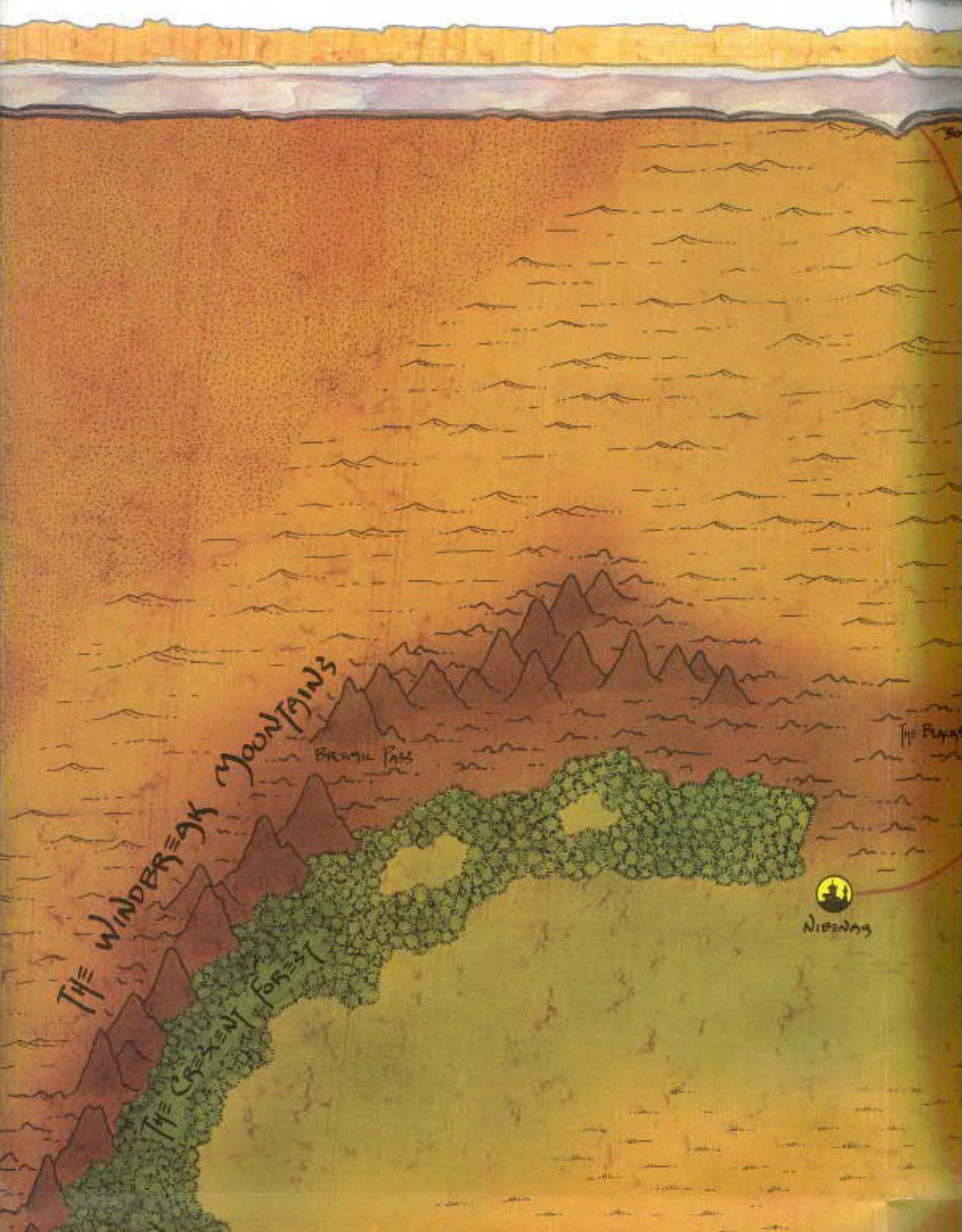


THE WINDBREAK MOUNTAINS  
THE CRESCENT FOREST

BREWIE PASS

  
NIBENAG

THE PLAINS





50 miles to  
Room



THE BLACKSPINE Mountains

THE BLACKSPINE Gorge



FOOTLOOL'S HORDE



FOOTLOOL'S HORDE



7 MILES TO FORT CROMLIN  
(or Horse Sign)

THE VALLEY  
OF TREUJIN

7 MILES TO QUOTENDAL

up 1912

FORTINIX  
(or Horse Sign)





