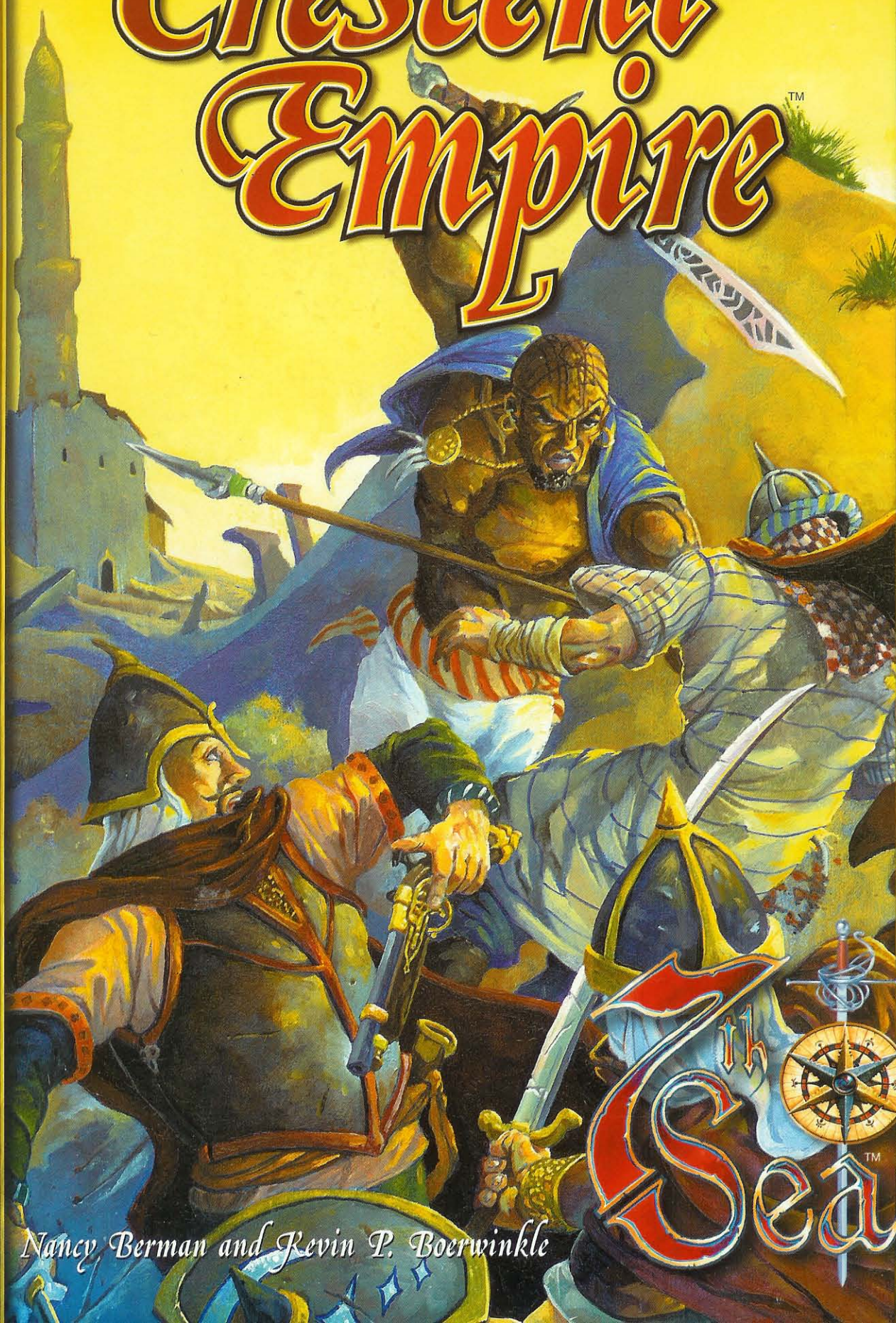
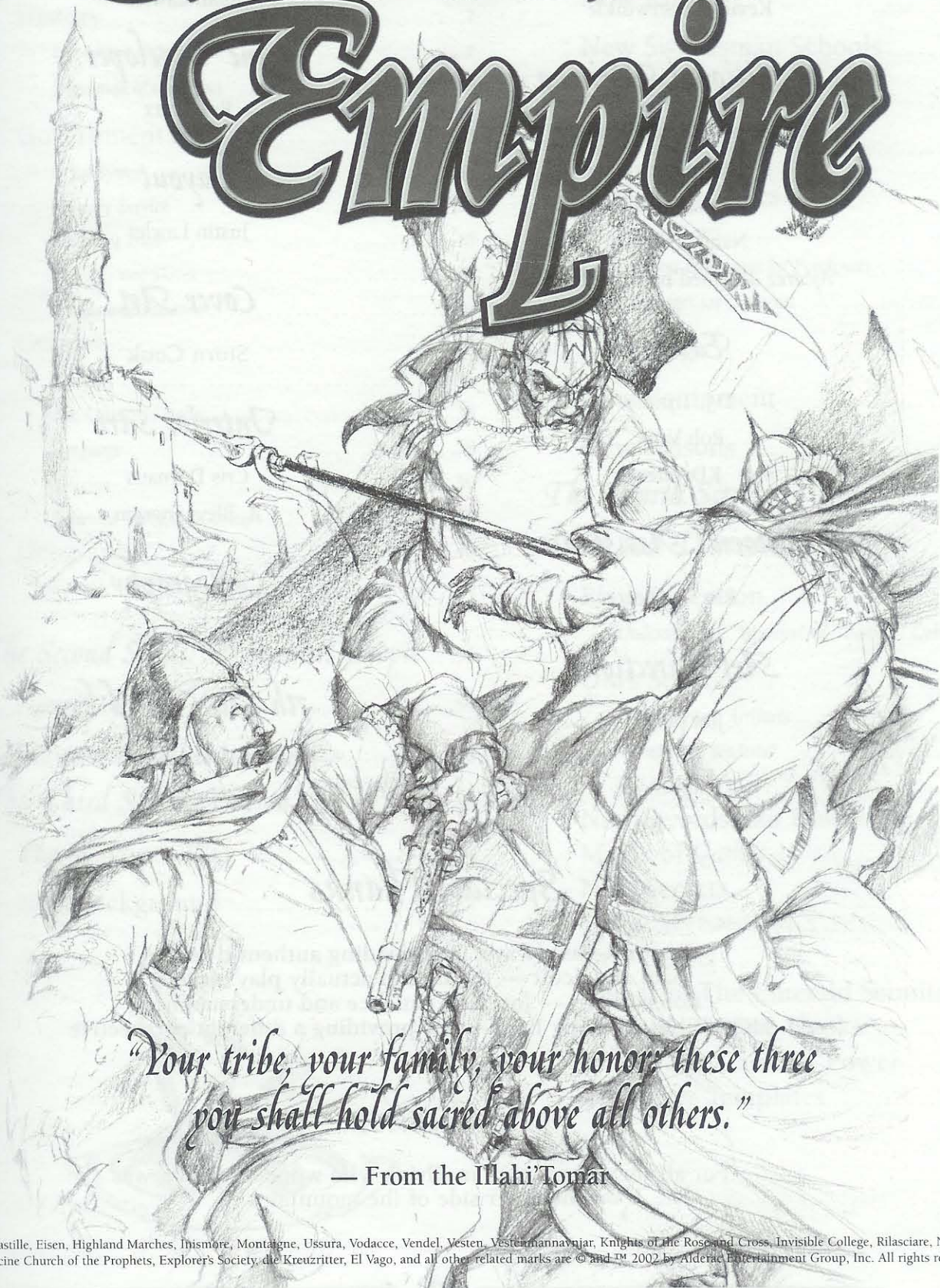


Crescent Empire™



Nancy Berman and Kevin P. Boerwinkle

Crescent Empire



*"Your tribe, your family, your honor: these three
you shall hold sacred above all others."*

— From the Illahi'Tomar

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Dedication

For all the adventurers in Théah who wondered what was
on the other side of the mountains...

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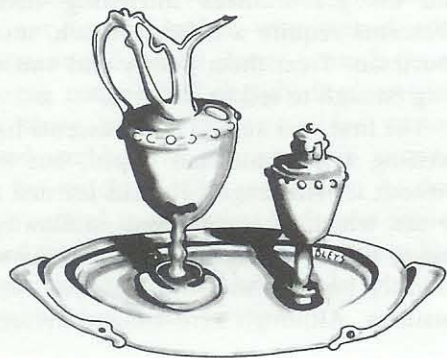
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An Oasis by Moonlight

As he pulled the black burnoose tighter around his face, Antonio Bernoulli resisted the urge to cough again. If he never saw another grain of sand, he would be truly happy. All around him, the vast desert called the *Muglak'kum* spread out towards the horizon, nothing but sand. It blew across the camp day and night. It settled at the bottom of his goblet no matter how tightly he secured the fine mesh over the opening. It nestled in his food, providing an unwelcome texture to everything he ate. It skipped across his skin like thousands of stinging little insects and found its way into places even his mistress had never explored.

Ah, *Carmella*. Winding her honey-blond hair around him as she kissed him, igniting him with her endless games of passion. He smiled as he recalled how they had spent one summer afternoon in a huge copper tub full of warm scented water and rose petals. Water. Clean soothing water. He thought that he would willingly commit murder if only it would get him even part of an hour submerged in water with no speck of sand anywhere. Anywhere.

"Eh, *gokuzi!*" The harsh sound of the *bakaji* epithet shattered his reverie like a broken mirror. His tribesman companion jerked a burnoose-covered face to the left as he tugged on the reins of his camel. It was time to return to camp. The peculiar rolling gait of these beasts had become more or less comfortable, given the alternative of walking on the scorching sand.

As they neared the striped tents of their encampment, there seemed to be more activity than usual. Apparently the long-awaited caravan had finally arrived. Antonio slipped off his camel and tossed the reins to one of the dark-eyed boys who always materialized when they came back to camp, looking for hand-outs. Antonio often thought about his own privileged childhood as a member of the wealthy Bernoulli family and could

not recall a night when he went to bed hungry — unless of course he was being punished. Even then, some kind-hearted servant always brought him a little something.

As he stepped inside the main tent, the young Vodacce adventurer paused at the unaccustomed splendor of the decorations; he had assumed that they would be escorting a simple caravan of traders. Salih Husnuh's first wife bustled up to him and shooed him out, muttering about his dirty, sandy feet, as she thrust a wad of white garments into his arms and motioned to him to take a bath. Antonio had faced a good number of fierce things in his journeys across the Crescent Empire, but Salih Husnuh's first wife was certainly close to the top of the list. She had a sharp tongue and a fast jab with whatever was handy to emphasize her point.

He bowed with great deference, which always brought a tight smile to her dark eyes, and backed out of the tent. It was actually a pleasant night and a brief soak in the nearby oasis would be most welcome. He walked slowly through the camp, acknowledging greetings from his fellow travelers. It was a strange life he had chosen — or rather, that had chosen him. He recalled the day his grandfather Prince Bernoulli had summoned him. The old man sat in state, his gouty leg resting on a heavily cushioned footstool. Although physically incapacitated, the Prince's mind was still sharp. He laid out a plan that involved Antonio carrying the family business deep into the Crescent Empire. He would join the services of a successful *kervaner* named Salih Husnuh whose family had been in a mercantile alliance with the Bernoullis for several generations. Antonio knew that his father and his two uncles were more concerned with finding new ways to spark their satiated desires than ensuring that the family's holdings grew and prospered, so he had accepted his grandfather's assignment. He was young and his mind filled with thoughts of adventure, fabulous treasure, and his grandfather's intriguing advice: "The Crescents require a delicate touch, much like a courtesan. Treat them poorly and you won't live long enough to tell us about it."

The first year among the Crescents had been as exciting as Antonio had hoped, but it was not without its challenges. He had learned new ways to eat, which often involved swallowing strange things he never knew were edible; new ways to conduct himself socially; and new ways to do business. Although rare among Crescents, dark

blue eyes like Antonio's were not completely unheard of; the Second Prophet — may he live forever in the hand of the Creator! — had such eyes. The young Vodacce had become accustomed to giving a brief explanation in his peculiar accent about an outlying branch of the *Ruzghar'hala* tribe, and most people he encountered appeared satisfied, although it was sometimes difficult to be certain. A few regarded him with narrowed eyes when he spoke to them, but he had come to expect some degree of suspicion from all the Crescents he met; it seemed an integral part of their character.

As he walked towards the oasis, Antonio unwound the turban from his head and ran his hands through his long dark hair. It wouldn't be the same as the huge copper tub with the enticing Carmella, but it would be a refreshing change from the thumping ride on camelback and the relentless sand.