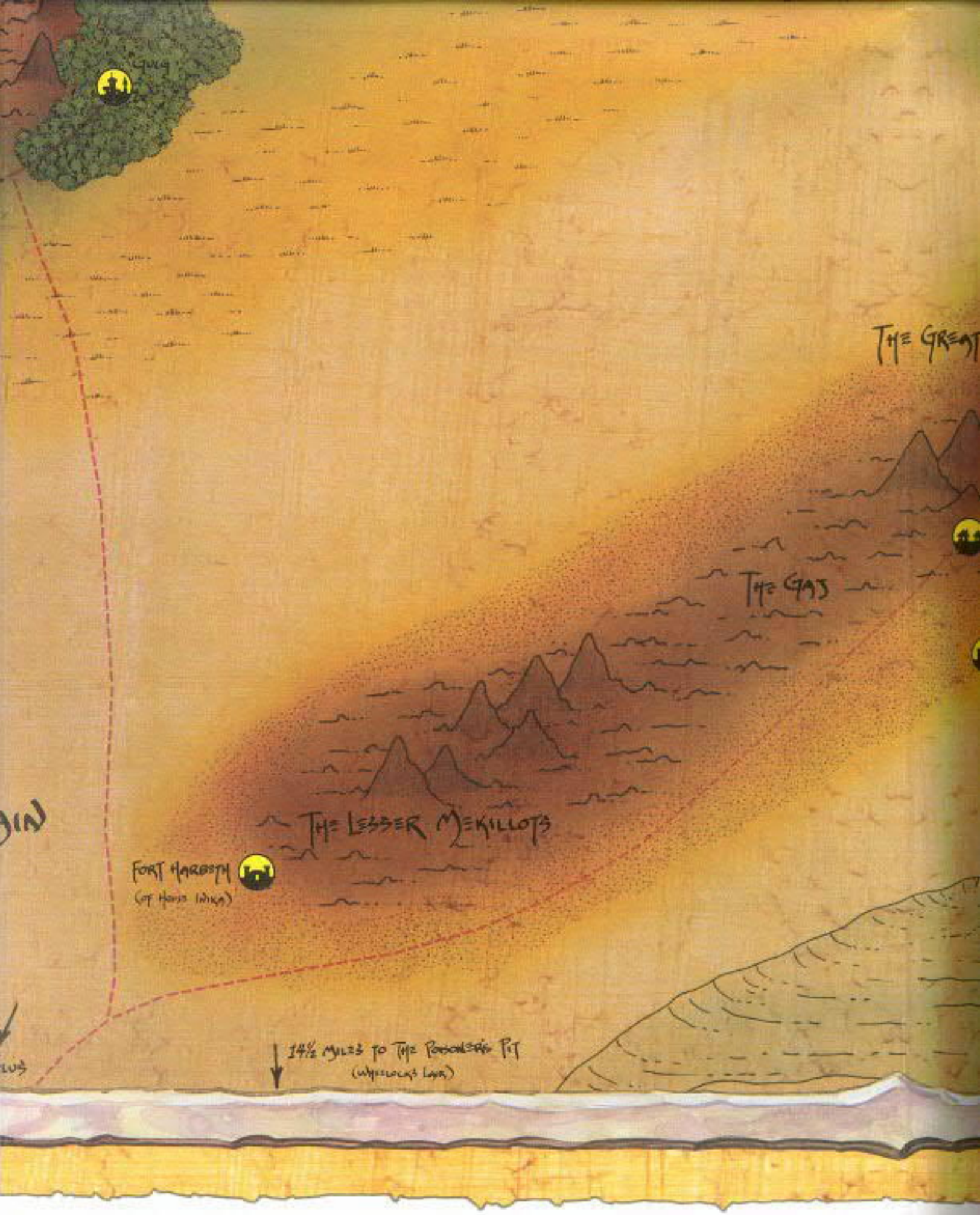


FORT KNOBS  
(OF HOUSE  
TAKING)