A splashing sound rose up ahead without warning and he instinctively dropped down, his hand on his dagger. Sometimes a wide-jawed *timsa* sought the comfort of the water. Deceptively docile, these scaly creatures had long flat mouths that gaped wide and showed rows of ferociously sharp teeth. Antonio did not relish the idea of becoming a midnight snack. Thankfully, as he approached the oasis, he saw the true source of the noises.

Antonio had experienced no difficulty adapting to the smoldering beauty of Crescent women. For him, the promise of exotic sensuality lying beneath the surface of Vodacce women saw its realization in the women of the Empire. Tonight, the Mother of Life must have been smiling upon him, because he was rewarded by a vision — that was undoubtedly what it was — of a young goddess cavorting in the dark waters of the oasis. She rose out of the water that sparkled on her body like diamonds in the moonlight. As she raised her arms to brush her dark hair away from her face, Antonio could not catch his breath. Two women stood by the edge of the pool holding garments out to the bather who sighed with disappointment and moved slowly towards them.

The young man shifted slightly, inadvertently making a sharp noise. The two older women gasped and grabbed at the younger woman, wrapping her quickly in the soft fabric. As they turned her around to cover her body, she smiled and winked in the direction where Antonio hid. He knew at that moment that he must be with this magnificent woman or die trying...



Introduction

The Empire of the Crescent Moon is very much the stuff of legends; wild creatures including one said to be half-man, half-horse; magnificently beautiful women locked away behind carved walls and guarded by scimitar-wielding giants; and a powerful Sultán who rules through devious spies and fanatic warriors. Is this the sort of place an adventurer would risk his life to visit? Of course it is.

This book is divided into four scrolls. **The Crescent Empire** reveals details heretofore unknown about the ancient history of the cradle of Théan civilization, as well as its government, geography, religion and culture. **Hero** explores the different ranks of citizens, from the Sultán himself to the lowliest slave. Of particular interest are the various secret organizations like the *Qatihl'i* and the Eyes of the Peacock, the Sultán's private network of spies. **Drama** reveals a new range of swordsman schools and combat, including horse archery; new and exotic equipment; and a look into the ancient ways of shamanism. In conclusion, **Veils and Whispers** provides an opportunity for new adventurers to try their hand — and scimitars — at an adventure set in the heart of Sultán's harem itself. In addition to the usual revelation of character secrets and helpful hints to the Game Master, players will have an opportunity to learn the ancient game of *ajedrez*.

Precious few Théans can speak knowledgeably about the Crescent Empire. For most, either the murderous *Khereid-Din* or a steaming cup of bitter coffee represents the nation's entirety. But it is much more than that. Everywhere you turn, whether it is *Kurtlar-dag* in the north or the *Muglak'kum* in the south, breathtaking beauty mixes with life-threatening danger. Those with a taste for something truly extraordinary will relish the chance to make their fortune — and reputation — where others fear to go.

The Gateway to Paradise swings open to receive you.



The First Scroll

The Crescent Empire



Formation of the World

Before the world became as we know it, before there was even a blade of grass on the plains or a drop of water in the sea, Light and Darkness existed separate from each other. By command of the Great Creator, Light held dominion over most of the universe, while Darkness was forced to live in the fringes of the world. Darkness found this arrangement not to its liking and little by little began to spread its shadowy fingers beyond the boundary of its realm. Where the brightness flickered and dimmed, the Great Creator formed the Lake of Light and from it called soldiers, *kilik parlak* or Swords of Light, to push back the invading forces of Dark. But it soon became clear that the brave *kilik parlak* could not repel or resist the Darkness alone, so the Great Creator gathered the Lake of Light into his mighty hands and breathed upon it, calling forth into the world an ally of fearsome strength and power. Emerging from the swirling vortex of the waters, the Mother of Life set foot upon the world and raised her shining face to the sky.

The Mother of Life reached within her heart and with a great cry of joy drew forth her gift to the world which was Man, born with the instant and clear knowledge that his task was to meet the Darkness wherever it sought to overcome the Light. This was not a man as we are, but Light captured within a form that could exist upon the land, a form that Darkness would know and fear. And at the end of his life — for he knew that his blood would flow in battle — Man would return through the bosom of She who shone upon the world, back to the blessed Lake of Light.

— Excerpt from the *Ilahi'Tomar*:

East of what is now Vodacce and south of the vast Ussuran nation lies the Empire of the Crescent Moon. Measuring around 1,258,344 square miles, it has played a remarkable, if undocumented, role in Théah's long history. Its original inhabitants were tribes of nomads who came down from the mountains and fanned out across the high steppes and the long shore in search of grazing land for their livestock. These pastoral tribes, living in makeshift tent villages pitched and struck from season to season, were skilled stockbreeders who understood nature far better than any other people in Théah.

As protection against the harsh elements and the vagaries of tribal treaties, groups of nomads formed loose federations that — over time — developed their own laws, customs and languages. As often happens, one tribe among the myriad of federations gathered strength and power, and began to claim dominance over the others: sometimes through diplomacy, more often through war.

Like Ussura, their mysterious neighbor to the north, the Empire of the Crescent Moon has its origins in groups of nomadic tribes. Where the

Ussurans had contact with a variety of other nations, the people of the Crescent Moon knew only two other civilizations: Numa and Cathay. While Matushka slept in her cave and Numa grew into a land-gobbling monster, the Crescent people were well on their way to developing a thriving civilization with amenities like indoor plumbing and celestial navigation, advances that their neighbors to the west would not see for at least a thousand years.

Some 700 years before the founding of Numa, bands of Crescent tribes poured down the western slopes of the *Hayalet-dag* mountains, driven as legend has it by some "unknown cataclysm." The truth is actually far less dramatic. When an unusually hard winter settled on the mountains and showed no sign of retreating, the tribes living in that harsh terrain were forced to find food or starve. Fierce blizzards with blinding snowstorms and vicious winds would not permit them to go down the eastern slopes and into the grassy plains of a neighboring tribe, so they were forced to go west.

Formation of the Tribes

Ruzgar'hala (Ghost Wind)

There is no way to determine an accurate date for the formation of tribes in the Crescent Empire. Legends say that the Great Creator brought the animals forth at the same time, but each tribe in the Empire claims that they emerged slightly ahead of the others. Some members of the Explorer's Society feel that either the *Kurta-kir* or the *Ruzgar'hala* were technically first, but they are unable to tell in which direction migration occurred. Many believe that both Ussura and Vodacce owe their existence to an influx from the Crescent Empire. Others feel that the *Aldiz'ahali*, specifically the inhabitants of the *Dakalan* and *Cinada*, are the original progenitors. A comparative study of linguistics should reveal which dialects contain root words and sounds as opposed to hybrid, but recent events in the Mirror Sea will delay verification of this theory for some time, perhaps forever.

In any case, the arrival of these wild-eyed nomads from the high mountains, dressed in furs and speaking an unintelligible language, had an impact on eastern Vodacce. Initially, it appeared to be a violent invasion of strange creatures. Gradually, the reason for their arrival became

clear and weapons were put away in exchange for baskets of food and axes to help chop down trees. The primitive Vodacce were mountain people themselves who had known hard winters. While these dark-eyed strangers clearly did not worship the same gods, it was also clear that they had a highly-developed language, a simple form of government and music, which at least meant that they were not Ssyneth or some other terrible race.

Although spring never truly came that year, the weather eventually abated and many tribesmen returned to their homes. Others chose to remain, gradually merging their culture with that of the locals. Hostility gave way to caution and eventually to comfort. The two groups eventually found pleasant and fruitful ways to coexist and even intermarry. The Vodacce learned to their delight that the mountain people were fierce warriors, and made excellent allies against common enemies. There were of course occasional skirmishes when disagreements broke out. Both groups were mountain people with strict codes of behavior that did not permit wrongs to go unanswered. A hybrid culture developed and colonies formed along the southeastern shores of Vodacce that would pave the way for future trade routes. It would be almost a thousand years before the two cultures came into contact again.

Kurta-kir (Gray Wolf; also called "The Great Tribe")

The founder of the *Kurta-kir* was a great warrior named Durkan. He led a large army down from the northern mountains at the request of their neighbors to the east, the *Jadur-rihad*, to deal with an incursion of wild tribesmen from Ussura. Once he secured their border, the *Jadur-rihad* offered Durkan two precious gifts: an exquisitely painted silk banner depicting the great Wolf and a *doumbec*, an hourglass shaped goatskin drum which produced a rousing sound that seemed to raise the warriors' spirits. From time to time, the *Jadur-rihad* would ask for minor assistance, so such gifts eventually became annual tribute.

After helping to rout the invaders, Durkan took his army south, along the eastern coast. He had been warned by a *Jadur-rihad* shaman to avoid the desert and the mysterious *Yilan-balik* tribe that lived there. When the *Kurta-kir* reached the mountains in the peninsula, a freak storm struck, and they were forced to take refuge in a cave. During the night, Durkan had a prophetic dream in which a beautiful *melik*, dressing in shining

robes, told him that it was the wolf's destiny to rule the land one day, and that the lion born under the wolf's protection would become the greatest ruler ever seen. The lion and the wolf were traditional *duzmari* — enemies — and for centuries the prophecy baffled even the wisest shaman.

*And when, at last, the great Durkan grew too feeble even to be carried into battle on a litter, he lay in the great tent of the Kurta-kir, drifting closer and closer to the time of his passing. His family — his wives and his concubines and their children and their children's children — sat beside him, their heads covered in token of their sorrow. The entire tribe gathered about the great tent, as did those who had come from far and wide, so great a man had he been. There were even those who had been his sworn *duzmari*, come now to pay tribute to such a worthy adversary.*

As the moon rose full above the camp and the hour of midnight approached, the old man opened his eyes and spoke: "You must not weep, for it is my time of passage. No one could have asked for a better life than I have had. If the Great Father grants the wish of a dying man, it would be that I might stay among you and watch over you in the times to come, but I have never turned from the face of death and I shall not do so now." With that, a wrenching sigh wracked his aged body and his face took on the pallor of one who had passed beyond this world.

From high above the tents of the Kurta-kir, the howl of a great gray wolf shook the night, and the people knew that the Great Creator had honored the final wish of a dying man.

Jadur-rihad (Fire Dragon)

Even the Crescents in the eastern region of the Empire do not know a great deal about Cathay. The people across the Mirror Sea come and go at will, controlling the amount of contact they wish to have with other nations. Quiet almond-eyed merchants display a variety of exotic wares and strange aromatic spices in the markets of Erivan and Kulkadir, although lately, with the increased traffic from the rest of Théah into the Mirror Sea, the merchants seem to have stopped coming as frequently. The one thing that the Cathayans did not seem to like was *kaffe*, a traditional Crescent beverage; they insisted on drinking a concoction of their own brewing that they called *chai*.

Tribal lore recounts the story of a golden dragon that lost its way in the thick mists over the Mirror Sea and at last fell exhausted onto the beach near what is now Erivan. The people who

lived by the shore were amazed by the magnificent creature and at first feared to go near it. But it soon became evident that it would not harm them, so they drew closer, almost hypnotized by the creature's beauty. They brought it food and gently washed its scales with cool water. Little by little, the dragon began to revive. Although it did not speak, they could tell from its huge onyx eyes that it was grateful. When night fell, the creature seemed fully restored, but when it flapped its leathery wings it was still too weak to fly. Afraid that some animal might come down to the beach and harm the dragon, several young warriors agreed to stand watch. They built a small fire and settled in for the evening. Strangely all three felt themselves getting drowsy and simply could not stay awake. One by one, they dropped off to sleep.

Several hours later, the youngest one, named Taahli awoke with a start. Standing before him was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. She was wearing golden robes of satin, and her straight hair fell down to her waist like a curtain of black silk. She wore a necklace of cabochon rubies and a golden crown. Her almond-shaped eyes were somehow familiar but he could not imagine that he had ever met her before. Taahli could not speak, so surprised was he to see this goddess, for surely that is what she had to be. Then she smiled and told him not to be afraid, for she was the golden dragon and now was restored to her natural state as a princess of Cathay. An evil witch had put a spell on her as punishment for her selfishness. Only when someone showed her kindness without hesitation would she be restored to her normal form. Sadly, for a long time, her fierce appearance frightened people away, so in her despair, she fled her homeland and became lost in the mist.

As a reward for his kindness, the dragon princess offered Taahli her necklace of huge rubies but he did not want her to depart. He had fallen deeply in love and did not wish to leave her side. The princess knew that if she returned to Cathay she would have to marry a man chosen by her father. So she stayed, sharing the wealth of her dowry — for that is what the rubies were — with the people who had saved her. Over time, she and Taahli came to know each other very well and eventually they married. From their loving union, the tribe of the Fire Dragon was born, a handsome people who combine the beauty of Cathay and the agile grace of the Crescent seaside dwellers.

Yilan-bazlik (Magic Snake)

The most mystical creature in the Crescent Empire is the snake. Regarded as a symbol of immortality, it is the focus being for the reclusive *Yilan-bazlik* who live in the great desert of the *Muglak'kum*. The people of this tribe see great beauty in the desert and in the creatures that inhabit it. For the rest of the Crescent Empire, the snake conjures images of the twisting fingers of Darkness; it is often used in literature and song to describe how evil enters people's homes and hearts. It does not help matters that the dreaded *Qatihl'i*, the brotherhood of assassins, worships the snake, which figures prominently in their rituals and personal garb.

While most other tribes bear a close physical resemblance to each other, the *Yilan-bazlik* seem the most "foreign" in appearance. Their skin tends to be smoother despite hours spent in the desert sun. Their eyes are not quite almond-shaped but have slightly elongated irises and are usually gold or tawny colored. Their dialect is more sibilant than any other in the Crescent Empire. Of all the tribes, the snake people are the most mysterious and they appear perfectly content to keep it that way.

The largest collection of Syrneth ruins are buried in the dunes of the *Muglak'kum* and it is said that this was once the stronghold of that ancient race. If that is true, the *Yilan-bazlik*'s claims that they descend from "an ancient race" may indeed be true. It is a risky business to poke into the tribe's affairs. Like a snake disturbed during its sleep, the *Yilan-bazlik* may strike first and ask questions later.

Atlar-vahir (Wild Horse)

Despite the beauties of the lush green plains on which the people of the *Atlar-vahir* tribe live, many of them have an unquenchable wanderlust. These are the people who gave birth to the Numan legends of centaurs, for an *Atlar-vahir* is more comfortable on horseback than on foot and has a bond with his or her mount that borders on the mystical. While their brethren to the south take to their ships, the *Atlar-vahir* ride their sturdy horses across the vast steppes in search of adventure and treasure. Many of them provide escort and protection services for caravans, while a few have taken the less honorable path of thievery. Yet even these tribesmen pay tribute to the chieftain, Khan Atagun Bahadar, for they fear his wrath more than an entire squad of *ghazi*. Only the *Atlar-vahir* can form the special *Khêl-kalb* bond with their horse.

The first person to experience *Khêl-kalb* was Serefina, an ancient chieftain's daughter who spent day and night caring for the horses. She rose before dawn and groomed each of them as if they were to be presented to the gods themselves. She washed them and brushed them until they shone. She polished their hooves and sang to them as she combed and braided their long hair. Wild horses can be capricious but around Serefina they were as docile and playful as children, nuzzling in the pockets of her clothes for bits of fruit. Once they were groomed, she would leap upon the back of Hizli, her favorite, and take the group for a gallop across the plains. It was a sight to behold: a herd of magnificent wild horses led by a beautiful girl whose long dark hair flowed behind her like her own mane.

It was on such a day that the son of a rival tribe saw Serefina and determined that he must have her. He knew that their tribes were *duzmar*; sworn enemies, so a marriage was out of the question. He decided that he would kidnap her instead. He watched for several days until he determined her daily routine. At some point she took the herd to an isolated place where the grass was particularly sweet. It was miles from anyone and he knew that she rode unarmed. He waited until she had slipped off Hizli, then bore down on her, beating the side of his own mount to a furious gallop. Fortunately for Serefina, her herd sensed the danger in time to alert her. She remounted and began to ride like the wind towards her camp. But her pursuer and his black horse were faster. She leaned over Hizli's neck and held on for dear life as she whispered to him, begging him to save her. The horse heard her plea and reached deep into its heart, pushing itself to the limit of its endurance.

Then a strange thing happened. Where there had been a horse and a rider there was now... something else. The pursuer, who had held her fast in his gaze, could no longer see her. The horse he had been pursuing was somehow larger and faster than it had been only a few moments before. The air crackled with a strange energy that struck the pursuer off his mount and he died as his head struck the ground. Then the link between Serefina and Hizli was broken and suddenly she was a frightened girl atop an utterly exhausted animal. She flung herself off his back as his legs gave out and he sank to the ground. She uttered a piercing cry and threw herself down, holding his head and crying as if her heart had broken. Later the next day the tribe found them, the girl incoherent with a fever clinging to the neck of the dead animal.

After a long time, Serefina recovered her physical health, but she never rode again. She continued to spend her days among the horses and came to understand their love for humans and their willingness to give up their life for a rider in danger. She learned that the gift of *Khël-kalb* was not granted to all, but to those so blessed, she told the secrets of the bond. In time, Serefina became the chieftain of the *Atlar-vihar* and ruled the tribe with great wisdom. When she felt her time of passage coming, she did not retire to the Great Tent but instead returned to the spot where her beloved Hizli had died and waited for him to come to her. No one ever saw her again, and no body was ever found — by her tribe or any others.

Aldiz'ahali (People of the Stars)

Far to the south, a peninsula reaches into the water between the Forbidden Sea and the Mirror. Two sets of small islands stand on either side of the peninsula. The ones in the Forbidden Sea are called Dakalan and the ones in the Mirror are the Cinada. Here, many believe, the original people of the Crescent Empire first touched upon the land. Life in the Islands is unlike that on the continent for the old ways are preserved with great reverence. The language of the Islands is difficult to understand because it has had no linguistic interference from any other nation. Some scholars say that their myth of the Mirror may be a clue to the possibility that the people actually came from Cathay:

In the beginning, the desert was one vast plain of gold that could not be measured. A cluster of mountains sat upon its southern border, while two seas washed its shores: the Forbidden Sea on the west and the Corridors of Flame on the east. The Moon spent every night seated before a huge diamond mirror, gazing at herself. Her beauty was so great that the stars became jealous and conspired to steal the mirror away from her. Knowing that the Moon slept longer when she was merely a sliver in the sky, they waited. Then on a dark night, they crept into her chamber and lifted the huge disk off of its pedestal. It was very heavy, far heavier than they had expected, and its edge was razor-sharp. They almost succeeded in getting the shining object out of the chamber when the Moon sighed and turned in her bed. The noise startled the thieving stars who dropped the mirror, which crashed through the floor. The Moon came awake at the sound and watched in horror as her most precious possession fell through the skies. Miraculously, it did not shatter, for the

heat caused by its rapid fall melted it. When it came to rest in the middle of Théah's huge desert, it had become a vast sea that sent sand flying east and west, and rent the mountains to the south in twain. The Moon's fury was terrifying until she realized that if she looked down she could still see her reflection. And that is why the light of the moon shines brighter in the Muglak'kum than anywhere else in Théah. The Moon gazes down upon the Mirror and she is happy.

— Ancient Crescent legend

The People of the Stars are known throughout the Crescent Empire for their beautiful and hypnotic music, featuring flutes and finger cymbals. They claim that their inspiration comes from the sound that the stars make as they travel across the sky. Festivals are marked by performances of young men and women in long lines that weave in and out of each other in intricate patterns. Life in the islands is very simple and relatively unaffected by the changes wrought by the cataclysms of the past. The people are more concerned with daily life than the latest political intrigue in Iskandar.

These tribes, and dozens like them, formed the first traces of Crescent culture. For centuries they lived much the way their ancestors had: simple, nomadic lifestyles unbroken by change. Some continued to move west down the slopes of the *Hayalet-dag* into what would become Numa. Another group moved north and mixed with Matushka's children. For the most part, the tribes along the eastern border stayed at the edge of the Mirror Sea. But there was one enterprising group of *Jadur-rihad* who settled around what would become Trebizond and they wondered what was at the other end of the large river flowing west. They set out in sturdy canoes and traveled for many months, past endless mountains, through the point where the river widened until they came to the place where the rivers split. Had they kept sailing west, they would have eventually reached the Frothing Sea; had they gone north they would have ended up in the lands of Eisen. When they consulted the signs, as they had done all along the way, everything pointed to the south. So they headed down *El Rio de Delia* and disembarked onto land not dissimilar from their own. They encountered nomadic tribes like those in their homeland, except for their language. It did not take long for them to understand that they had landed in a place called Acraga.

The river passage between Acraga and the Crescent Moon was long but not terribly dangerous — far safer than traveling through the treacherous seas on the south — so it made sense to establish commerce between the two lands. Because both “countries” were really nothing more than collections of tribes, there was no formal treaty recognizing an alliance between them. Over time, intermarriage and exchange of customs brought the nations closer.

AUC 1-228: Numa

Ironically, while ties with the Acragans grew strong, ties with the primitive peoples of Vodacce, the country between the two, were nearly nonexistent despite their close proximity. Other than the intermarriage of the Crescent tribes that entered Vodacce from the *Hayalet-dag*, there was no significant contact between the two nations during the time of Numa's founding. While the new nation's city-states were struggling amongst themselves, the tribes in the east went about the daily business of survival. It took nearly a century for the Numans to have an impact on their neighbors to the east, but when they did, they didn't take half-measures.

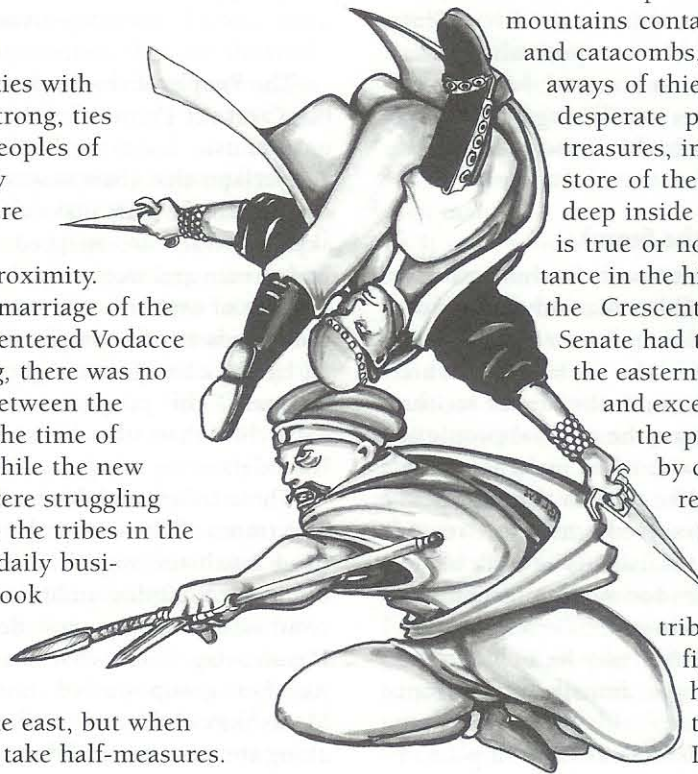
The Numans figured out something that the Crescents would not adopt for centuries: to survive, they must come together as one nation. During Numa's expansion period between AUC 148 and 189, there were occasional encroachments across the *Hayalet-dag* and along the coast near what is now Rahajeel. The Numan Senate enthusiastically embraced the philosophy of manifest destiny although it was just as happy to expand by allegiance and treaty as by conquest and invasion. They struck one such treaty with the chieftain of the *Ruzgar'hala* but he made it clear that he had no jurisdiction over neighboring tribes and sadly could only guarantee safe passage to the borders of the next territories.

War was an integral part of the Numan Senate's plan, but that required an army. The Senate responded by forming the most intimidating fighting force in the world. They were fortunate in their selection of generals, a fact of which they became abundantly aware after the stunning victory at the Battle of Palo di Olimpia in AUC 213.

Dominated by Mt. Olimpia on the crest of the range, the Palo di Olimpia rises above Teramo, the easternmost province of Vodacce. These mountains contain innumerable caverns and catacombs, perfect for secret hideaways of thieves, brigands and other desperate people. Legends tell of treasures, including the vast golden store of the Numan Empire, buried deep inside the caves. Whether this is true or not, it holds great importance in the history of both Numa and the Crescent Empire. The Numan Senate had turned its greedy eye on the eastern lands and its rich plains and excellent ports. They fanned the proverbial flames of hate by claiming that the time to reclaim the lands stolen from them was long overdue. In response, the border tribes assembled a huge fighting force, hoping to halt the Numans in their tracks. It was not to be. In AUC 213, a Numan army, outnumbered 10 to 1, pushed the superior forces back down the western slopes and towards the sea. The Numan Empire would hold sway over the western portion of the Crescent peninsula until AV 32.

AUC 228-AV 32: Numa Triumphant

Once they felt that their holdings in the east were secure, the Numan Senate turned its focus west, which gave the Crescents some breathing room. Naturally, they regrouped and tried to take back what had been stolen from them, but each time the superior Numan forces repelled them. By AUC 518, the Numan Empire spread its greedy claws over what is now part of Eisen, plus Montaigne, Castille, and Vodacce. They even made incursions into Ussura, and eventually controlled half of the world.