# THE GREAT IVORY PLAIN

30 MILES ↙  
TO NORTH LEOPOLDS





THE GREAT

THE GREAT

THE LESSER MEKILLOTS

FORT HAROSH  
(OF HORS INKA)

↓ 14 1/2 MILES TO THE POISONOUS PIT  
(WHEELWRIGHTS LAIR)

IN

US



GREATER MEKILLOTS



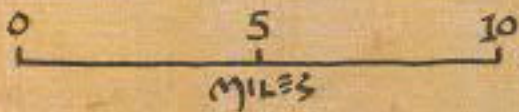
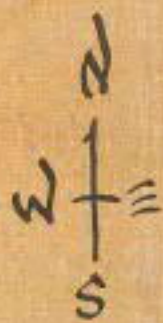
CUTPOST 19  
(OF HOUSE WARRI)



SALT VIEW

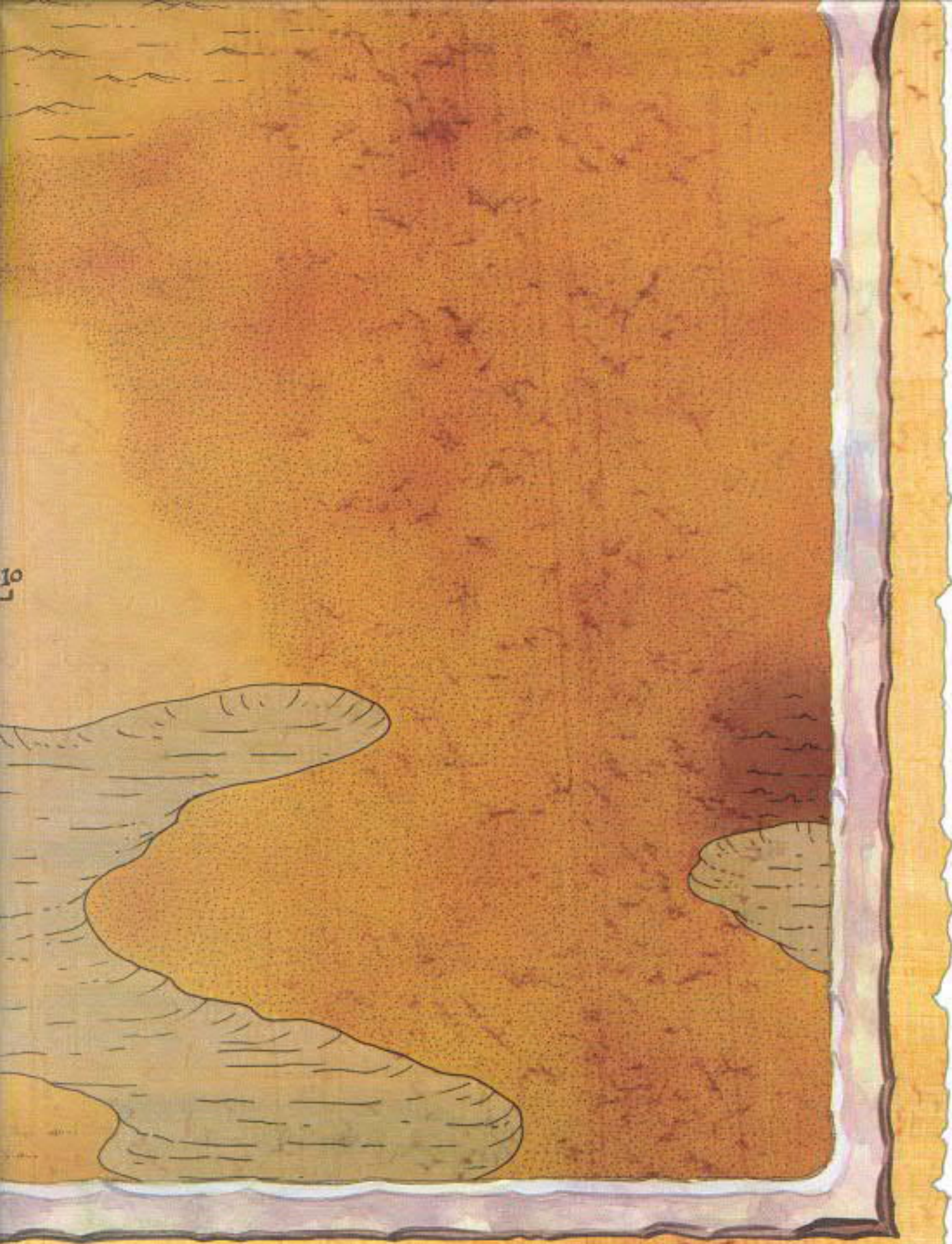


FORT FYRA



10 MILES TO THE RUINS OF  
BODGEM





10



Tf = Greenleaf Forest

Slw = Daggons

Fr = Mard Daggons

- 1 Temple of the Sun
- 2 Tf = Hunter's Daggons
- 3 Tf = Warrior Daggons
- 4 Tf = Sunkent fons
- 5 Mard's Cryptogons =
- 6 = used Daggons
- 7 Tf = Star's Daggons
- 8 Mard's Cryptogons
- 9 Daggons Squares
- 10 fons = of Sing
- 11 Daggons (fons of Cryptogons)
- 12 Gards' fons of fons
- 13 fons' Nest fons
- 14 = fons = fons
- 15 fons of fons
- 16 fons of fons
- 17 fons' who fons' fons

Tf = Hunter's fons

Tf = Mard's fons







Temple Diggings

TH = Grassland Forest

FR = Iron Diggings

TH = Drum Circles

M = Regularly = MPRRINGS

To Aborigines Leopards

13

14

15

Aborigines Gate

2

1

5

TH = G...  
G...







The Earth Walk

Noble Houses

The Stone Quarry

West Gate

Trademen

Freemen Merchants

To Guild

3

2

5

1

6

7



- 1 The Sun's Tower
- 2 The Sign's Square
- 3 Temple of the Sun
- 4 Engraved Palm Monument
- 5 The Plaza
- 6 Temple of the King's Leg
- 7 The Abyssinian
- 8 Temple of Earth
- 9 Sacred Brass Monument
- 10 Temple of Trade
- 11 Sign's Square
- 12 Sign's Square
- 13 Emerald Market
- 14 Temple of Engraving - Water
- 15 Noble's Monument
- 16 The Omnipotent Reservoir



Fremgen

Fremgen Tenants

Noble's Compound

Abandoned

The City Reservoir