Thanks to the relations between Acraga and the lands of the Crescent Moon, news of the horrors of the Acragan Wars reached as far as the *Jadur-rihad* and spread through the merchant network. While some among the *Jadur-rihad* and *Kurta-kir* thought they should sail west to avenge the murder of their cousins, wiser heads prevailed. After all, those who had left hundreds of years before had done so of their own free will, and the risk of turning the focus of the Numans upon the eastern Crescents was too high. Instead they made fewer journeys to Acraga until they could gauge the situation. It would be another hundred years before contact would be re-established at its former level.

Power corrupts and the Numan Empire eventually felt the consequences of their greed. There was simply no way they could effectively monitor their vast holdings. Corruption ran rampant in the government which meant a less vigilant grasp on outposts. Thus the Crescents who had been biding their time seized an opportunity to regain their dignity and some of their stolen land.

AV 32: Freedom

The Crescent people place great stock in dreams and portents. One such dream prompted their first significant defiance of Numan power in AV 32. After four nights of having the same vision the shaman of the *Ruzgar'hala* came to the chieftain with a plan. If they consolidated forces with the *Atlar-vahir* and *Kurta-kir*, they might be able to repel the Numans encroaching upon their borders. The shaman's dreams convinced him that one tribe alone would not be strong enough to send the invading *yavanci* back over the mountains where they belonged. The negotiation between the tribes took many days but eventually they agreed to cease of hostilities in order to deal with the larger enemy. By the end of the year, the three tribes had marshaled a sufficient force to finally destroy the westerners.

Numan records refer to the "Empire of the Crescent Moon," which swept down from the east and repulsed their vaunted legions. The Numans suffered a sound defeat, and the generals back in the capital could not conceive that they had been defeated by simple tribesmen. This temporary alliance could by no means be termed an "empire." However, the Numans had no other frame of reference for such a large territory. If it was that big, and could defeat them that decisively, it had to be an empire. The name remained, and eventually referred to the entire

peninsula — whether or not the tribes regarded themselves as a single entity.

When the battle was done and the chieftains had a chance to assess their victory, they saw that some degree of unification had proved beneficial. However, further unification would mean that they would have to remain allied, which did not sit well with them. Resolved to stay tenuously together in case the invaders returned, the tribal chieftains returned to their encampments but kept a wary eye on both the infidels and developments in the other tribes. Should the time come again when they needed to repel invaders, they would do so as a combined entity. Secretly they hoped the day would never come.

AV 100: Darkness Rising

Even without significant holdings in the Crescent Empire, the Numan Empire was too large to remain a single entity, and it eventually split into Eastern and Western halves. Unfortunately, this solved nothing, but exacerbated the political in-fighting and general bureaucratic corruption... which presented another advantageous situation for tribes of the Crescent Moon. Still the Numan Empire continued to send cadres of soldiers through the mountain passes and south across the Forbidden Sea in hopes of conquering the nomads whom they regarded as barbarians. As far as the *Atlar-vahir* and *Ruzgar'hala* shamen were concerned, this assault was a harbinger of the rise of Darkness and the end of the world. The Crescent tribes continued to battle the *yavanci*, angry at being continually forced to retake their own land. It was an exercise in futility, like trying to catch the waves of the Forbidden Sea. When they were not fighting against the infidel, they either fought with or married into each other's tribe. So it remained for another hundred years.

AV 202: The Caliphate

The turning point came in 202. As the chieftain of the *Kurta-kir* stood one winter's night at the entrance to his family's winter caves, he saw the stars twinkling in the impossibly clear winter sky. The clouds seem to cup ephemeral hands around a string of six bright stars. As the other clouds evaporated, the hands remained, moving protectively around the gleaming stars. He watched for a long while, thinking about possible interpretations. He then retired for the night with a plan in his head.

If he could devise a way to form some sort of tribal alliance without denying individual autonomy over the chieftans' own lands, it would be possible to protect themselves from foreign invaders. No one tribe could defend itself against the formidable Numan Empire, and he knew that the lands to the north of Numa could contain foes of equal power. It would not be easy convincing the other chieftains to even sit in the same tent, let alone agree to a formal alliance, but the *Kurta-kir* chieftain knew in his heart that this was the right thing to do.

Thanks to his extremely skillful diplomacy — coupled with lavish gifts and entertainments — the *Kurta-kir* chieftain assembled a tense but ultimately successful gathering of the chieftains. He laid out his plans for an “alliance of families,” as he called it, designed to protect the outer borders of the Crescent lands. The tribes would retain their individual autonomy, but to outsiders they would present a united front in the form of a council that would select one among them to act as the spokesman. He stood before them with both hands spread open, palms up, to reassure them that he had no secret plans to place himself above them all as king. To prove that, he suggested that they meet formally every year at the Festival in Edirne where they could select a spokesman in a public ceremony. By selecting a leader in this fashion, the people could see and understand that this was being done with the full concurrence of all the tribes.

The chieftain of the *Atlar-vahir* liked this suggestion because it meant a great profit in trade for his people. He suggested that they establish a symbol of leadership that the spokesman would carry, so that all might know who he was. The *Yilan-bazlik* chieftain offered his *baston*, which was decorated with gold tassels. He suggested that each tribe should contribute a talisman, which they did. Perhaps the most curious were the strange little beach tokens given by the chieftain of the *Jadur-rihad* that had an inclination to point north whenever the *baston* lay upon the ground.

Because the position of spokesman would pass among the chieftains, they needed a more formal title. After much wrangling, they settled on *caliph* when means “successor.” The tribes grudgingly agreed that as long as none of them betrayed the others to an outside enemy, they would meet every year in Edirne and come to each other's aid when needed. The momentous decision established the reputation of the *Kurta-kir* as strong leaders, one which would secure their reputation over the next thousand years.

AV 297-300: Marriage with Castille

It took almost 200 years before things in the *Hayalet-dag* settled down. When Numa finally fell, no tear was shed in the Crescent Empire. The time for Numa to make its passage into the after-life was long overdue.

By AV 297, the sprawling Numan Empire was in its death throes. The distance between the conquered people and the capital was too much for the increasingly dissolute and corrupt Senate to handle. Eisen barbarians pushed south, while internal corruption prevented the Numans from effectively striking back. In the far west, the Acragans broke from Numa, which presented a perfect opportunity for the Castillo family (formerly *Castillus*) to assert control over the newly-liberated nation, called Castille. In AV 299, Josémaria de Castillo ascended the throne as ruler of a united nation. Like Vodacce, Castille knew the value of trade and used it to full advantage, forging a formal trade alliance with their distant cousins in the lands of the Crescent Moon. The Castillians hoped that, by building on the ancient connection between the two nations, they would keep the Numan Empire from ever rising again.

This alliance re-established the flow of commerce and information, giving Castille access to much-needed innovations in science and technology, especially in the art of war. (They did not wish to repeat the horrors forced upon them by the brutal Numans.) In exchange, Crescents were free to go wherever they pleased in King Josémaria's country. (Oddly enough, no one at the time compared the similarities of this “silent invasion” to that of the Numans.) Josémaria knew about the agreement among the tribes but felt no threat from them as an “empire.” He was entranced with the Crescent lifestyle, the graceful architecture, the quiet gardens, the rich but comfortable clothing, and particularly the beauty of the exotic Crescent women. In fact, while attending the annual Festival at Edirne, he fell deeply in love with the daughter of the new Caliph and asked for her hand in marriage. Crescents and Acragans (or Castillians, as they were now called) had been intermarrying for years, but this was an important step in relations between the two nations. The infatuated Castillian king made a suitable display of wealth and the Caliph agreed to the match.

AV 305-306: The Second Prophet and the Crusades

Malak, the Second Prophet, appeared from deep within the Crescent Empire. Like the First Prophet, the blue-eyed Malak brought nine Witnesses with him, at least one from each tribe, and was immune to sorcery. His message was one of action, alerting the people to the corruption within the Church, not a particularly popular message with the hierarchy which launched an effective campaign to discredit him.

Malak believed that only by following a precise regime of rites and rituals could people hope to regain spiritual purity. He was particularly opposed to duels and war, definitely not something that the people of Vodacce or his own countrymen could put aside lightly. He preached against sin, proclaiming the enjoyment of earthly pleasures to be contrary to the will of the Creator. But the strongest message of his ministry — and the one that people had the most difficult time with — was the call to make a pilgrimage to the Crescent Empire, which he declared the home of Theus. Even if people were willing to leave their homes to make the trip, it meant that they would have to pass through the most dangerous and deadly area in the entire world... considering that no one seemed to return from their journey to the east.

The Emperor Alexius, governing what was left of the Numan Empire, saw this as a threat to his power and his holdings, but he did not want to order the death of a holy man, so he commanded his guards to bring Malak to him. They tried to follow his orders, but were unable to breach the impenetrable and obviously magical circle that surrounded the Prophet. After a futile six hours of battle, the Emperor's guards gave up and returned home in exhausted defeat. Alexius sent an army this time, and Malak voluntarily went with them, rather than sacrifice the lives of his followers. One year of interrogation ensued, during which the Emperor's inquisitors did all the talking. Malak, who smiled serenely, never spoke.

The morning of Primus 1 dawned brightly. The guard on duty was making his morning rounds when the skies above him emitted a cloud of bright light which rendered him unconscious. When he came to, the prison in which the Prophet had been incarcerated was a pile of smoking rubble and Malak was nowhere to be found.



A report soon came that the Prophet had gathered a crowd of some 40,000 followers at Monte Joyas and preached a mass exodus to the Crescent Empire. The Emperor's dilemma grew more difficult. There was no question about Malak's holiness now, but he was advocating a serious reduction in the Emperor's subjects. Assuming that an even larger army was needed, Alexius ordered three massive units to prevent

Malak and his followers from crossing the mountains into the Empire (peacefully if possible). The troops arrived at the border but as they began their ascent to the town, they were greeted by an eerie sound: the cry of vultures circling overhead and the chilling howl of jackals.

Laid out in neat rows were the bodies of the followers who had apparently offered no resistance to whomever or whatever it was that had murdered them. Malak's body was sprawled across the makeshift altar, his face forever frozen in a serene smile. The commanders of the armies, stunned and sickened by the carnage, retreated to make camp and figure out how to dispose of so many corpses. While they sat in their tents, the wind began to rise with a bone-chilling howl and those who tried to look outside were beaten back by a relentless buffeting. For five hours, the forces of nature raged outside the tents of the Imperial Army, and even the most battle-hardened veterans were fearful for their lives.

Then, as suddenly as it had started, the wind stopped and this time the silence was complete. Men pushed the flaps of their tents open to see emptiness — no vultures, no jackals, no altar, no bodies.

The Emperor fumed with frustration. It was obvious that the Crescent Empire was a land of utter barbarism, where people would kill a holy man and his followers in cold blood. He called for the civilized people of Théah to rise up and wipe this infidel from the world. Thus the First Crusade began.

The Crusades themselves were a stop-and-start affair. The Crescents defended their territory fiercely, and often drove the invader west past the mountains. Just as often, however, spirited western forces would seep into the peninsula, claiming large chunks of territory for their Church. The conflict cost thousands of lives, and spilled untold amounts of blood across the Crescent territory. Attacks from the west waxed and waned as new Church leaders arose; some adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the Empire, while others wanted nothing less than its annihilation. In addition to the horrendous casualties, the Crusades cost the Crescents their allegiance with Castille (see below) before finally sputtering to a halt sometime in the fifth century.

Despite the horrors of the Crusades, some good came of it all. Working under a makeshift shelter made from a ship's sail, an Eisen Crusader and his wife began tending to the wounded on the front lines, some of whom were men of property

and wealth. After the city of Zafara was taken, these grateful soldiers built an actual care station called the Hospital of the First Witness. Over time, it became known as a place where Crusader and Crescent alike could seek healing without prejudice, and in fact, no Crescent troops have ever attacked the building.

The gentle nature of the hospital also produced a constabulary of grateful knights, who successfully kept peace in the port city for many years and insured safe harbor for all who landed there. So remarkable was this that in AV 347, the Hieros Council granted them the right to wear their distinctive black crosses in public. As the order of *die Kreuzritter* (Knights of the Cross) grew, its fortunes became entangled in the machinations of Vaticine Church politics, but it always considered the city of Zafara as the place of its origin.

AV 313: The Caliphate

In AV 300, High King Josémaria of Castille married the Caliph's eldest daughter; the first issue from this union was a son, Alonzo al'Mahmud José Maria. In AV 313, tragedy struck the royal family when the High King died suddenly. Alonzo's uncle ascended the Castillian throne as regent. As part of his intention to support the First Crusade, he proclaimed himself both King and Caliph and denounced the Crescent council as a band of murderers who must be executed for their treachery. Alonzo's grab for power was cut short by a dish of poisoned Crescent figs, apparently served without the royal taster's knowledge.

Having a king of mixed blood did not sit well with the Castillians, who wanted their own monarch and felt that once again they were under control of a foreign power. Hatred against the Crescent Moon now reached fever pitch in Castille. They did not want a king with mixed blood, and balked at the profusion of Crescent culture. Clandestine bands of young men roamed the streets at night, destroying anything that was even remotely Crescent. A new Caliph was chosen, one unconnected to Castille and who claimed no jurisdiction over that distant country. Castillian technology slowly improved, and their isolated status spared them from the worst ravages of the Dark Ages, which swept over the rest of Théah and held it fast for the next seven centuries.

AV 1000: The Third Prophet

By the end of the first millennium, the people of the Crescent Moon believed that they had left the horrors of the Crusades behind them. Then word came from northern Castille that a new Prophet had arrived, a young man without a name who burned with the fire of righteousness. Once again, the Vaticine Church came under attack as the Castillian zealot preached a dire message of brimstone and retribution. The evil sorcery that had replaced the true faith must be excised from the hearts of the people across the land, as well as from those vile heathens living under the Crescent Moon.

Pilgrims gathered in growing numbers to hear his powerful message, which did not bode well for the Crescent Empire. The Third Prophet declared that heresy must be driven from all of Théah, especially from his beloved Castille where the evil influence of the Crescents could be seen at every turn.

By the spring of 1002, it was not uncommon to see mob violence in Castillian streets that targeted Crescents living there, those with Crescent ties and even those who even remotely looked Crescent. These incidents came to a head, quite literally, in the city of Malaca when a Crescent enclave stormed the palace to protest their unjust treatment and the violent abuses against Crescent prisoners in Malaca's prison. Bishop Felipé de Gallegos tried to calm the mob, only to be struck on the head by a rock flung from somewhere in the crowd.

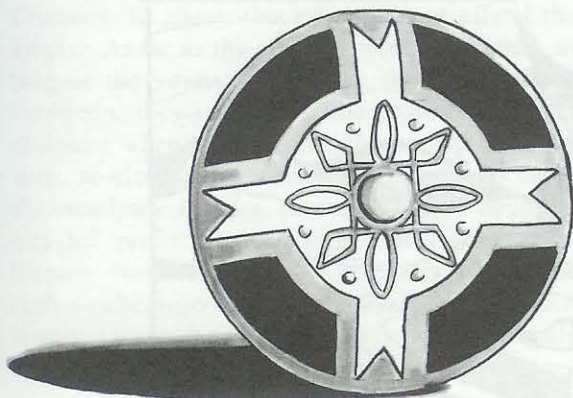
Later that night news of the Bishop's death at the hands of the Crescent mob sped through Castille. When the Third Prophet heard about the murder, he called for a holy Crusade against the Crescent Empire.

This call for vengeance did not sit well with everyone in Castille. Another Crusade against the Crescents would cost a great deal of money and disrupt the lifestyle to which the Castillian upper class had grown accustomed. For the next eight years, civil war raged in Castille as the nobility, aligned with their Crescent friends and allies, fought against the leader of this "People's Crusade" and his tattered by fanatical army. When the elite army's superior forces were close to quelling the campaign, the Third Prophet threw himself on the mercy of the Hierophant who called upon the faithful of Vodacce (and their considerable financial resources) to protect their nation from what he termed "the imminent invasion from the East."

AV 1002-1011: The Crusades

At the Hierophant's exhortation, Vodacce decided that it would not only rid its own land of Crescents, but actually launch a campaign to sweep down over the eastern mountains, as had been done to them so long ago, to bring the Crescent Empire to its knees by force. Sadly, the scions of many noble Vodacce families who knew far more about the romance of battle than its harsh realities, died in the futile invasion and for a time, the grasslands below the Hayalet-dag were called Los Llanos del Sangré or "The Plains of Blood." By 1011, the Vaticine army, such as it was, had run out of money and men.

In a last-ditch effort to destroy the Crescent menace, the twisted Lorenzo family of Vidacce launched an insane scheme. Their matriarch, "Mad Queen" Marrieta was fond of conducting experiments in her secret laboratories that were horrific almost beyond description. When it became clear that the Vodacce army had been annihilated, Marrieta tried to use her Sorté magic to destroy the infidel nation once and for all. She planned to twist the strands in a way that would cause the lands of the Crescent Moon to disappear completely from Théah. However, in her insanity, she made a catastrophic error. The spell she wove turned against her and her palace — along with all traces of the Lorenzo's ancestral island home — vanished without a trace. News of her spectacular failure, resulting from the use of black magic, was further proof to the Crescent people that these fundamentally corrupt outsiders were agents of Darkness and all efforts must be made to keep them from entering the sacred land of the Great Creator.



Meanwhile, in 1009, the pro-Crescent High King of Castille was defeated at the battle that historians call El Fin del Ciclo or "The End of the Cycle." It was a turning point in Castillian history because it marked the public end of sorcerous power in that nation. Amidst the chaos that threatened to destroy what little was left of this once-proud country, a new hero arose: a valiant warrior named Ramón Sandóval, a man of mixed Castillian and Crescent blood who soon gained the title El Sayyid ("The Master"). Such was his prowess and honor that, despite his heritage, he was crowned King of Castille in 1014.

AV 1011-1308: Conflict and Isolation

For a brief time, there was a cessation in hostilities while the Vaticine Church regrouped and dealt with the death of the Third Prophet in 1030. There were occasional forays into the Crescent Empire under the tired banner of the Crusades, but neither side really had the heart for it and combat ended in negotiation as often as not. Fighting in the mountains became difficult for the Vaticine troops who were more accustomed to flatland maneuvers. The *Ruzgar'hala* knew the mountains far better than their enemies, and had the added assistance of winter that sent the unwashed infidels back across the border year after year.

Hostilities resumed briefly in the 1080's. The Vodacce cardinals had lost a considerable amount of influence during the heated conflict and now that peace seemed to have been restored, they had time to plan. While most of the Church's bureaucracy remained close to Vaticine City to supervise its rebuilding, the cardinals gathered an army in Rahajeel and launched a vicious surprise attack against the Crescent city of Alexia. Alexia was a gleaming monument to learning that

was only minimally protected. After all, the Crescents reasoned, no one in their right mind could possibly want to destroy such beauty. Sadly, they were wrong. The cardinals' army took the treasures of the great library and left the city in ruins. This is still regarded as one of the great tragedies in Crescent history and many felt that it was the fulfillment of the prophecy about Darkness rising up from the West. The wanton destruction of property, especially the priceless volumes of ancient writings, and the massacre of unarmed and peace-loving people struck a blow that the Empire has yet to recover from.

Inspired by the daring attack, young Vodacce rakes who would otherwise run rampant in the streets turned their attention — and hostility — on the Crescent Empire. To protect Vaticine interests in the newly-conquered territory, Hughes Allais du Crieux of Montaigne petitioned the Hierophant for approval to found a new chivalric order, the Poor Knights. This order, charged with protecting the Church's interests in the newly occupied lands; eventually this order becomes *die Rosenkreuz*.

The tribal armies were no match for the Vaticine Army. The *Atlar-vahir* could use their horseback archery skills to some effect but their speed could not match the Vaticine's heavily-armored troops. The Crusaders swept across the land, wreaking havoc right up the edge of the *Yilan-bazlik* territory. Here at last, the Crescents could make a stand. This was new terrain for the invaders and they were unaccustomed to the sweltering heat and the pervasive sand of the great desert. And then there were the serpents. Although they acted solely out of self-interest, the *Yilan-bazlik* probably saved the entire Crescent Empire by forcing the young knights to turn back.

Seeing the Vaticine army in retreat bolstered



the flagging spirits of the *Atlar-vahir* and *Kurta-kir* armies which hounded the invaders like avenging wraiths.

The Church took the return of the Crusaders as a temporary setback. They whipped the people into a hysterical frenzy by preaching terrifying sermons about the brave soldiers who had marched into the heart of sorcery and evil to save the world from destruction. Fearful that the forces of darkness would raise a sorcerous army of serpents and demons from the desert, the Church forbade any trade with the Crescent Empire. The sanction hurt the *Ruzgar'hala* worse than any other tribe because they had run a profitable trading enterprise in eastern Jesalute and the port town of Rahajeel.

The retreat of the Vaticine Army was only temporary. Now that they knew where the desert was, they came up with a plan to destroy the evil that lurked there. For the *Atlar-vahir* and *Kurta-kir*, life was a daily struggle to survive the Crusader onslaughts. They formed a temporary alliance so that they could prepare a joint defense. What was confusing for the Crescents was that there appeared to be some genuinely good people among the Poor Knights who seemed to understand their simple way of life. However, they were still infidels and a threat to the Empire's continued survival, so only the ones who agreed to convert to *patika* on the spot were spared.

AV 1308: The End of the Second Crusade

In the end, however, it was not the efforts of the Crescents, but an internal development within the crusading army that led to a permanent cessation of hostilities. The Poor Knights of the Prophet, long considered the Vaticine's most devout soldiers, were condemned by the Church as heretics. The Knights were executed and the Church declared the Crescent borders closed to all faithful, effectively ending the Second Crusades. In effect, this edict did not offend the Empire. As far as the crescents were concerned, as long as the *yavanci* stayed on their side of the mountain, they could rot. The prophecies spoke of a time when Darkness would rise up from the West, so closing the borders might actually delay the cataclysm. Besides, there was ample opportunity for profit from trading routes within the Empire. Neither Ussura nor Cathay had made such a ridiculous ruling, so overall the sanctions simply meant fewer encounters with the pale unwashed wine-guzzlers from the west.

The one group who retained their connections with the Empire was the Bernoulli family of Vodacce. Thanks to their powerful influence within the Vaticine Church, they retained their trade status despite the edicts against Crescent contact. They became the sole dealers in Crescent goods for most of Théah, and expanded their monopoly into a huge power base. Members of the Bernoulli family can still be found in the Empire today, trading for goods and bringing word to the Crescents of dealings in the heathen west.

AV 1349: Treaties With the North

In the mid-14th century, an outbreak of the White Plague swept across Théah. It lasted only a few months, but still had an effect on the people of western Théah. The Crescent Empire was spared those ravages, however, and continued life as it always had. In 1349, the old Caliph arranged the marriage of his eldest daughter Elenya to Stefan Dushanov, a powerful prince who controlled the southern side of the Gora Bolshoi mountains on the Ussuran border. Unlike the other cities controlled by the Somojez, this area remained treacherous and often impassible due to the fierce winter storms. The marriage was intended to seal an alliance which would hopefully secure the Empire's northern borders. Although not particularly enthusiastic about the arrangement, the strong-minded Elenya was fiercely faithful to her tribe and set off with a sizeable dowry for her new husband.

No sooner had the caravan left the plains and headed into the foothills when it was attacked by a renegade band of Ussurans, led by a vicious chieftain who styled himself "Khan of the Mountains." He kidnapped the bride, stole the dowry and sent word to the groom that his wife-to-be would not be returned to him. Elenya knew a bully when she saw one, so she pretended to acquiesce, thanking him profusely for saving her from a hideous marriage. Appealing to his inflated ego, she expressed interest in becoming one of the Khan's wives and offered to dance for him. Her exotic beauty completely overwhelmed the mountain man to the point where he never saw her drop the sleeping powder into his cup. Once he and his guards were incapacitated for the night, she freed the other captives and rode off into the mountains.

She arrived at Stefan's stronghold, dirty, tired and bedraggled, midway through a wedding ceremony. A stunned silence reigned as the dark-haired girl pushed her way through the crowd and stood before the startled assemblage. The wedding was halted and Stefan led her to a private chamber where he explained that everyone thought she was dead. He had not been particularly happy about the match either and took her "death" as a sign that he could marry the girl he loved. Without wishing to cast aspersions on her family or her tribe, there was now the question of her eligibility, given what might have happened at the hands of the Khan. Elenya agreed that under the circumstances, her family would not be disgraced if she didn't marry, as long as she returned home with the dowry intact, or with suitable recompense for her losses. The prince agreed and promised to add a sizable sum in addition to the funds she had lost. After a long bath, she joined the revelers and celebrated with Stefan and his bride.

Elenya gathered a small band of loyal followers and began the journey home, saddlebags bulging with treasure. She took a route that would not bring her in contact with the greedy Khan and eventually arrived back in the Empire, wiser for the experience. There was no question now of her marrying, and she was content to remain single until very late in life.

In 1355 word came that Stefan Dushanov died under mysterious circumstances and his son Ivan Stefanov asked for "Aunt" Elenya's help restoring order to his government. Once again, Elenya took to horseback and arrived thankfully without incident. The older nobles remembered her and offered their respects, while the younger ones soon learned to respect her judgement. As fate would have it, she fell in love with Stefan's cousin, a handsome warrior named Alexei who was many years her junior, and married him. When Ivan died in a hunting accident several months after her arrival, the nobles came to Alexei and Elenya and offered them the throne of the small holding. There she lived the remainder of her life.