The Pond of Burgundy Water

Reservoir Gate

15

4



# The City of Gulq

ONE INCH = 100 FEET

The Grassland Forest

CRAFT DISTRICTS

To Nazmy

The Peoples 497







The Quays  
997

Merchant Encampments

The Mopri Wall

Craft Daggos

The Grassland Forest

The Exiles  
997

Fremyn Daggos

Lugur-Roy's Opulent  
Ascension Road

To The  
Forest Grassy

The People's  
997

12

11

10

9

9

15





To The Crowned Forest

The Empty Way

Noble Houses

Freemason Tenants

Troopmen

The Merchant Houses

To River

District of the  
Dynastic  
Merchant Houses

16

10

11

12

9

8





# The City of Nibbelsy

One Inch = 150 Feet



To Noble's Farms

Freeman Tenants

Freeman Merchants

Noble Houses

The High Road

The Sooty Gate

The District

Merchant Houses

Merchant Houses

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Nowhere are the stark contrasts that define life on Athas more dramatic than within the Ivory Triangle! In the forests of Gulg live elite hunters called the Judaga Warriors, who claim the heads of their prey as trophies. Behind the walls of Nibenay (built with the blood and toil of countless slaves), decadent markets promise myriad experiences to those who have money to spend and courage to spare. Across the

desolate salt flats of the Great Ivory Plain, a handful of bold merchant outposts and slave tribes struggle to exist and to exploit unwary wanderers. Amidst all, a sinister poisoner of the Tablelands plies his trade on the border between life and death. These dangers and more lie within that region called the Ivory Triangle—the ideal setting for continuing adventures on the deadly world of Athas!



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