AV 1360: The Creation of the Sultánate

The *Kurta-kir* tribe had given the Empire most of its greatest rulers. Chief among them was Murakhan al'Tazir, a brilliant general with tremendous personal charisma who undertook the permanent unification of the tribes. He believed that the sanctions issued against the Crescent Moon by the Vatican Church would not last forever and in the meantime, it behooved the

tribes to consolidate their power more formally. To this end, he made a historic presentation at the annual gathering in Edirne.

Murakhan spoke before a full house in the great stadium, explaining that this year held more important business than games and dancing — if they failed to formally align, the day might come when the stadium would lie in ruins and they would all be slaves to the infidel masters. Sooner or later, the *yavanci* would return, and the tribes had best be ready for them. For several days, the chieftains and their entourages sat in the stadium, shouting and arguing over his words. The *Aldiz'ahali* were generally unconcerned because everyone — even their own countrymen — left them alone; only Cathayan merchants and Crescent pirates entered the Mirror Sea. They could not foresee a situation where a *yavanci* would even be able to make it as far as the eastern side of their territory.

The *Atlar-vahir* chieftain saw the wisdom of Murakhan's suggestion but did not understand why Murakhan should be the ruler. After all, the *Atlar-vahir* holdings were as large as his. In response, Murakhan called upon the *rahib* of Mt. Karada who reminded them that of all the creatures, the great gray wolf held dominion over the plains. As the chieftains nodded over his words, Murakhan further observed that the alliance had been in effect for centuries; formalizing it under his leadership would strengthen the region against any incursion. Since none could dispute his charisma or leadership, they finally agreed to his plan.

Murakhans first two acts as ruler were to establish the *Meklis Kabal'e*, the Council of Tribes, whose membership would consist of the various chieftains, along with their head shaman and chief warrior. Murakhan appointed his brother as the new head of the *Kurta-kir* clan. The second proclamation was a change in title from *caliph*, which means "successor" to *Sultán*, which means "ruler." Thus Murakhan severed the final tie between the Empire and Castille. According to the great Vendel scholar Wolf von Leonhard:

With Sultán Murakhan came a sweeping change: from a loose collection of nomadic tribes, constantly at the mercy of nature to an entity that could actually begin to consider itself a civilization. Freed from the constant fear of death from desiccation and vicious animals, the people of the Crescent Empire now faced a new challenge: learning to live in one place with neighbors who were not going to pack up and leave for higher pastures when spring came.

Murakhan himself was more than a nomadic warrior. He was shrewd, ruthless and confident. He created a personal army of soldiers, called *Yeniser'is*, who were completely devoted to him. When he walked among them, they called out to him, offering him a seat by their campfire, the choicest morsels from their cooking pots, and water from their own drinking skins. He knew them all by name and shared a greeting or a confidence with as many as he could. He also displayed great compassion and wisdom as well as stern but eminently fair justice. He knew that gathering the tribes under one banner was easier than keeping them united, so he did his best to respect their differing traditions, charging his administrative advisors to act with honor. Those who did not were dispatched quickly.

Despite a well-deserved title as Defender of the Crescent Faith, Sultán Murakhan was not without some tolerance for other religions (though his favorite debating technique was to find a way to prove that all the faiths of Théah had indeed sprung that of the Crescent Empire.) He even permitted those of other faiths to live within the boundaries of the Empire, although he made sure that they were watched closely. However, he insisted that his black-clad *Yeniser'is* all followed the true Faith. As tolerant as he was, he was firmly committed to the Crescent Empire and warned his people against the evils of assimilation, which would lead to weakness and domination by the infidel powers to the west.

He was a kindly father who took pride in his many children and treated his wives with as much fairness as he could. Infidel women from Ussura and Cathay lived in his harem and he permitted them to worship as they pleased as long as they did so in private and did not advocate overthrow of his rule. Every year on his birthday, he called them before him and offered them the chance to make him a gift of their conversion. Those who did received lavish gifts and were moved into the main part of the harem; those who did not were permitted to return to their sequestered area without punishment.

AV 1389: The Battle of Razgrad

Despite Sultán Murakhan's brilliant leadership, however, keeping the peace among the tribes was more difficult than making it. In the northeast, the *Jadur-rihad* of the Adaz'uk continued to chafe under what they saw as subjugation by the *Kurta-kir*. Urged by members of the Safadim, they joined forces with Ussuran dissidents to overthrow the

Empire's yoke. The forces of Sultán Murakhan took the field near Razgrad led by his eldest son Bayazed, nicknamed *Yildirim* ("Lightning"), Bayazed was impetuous, unpredictable and superstitious, but beloved by his devoted cadre of personal warriors. The battle was fierce with many casualties on both sides, including the elderly Sultán himself, but in the end, the Empire triumphed. The rebel leaders were put to death, and the new Sultán installed a garrison in the northeast cities to ensure obedience. Bayazed cemented his new regime with one last execution; he always suspected that his uncle was not satisfied with being chieftain of the *Kurta-kir*, so his first act as ruler was to order the man's death. The public execution took place mere hours after Bayazed's formal coronation.

As the years went on, Sultán Bayazed became more and more erratic, often storming through the harem late at night, demanding to be entertained. He claimed that terrible dreams haunted his sleep, but the physicians and priests and the tribal shamen could find nothing physically wrong with him. The court physicians were conferred and presented their findings to an emergency session of the *Meklis Kabal'e*: the Sultán had gone mad.

Despite his erratic behavior, the Sultán's *Yenicer'is* were still fanatically devoted to him and any attempt to force his abdication would cause even greater problems. After several secretive discussions, the tribal leaders hit upon a solution. They contacted head of the *Qatih'l'i*, a sinister band of assassins in the southern mountains. Within a matter of months, the poor Sultán was dead of a strange "wasting disease."

AV 1444-AV 1574: A New Dynasty

With Bayazed gone, the Empire suffered a decline. For some thirty years, it struggled to maintain its unity under a string of weak Sultáns. Then in 1444, the current Sultán's eldest daughter married the son of the *Ruzgar'hala* chieftain, an able young man named Mehmet ben Seliman. The Sultán saw in his son-in-law qualities missing in his own son — a quick intelligence, an understanding of strategy and a gift for leadership. More and more, he confided in Mehmet, finding great wisdom in the young man's advice. When the Sultán proclaimed Mehmet his successor, his advisors were thrilled. His son, however, was less than pleased with the pronouncement and his mother, the *Ilka-Kadin*, was utterly furious. Together mother and son plotted to hasten the

Sultán's demise. Thanks to a watchful *Yeniser'i*, however, the two were caught in the act of poisoning the old man's *kaffe*. A struggle ensued, during which the *Ilka-Kadin* swallowed the poison herself and fatally stabbed her son as he knelt over her dying body.

Mehmet proved an able and wise ruler, as did his descendents. He instructed his son Saleem that preservation of unity was the most important thing; that in a sense, Saleem should consider the concept of a "nation" as he would a tribe. Saleem's son and grandson followed in their predecessors' footsteps. Sadly, the grandson, who was without issue, died in 1574 before he could name a successor. For the first time in almost 170 years, the *Meklis Kaba'e* faced the dilemma of appointing a new monarch. Once again, they turned to the *Kurta-kir*, this time to the Muradim family. It would prove a very wise choice. From this line came a succession of Sultáns who began the great building program and set about the construction of the Royal Palace of Iskandar, one of the most beautiful palaces in all of Théah. Their fostering of public bazaars encouraged people to move into the cities. For the first time, it was actually possible to take a census with some assurance. The Empire thrived as the apparatus of government grew larger and more immense. Inevitably, corruption flourished within its ranks.

AV 1571-AV 1648: Pirates

Despite the ongoing restrictions against trade with the Crescent Empire, western Théan adventurers and entrepreneurs continued to trek eastward, careful to avoid the Inquisition's patrols. Even with the threat of pirates, many found it easier to reach the Empire by sea. In 1571, in an effort to stop the incursions, a large fleet of Crescent pirates tried to claim the Bernoulli island of Amozare. The battle raged for a full day but in the end the Crescent pirates were defeated. While the Sultán and his council were not particularly crushed to see the pirates destroyed, it served to remind them that the western heathens remained dangerous.

Piracy, however, was still a pressing concern. The battle for Bernoulli's island had destroyed the most dangerous raiders, but smaller bands constantly harassed merchant shipping. They would strike from hidden coves along the shoreline, often taking their prizes within sight of friendly harbors. Ships from Cathay proved particularly tempting targets, as did Vodacce vessels belonging to the Bernoulli family.

Around 1640, a new threat rose in the Crescent seas. A fanatical raider calling himself Kheired-Din launched his first raid on the mainland of western Théah, attacking a coastal town and taking many citizens as slaves. He soon garnered a fearsome reputation among Crescents and non-Crescents alike, committing atrocities that made even the most hardened warrior blanch. His personal fleet of Corsairs raided up and down southern Théah, striking with near-impunity. He claimed to be following a holy vision, promising to usher in a new age of the world. But his efforts proved as damaging to the Crescent Empire as they did to the rest of Théah, and the Sultán put a tremendous price on the Corsair's head. As yet, no one has managed to claim it.

AV 1663: The Lion Prophecy

Twenty-five years ago, while on a visit to the tribal homeland during the month of *Aslan*, the *Ilka-Kadin* gave birth to a son in the women's tent of the *Kurta-kir*. After the child was swaddled and lying contented in his mother's arms, a mewling sound rose from a corner of the tent. Apparently, a wolf had crawled into the tent and given birth to a cub. The shaman and the elders of the tribe fell on their knees in wonder, certain that this was the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy. In 1663, Timur Aslan Cihangir was crowned Sultán with the full blessing of his late predecessor. Since then, the nation has waited expectantly to see if indeed he would become the greatest ruler the Crescent Empire has ever known.

The Present

Most of what has occurred during the past tumultuous year did not directly affect the Crescent Empire. The Montaigne Revolution, the developments in Castille... all passed by with nary a blink in the Crescents' eyes. Some relief aid was rendered to the victims of the earthquake in Vodacce, which sank Prince Caligari's island beneath the sea. The Sultán believed that the Vaticine Church would not have acted likewise under similar circumstances, and besides, the tenets of his faith required him to aid those who had suffered a natural disaster.

Of greater concern were the screams of pain that awakened the capital on the morning of Corantine 1, 1668 when every mystic through Théah — including the Crescent Empire and Cathay — came awake with a terrible vision. The Island of the Sunken Eye, an ancient Syrnych stronghold lying deep beneath the Mirror Sea, was

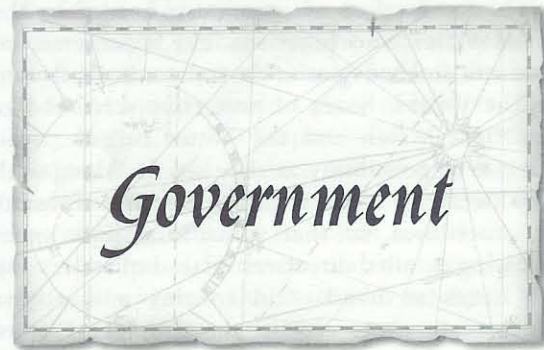


threatening to rise again. Wise men, scholars, monks, shamen — anyone with a shred of psychic ability — dedicated their efforts towards finding the cause of the continuing visions. On Septimus 1, Kheired-Din and a renegade Explorer named Guy McCormick raised the ancient island for some unknown purpose. The chambers of the Sultán's palace were already full of religious people clamoring for an audience, and now statesmen, politicians, military advisors and tribal representatives descended on Iskandar, demanding to know what the Sultán planned to do about this latest disaster.

Luckily, things stabilized quickly. Though its rise was momentous, the Island did not seem to pose any immediate threat. Whatever dread powers lay within it did not rush out and consume the world, nor did it cause any direct threats to the Empire. Its power seemed more diffuse, affecting the seas to the distant west more than the placid waters of the Mirror. While Cabora itself appeared stable, however, the reaction of the rest of Théah was not. The Sultán knows that the major powers of Western and Northern Théan signed the Treaty of Cabora on Octavus 18, that Ussura will not allow any

expeditions bound for Cabora to dock at their ports, and that Church spies are sabotaging any ships which may have stopped at the island. In light of these developments, one of the top items on his list is the establishment of a real Crescent Navy and he has begun investigating possible candidates for Admiral among the *Aldiz'ahali*. He has also made an arrangement to meet privately with Bayana Meryam bint Saliha (see page 63) to learn more about her theories of navigation.

What this bodes, no one can say. Perhaps it heralds the beginning of a new age of cooperation with the west. Perhaps, as some say, it marks the ultimate doom of the Empire. But the Sultán is confident that he and his advisors can react to any eventuality, and that his people will endure whatever hardship may be coming. The Crescents have survived for millennia deprived of outside contact, with no one to depend upon but them-selves. The Sultán considers them the strongest people in the world, exhorting his people to face the future without fear.



The government of the Crescent Empire is very structured and bureaucratic. For people with their origins in the nomadic way of life, they have managed to create an increasingly elaborate hierarchy, perhaps as a reflection of the natural order they see around them. In any event, like most structures of this type, it enjoys a certain degree of efficiency in some areas, but in others is bogged down by the sheer number of people it employs. In a sense it suffers from the same disease that killed ancient Numa: a corrupt and top-heavy government trying to manage a far-flung Empire. Sultán Timur is aware of this and is trying to weed out such inefficiency before it brings his nation to a grinding halt.

This wasn't always the case. In the early days of the Empire, the government functioned much more efficiently. But as the levels of bureaucracy increased, so did the corruption. Administrators were initially selected based on their competence,

training and appropriateness for the job. Promotion was based on meritorious service. Communication up and down the chain of command was immediate, the way it had been in the tribe. As the population in the cities increased and the focus turned from the tribe to the throne, the bureaucracy took on a life of its own.

Competition for government offices increased, bringing pressure to bear on those who made the appointments. Appointments seemed to go to people with more money than other candidates or better family connections or the ability to dig up information that could be manipulated to their advantage. The shift in the quality and morality of government, coupled with the distance of the outlying areas, created a situation ripe for corruption, like the Darkness, which spread its oily fingers into the provincial areas. Officials and tax collectors in the outlying territories could purchase an office, then extract exorbitant taxes, line their own pockets, and still send the requisite amount to the capital.

The top level of government is headed by the Grand Vizier who functions like a Secretary of State and chief advisor to the Sultán. Beneath him are the Viziers, heads of protective services like the Night Watch and the Water Brigade, who delegate responsibility as they see fit. Along with the hierarchy comes protocols and formats for procedures, so that valuable time is spent following detailed directives instead of addressing the issues at hand. Add to this a duplicate structure in every city in the Crescent Empire plus the tribal government structure (that thankfully runs far more smoothly, but still requires a laborious integration with the larger government), and you have the makings of a monster.

Legal System

The *meklis kabal'e* of each tribe, sits in judgment when called upon to do so. They base their decisions on the code of law as presented in the *Ilahi'Tomar* and amended with commentary; there is very little that a *hakim* has not seen. *Hakim*, formal judges, are appointed for 12-year terms, at which point their service is reviewed by the tribal chieftain and the head shaman (or, on the imperial level, by the Sultán and the High Priest.) If it appears that the decisions rendered have been fair and just, in keeping with the tenets of *patika*, the *hakim* receives another appointment.

The *meshveret* is the body of common law comprised of types of cases, the appropriate rulings based on *patika* and the judgments rendered. In addition to a growing number of clerks and scribes employed to keep the information current, there are a group of *ulema* or religious scholars who serve as reviewers and commentators. They analyze the decisions, noting those that are both exceptionally good and highly questionable. Every court in the land compiles a copy of their judgments every six months and sends the document to Iskandar.

In the Crescent Empire, a person is considered guilty until proven innocent, except when the accused is of higher social or military rank than the accuser. Both parties are encouraged to bring witnesses or produce signed affidavits attesting to their innocence. They may hire an *avukat* to present them. If they are found guilty, they do not need to pay the *avukat's* fee.

A woman may bring charges against a man, even a wife against a husband, but a slave has no legal rights nor does a concubine. If a concubine has a complaint, she must bring it before a harem council over which the First Wife presides. In extreme cases, the husband may be called upon to make a judgment, but it has to be serious enough to warrant his presence. (See page 29 for more about women in the Empire.)

Meklis Kabal'e (Tribal Council)

Literally the "sitting tribe," a *meklis kabal'e* is composed of the chieftain, the leaders of the warriors, an *eski-maluma* (a wise woman, usually the eldest in the tribe who is either unmarried or widowed) and the shaman. This group determines the outcome of all types of disputes and negotiations, including treaties and agreements with other tribes over grazing and water rights; inheritances and successions; marriages; and abuses of hospitality. They also preside over formal resolutions of *dogru ve davasi*. The further away one is from the main cities — especially Iskandar — the more (stubbornly) reliant the tribe is on the decisions of its own council.

On a national level, the council structure is repeated, with the Sultán presiding over his generals, the High Priest, his Grand Vizier, the Chief *Hakim*, the head of the Watch, a cadre of ministers and a representative from each major city and tribe. If the head of the Eyes of the Peacock (see page 25) is there, no one except the Sultán knows who it is. On rare occasions, *Ilka-Kadin* Hasna may be asked to attend, but she sits behind a screen or is lightly veiled to protect her

from the prying eyes of those who do not have the right to gaze upon her. She is consulted when items on the agenda include hospitals, orphanages, education and charity work.

Royalty and Nobility

"In the end, what drove the nomads of the Crescent Empire from their tents to the city was not drought or flood or disease or war. It was the unrelenting desire for a garden."

— Wolf von Leonhard

For the most part, when they were not fighting Vaticine invaders or each other, life for the Crescent nomads was a good one. Over time they developed a pattern of migrations that took them to grazing lands in spring and summer and sheltered caves and valleys during winter. They believed that the cycle of their lives, as proscribed by the Great Creator, enabled them to practice the laws of *patika* through their daily activities.

The chieftain, as the leader of the tribe, rules with the help of the tribal council. In some tribes, the head wife is a member of the council but this is not standard, although she might be consulted on domestic matters.

This structure has worked for centuries, providing a consistent infrastructure for tribal life. The chieftain can also call upon others in the tribe as needed to advise him. When the time of his passing comes, he lies in state in the great tent and announces his successor, usually his eldest son or a close male relative.

When the nomads drifted towards more permanent settlements, this structure remained more or less intact, but over time the title of "chieftain" seemed to lack the proper weight to describe a man who ruled over a permanent settlement. Those who prefer to follow the nomadic life still retain the title of "chieftain" with great pride and regard it as a sign that they have not strayed from the old ways.

There are relatively few titles in the Crescent Empire that do not refer to a person's position (i.e. High Priest or High Commander). Nobility is designated by the titles "bey" or "bayana" which translate to "lord" and "lady." There is no long-standing tradition of noble families in the Crescent Empire the way there is in the rest of Théah. The Sultán can elevate someone from the middle class to the nobility by a grant of land and formal recognition of the recipient's new status.

The titles used in the harem are simple: *Ilka-Kadin* is the chief or first wife. *Ikinci-Kadin* is the second wife, *Ucuncu-Kadin* third wife; and

Dorduncu-Kadin the fourth wife. Concubines and odalisques may have nicknames, like *Turkuvaz* (turquoise) or *Nessa* (joyful) but they hold no official title. The *Valide-Kadin*, the Sultán's mother, is the other titled woman in the harem. (More on harems can be found on page 30.)

Eyes of the Peacock

Most outsiders consider the people of the Crescent Empire incredibly superstitious and suspicious, and given what is known about life there, perhaps those feelings are justified. In a nation where even a perceived slight can elicit a dramatic and perhaps terminal reaction, people do not sleep as soundly as they might. To be fair, those who live in tribal encampments have the protection of their family and tribal guards. Those in cities and towns must rely on the local night watch and whatever security they have established in their homes.

For the Sultán, who is the most at risk in the Empire (except perhaps for the son of the *Ilka-Kadin*,) danger constantly lurks around the next corridor or hidden inside a piece of baklava. The history of the Crescent Empire is full of coups and assassinations, and in fact one of the reasons Muradkhan initiated the change in the ruler's title from *caliph* (successor) to *Sultán* (ruler) was to divert the Eye of Darkness that motivated treasonous acts against the man who sat upon the throne.

Another way to protect the monarch is to anticipate every possible action against him. To do this requires hundreds of people to watch and report what they see. Thus was born the Eyes of the Peacock, the extremely secret police of the Crescent Empire, which exists for one reason — to protect the Sultán's life and preserve the royal line. So clandestine is the organization that only the Sultán knows the identity of the head of the Order.

There are no specific requirements for joining the Eyes of the Peacock. The needs of the Order are such that many different types of skills and talents are useful. However, all agents share two common traits: loyalty to the crown and an unshakeable faith in *patika*. Those who serve as Eyes do not know the identity of other agents. They have an elaborate system by which they relay coded information through a contact. Some may receive specific missions or certain people to observe. Some may act as servants in the houses

of suspected traitors; others may be asked to undertake a marriage that will place them in an advantageous position to gain information.

There are distinct advantages to service as an Eyes of the Peacock. To insure that debt or other financial matters do not pressure the agent, all accounts are settled prior to beginning service. It is understood that should the agent incur debt again, his or her services are immediately terminated. All agents sign an agreement that spells out the consequences of betraying the Order. When the agent signs with a *tughrum* or thumbprint, they have in essence pledged their lives to the Order and will be unable to deny the signature. A signed agent may ask to be relieved of the agreement under extraordinary circumstances, such as the death of a spouse or child, or grave illness. The head of the Order reviews the request and makes the final decision; the agent is notified through his or her regular contact.

Agents who provide intermittent information or regular non-specific reports receive a payment for all information that can be verified, while those who agree to undertake a mission receive a comfortable stipend, although not enough to draw attention to themselves. If it turns out that the information submitted is not verifiable or is patently untrue, the agent runs the risk of losing his job at the very least.

Military Service

Like flames driven before the wind I shall pursue the enemies of my homeland, nor shall I endure even one to remain alive; whether he falls under a shower of arrows or the thunder of my horse's hooves, I shall rejoice as his blood soaks the ground.

— Crescent battle song

The spirit of the warrior is the driving force behind the Crescent military. While brilliant tacticians and charismatic generals are valued people, without a standing army, they might as well be pushing *ajedrez* pieces across a board. Even the simplest *askari* has a strong faith in the Creator and is secure in the knowledge that if he falls in battle, his entrance in *savasi-bahshé*, or the Blessed Garden of Warriors, is assured. Like other elements of the Crescent government, the army is elaborately structured, with numerous ranks and positions to fill various duties. Though they number in the hundreds, the most important are detailed below:

Askari

The *askari* is the basic foot soldier. The life of a soldier is a fairly good one, all things considered. He has food, warm clothing and a decent stipend. Promotion in the army is based on merit and performance, although nobility enters at a higher rank than the common recruit. Every member of the Army is issued the following kit: tunic, trousers, black fabric for a turban, boots, and a pack that can hold up to three days' rations should he be separated from his comrades or otherwise isolated. Weapons are provided based on skill and training.

Yenicer'i

Normally, these highly trained, intensely loyal soldiers serve as the Sultán's personal bodyguard in peace and in war. If necessary some of them they may be called upon to serve as a separate unit during combat, but they are rarely far away from him. Although *bekcim* (see below) serve as the majority of guards in the royal harem, the *yenicer'i* are disdainful of the "amateurs," as they call them and insist on taking full responsibility for guarding the Sultán's private quarters. When a member of the *yenicer'i* retires, he receives land and a handsome purse, as well as a small stipend for life.

Bekcim

These are the guards of a harem, regardless of its size. Even a simple merchant with only two wives and two concubines can hire someone for a few coins a month to protect his women. The *bekcim* in the royal harem are actually well-trained professional soldiers and bodyguards regardless of what the elitist *yenicer'i* may say about them. The scimitar is the preferred weapon of most *bekcim* who guard the interior quarters, while a spear or trident is used by guards posted at gates. The job of *bekcim* is good for retired soldiers who are too old to fight or who received minor injuries that would not impede their ability as a member of the watch.

Because of their generally bucolic existence, the people of the Crescent Moon were often underestimated as opponents by foes who regarded them as unskilled barbarians; however, opponents found out, usually the hard way, that their skill at horsemanship and mobile combat archery was unmatched in all of Théah. Woe betide the attacker who rides off, thinking he has outrun his enemy! The range of their short curved bows make them a deadly force both in the inter-

tribal wars that spring up over rich grazing land or watering holes, and in combat against armies of other nations.

Tribal Levees

In the tribes of the Crescent Empire, the ability to defend oneself is an important survival skill. Two basic units handle tribal combat situations:

Akhis

The *akhis* are the equivalent of infantry, usually young men and women who take up the sword and make an extrafamilial pledge to each other as sword-brother or sister. They train together and fight in small units, confident in each others pledge to protect their back.

Akinji

The *akinji*, usually men, are the cavalry whose bond with their mount is unusually strong, especially among the *atlar'vahir*. The *atlar'okcu* are the elite horse archers considered mystical creatures by some Théans because of their phenomenal riding skills and deadly accuracy.

These units learn to fight together based on the styles developed within their own tribe. More accustomed to guerilla tactics than rigorous structured maneuvers, they also provide auxiliary power for the regular army but their participation is seasonal and their first allegiance is definitely to their tribe. When army commanders include tribal levees in their ranks, they must also ensure that inter-tribal rivalries do not break out, or they could lose a cadre of fighters in the flash of a angrily-drawn dagger.

Ghazi

A more dependable source of additional power are the *ghazim*, fighting units assigned to individual *rahibi*. Recruited from across the nation, as well as from the brotherhood of the

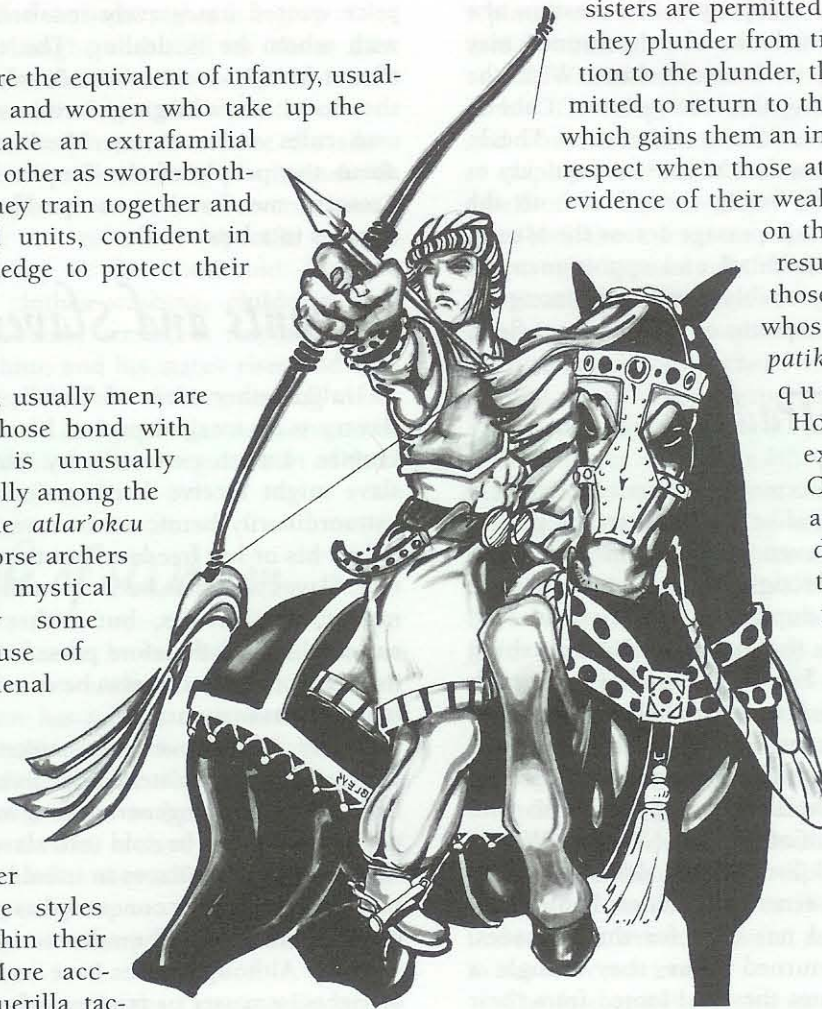
rahib himself, their main task is to protect the Empire's borders against invasion, especially from Vaticine and Inquisition forces. One of the other responsibilities assigned to *ghazim* is to bring non-believers to the true faith of *patika*, which might involve anything from organizing prayer meetings to forceful conversion. After making their allotted tithe, the lay brothers and sisters are permitted to retain whatever they plunder from trespassers. In addition to the plunder, these troops are permitted to return to their tribes regularly, which gains them an increased measure of respect when those at home saw visible evidence of their wealth and *seref*, glory, on the battlefield. (As a result, sadly, there are those among the ranks whose true devotion to *patika* is somewhat question-able. However, after the experience of the Crusades, the *rahibi* and the government do not wish to have their lands overrun by unwashed, wine-guzzling infidels again, and thus turn a blind eye to the situation.)

The Navy

At the present time, there is no formal standing Navy in the Crescent Empire.

For centuries, no one ventured far into the Forbidden Sea from the west, so there was no need to defend the coastline. The only ships coming from Cathay are merchant vessels called "dragon wings" because of their huge sails. Ussuran vessels traversing the length of the Mirror were also commercial rather than military. The Crescent merchant "fleet" consists informally of a wide variety of vessels, captained mostly by *Aldiz'ahali* who are exceptionally good navigators.

There are also numerous pirates running along the southern coast, including the infamous Kheired-Din. Run-ins between merchants and pirates are frequent, but of less concern to the



government than the recent influx of western Théans from Rahajeel and Jesalute. Although they would not say it to the Sultán, some of the older tribal chieftains are quite happy when a Crescent pirate intercepts a western Théan vessel. They have grown accustomed to life without external interference and have no wish to see it change.

On the other hand, the chieftain of the *Aldiz'ahali* has been lobbying for the creation of a navy for years and it looks like the council may finally be starting to listen to him. With the incidents surrounding the emergence of Cabora, and the attendant attention of western Théah, Sultán Timur realizes that he must act quickly to form a navy or risk losing control of both the Forbidden Sea and safe passage across the Mirror. The post of High Admiral and appointment of senior officers will probably come from among the veteran *Aldiz'ahali* captains of the merchant fleet.

Merchant Trade

The life of the successful Crescent merchant is one to be envied. Unlike his brethren, he gets to travel extensively, even on occasion to Cathay. Trade goods pass through the Empire the likes of which cannot be duplicated anywhere else in Théah. It is said that one of distinguishing characteristics of a *bahshé* in Paradise is the rich scent of spices, which is easy to believe. The spice trade in the Crescent Empire includes pepper, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, ginger and saffron, and provides an excellent living for those who send caravans to Cathay and Théah. Woven goods, especially *kilim*, are in demand. These items would have remained hidden behind the mountains if it had not been for the Crusades. When crusaders returned home, they brought a rich array of treasures they had looted from their battles. In this way, western Théan developed a taste for the exotic, paving the way for people like the Bernoulli family to become rich by dealing in Crescent goods.

The Bernoullis and their minions received dispensation from the Vaticine Church as the only westerners permitted to conduct trade with the otherwise sanctioned Crescent Empire. The growing demand for goods caused Prince Bernoulli to ally with minor families and hire mercenaries to maintain his vigorous trade activities. In addition to the perishable goods that his company of merchants import, there is also

the quiet but extremely lucrative gem trade. Emeralds in particular, along with opals, diamonds and rubies are in high demand and Prince Bernoulli is happy to oblige.

Unlike doing business with a Vendel, part of the joy for a Crescent merchant is the ritual of haggling and bartering. A person who goes to a Crescent market and buys an item at the first price quoted has gravely insulted the merchant with whom he is dealing. The trade language, *tikaret-baraji*, was not developed just as shorthand; it is a language in its own right with its own rules and customs. Much can be learned about the people of the Empire by watching a Crescent merchant's eyes sparkle as he or she engages in a brisk trade.

Servants and Slaves

Unlike other areas of Théah, the concept of slavery is an integral part of life in the Crescent Empire. Under extraordinary circumstances, a slave might receive freedom for performing an extraordinarily heroic act or save enough money to buy his or her freedom, but those instances are rare. Slaves were not freed upon the death of their master or mistress, but rather considered a commodity and therefore passed on as part of an inheritance. They can also be counted as part of a tribute or tax payment.

There is a slave class among native-born Crescents, unfortunates whose lives never change from generation to generation. A man who fails to pay his taxes can be sold into slavery, along with his entire family. Victors in tribal land wars might take the people they conquered as personal slaves, or sell them at a local market to add to the tribe's treasury. Although slaves have no social standing or rights, a master or mistress who abuses a slave unmercifully can be called to account for breaking the law: an admonition in the *Ilahi'Tomar* forbids cruelty towards those who are not enemies.

Another source of slaves is raids on borders shared with other nations. Ussurans probably represent the largest race of slaves in the Empire because they are strong and hard-working, and their borders are not guarded as fiercely as other countries. The women are also favored as servants and concubines; many Crescent men find their pale coloring and light hair an intriguing change from the dark beauty of Crescent women. Slave traders do a rousing business in the Empire,

especially in the large slave markets of Iskandar and Erivan. Pirates may fill a commission for slaves from a particular nation, either for the patron's own use or as a gift for the Sultán. These commissions come with a high price tag, but the nobles who place the order can afford it.

Servants have a higher social standing than slaves. They receive wages for their work and, while not afforded the same rights as higher classes, cannot be bought and sold as slaves can. Although not considered viable as wives, female servants can be elevated to the status of concubine. For the most part, servants are the silent force behind the smooth running of a household, whether on the plains or in a city. Servants have a variety of roles specific to their responsibility in the household: kitchen, housekeeping, clothes washing, childcare, gardener, etc. The senior servant is responsible for those beneath him; and his status rises and falls based on the performance of those serving under him. Merchants and craftsmen also use servants to do the menial tasks that are a regular part of their daily routine.

The Role of Women

This may a man do: he may bring four women into his tents as wives but no more. In His wisdom, the Great Creator has set this as a sacred number and thus he reminds men that there are only four seasons and four directions in which they may face. That the tribe may thrive and prosper a man may also take women into his tents to serve him and his wives. However, no man may take more women than he can sustain in comfort.

— excerpt from the Ilahi'Tomar

The role of women in the Crescent Empire is not easily understood by those outside its boundaries. Women are objects of power, adoration and even property, depending where in the Empire they live. The perception in Western Théah is that Crescent women serve as sexual playthings for their dominating male husbands and masters, but the truth is much more complicated.

To understand this issue, one must recall the Crescent creation myths in which the Mother of Life figures heavily. She is, in many ways, the Great Creator's partner in much of what occurs in the natural world. She is also the keeper of great

mysteries; she can bleed without dying and she can create life. For these reasons, she is revered and worshipped, and in some tribes there is strong evidence that the tribal leadership may at one time have been a matriarch, the remnants of which can be seen in the role of wise woman. As the prehistoric communities progressed towards what is termed "civilization," the patriarchy replaced the older structure, thus changing the role of women.

Can a Crescent woman be anything she wishes to be? That depends mostly on where she lives and what her tribe affiliation is. Given the cultural emphasis on education among city and town dwellers, at the very least all girls of merchant class and above learn to read. Some servants are also taught but as a rule, slaves are not. However, if an intelligent slave comes to the attention of her master, she may be taught to read to the children.

Women can be teachers, although this is rare beyond those who instruct children. They can also earn a living by learning one of many trade skills, especially weaving *kilim*, sewing and cooking, either at an outdoor stand or in a large personal kitchen. One of the most common places women appear is at the bazaar, perhaps watching the shop for a male relative or hawking produce fresh off the farm. Women can also work in a *kaf-fehan* as a hostess. Dancing as entertainment is almost exclusively done by women, as noted below. There are also a number of successful female merchants and *kervan* traders. This is not an easy life and some female merchants are forced to dress as men to avoid slavers. However, they are also quite adept at defending themselves and have earned the grudging respect of the men with whom they do business. It should be noted that there are no women slavers, nor do women work in the slave market.

The farther away one goes from the cities the more equally distributed the daily tasks of the tribe become, especially those engaged in farming. While women do not as a rule hunt, they do fish, so it is not uncommon to see them working alongside men in coastal towns and villages. It is even possible (although extremely rare) for a woman to be a tribal chieftain; the succession usually passes through the male heirs and relatives, however. The one tribe in which this is not the case is the *Aldiz'ahali*. They have the most equitable distribution of power between men and women, due in part to their belief that the heavens are the purview of the Mother of Life and therefore distinctly female.



Harems

The word harem simply means “women’s quarters.” Thus a modestly successful merchant might have a wife and a few concubines, all of whom live together, separate from the rest of the domicile. In a large harem, such as the Sultán’s, there are several wives, many concubines, children, *odalisques* (female servants), *bekcim* and many slaves, both male and female. Keeping a household of that size running is a full-time job. Not only is there the full range of domestic tasks to be done, but the diversity of languages and customs must be accommodated to insure peace and tranquility. When the Sultán comes striding through the door after dealing with squabbling ministers all day, the last thing he wants to see is tears and a domestic crisis.

The structure of the harem has changed over time. Like their predecessors, royal wives hold great power because the continuation of the ruling line lies within them. To some extent, they are involved in training their sons in the ways of politics and on rare occasions have even acted as temporary regents. They are also the embodiment of the success of the reign for they oversee the convoluted internal structure of the harem. More than one reign has suffered when internecine politics threatened to overrun the confines of its carved doors. Struggles between the *ilka-Kadin*

(head wife) and an ambitious concubine are not uncommon, especially when the political machinations of the *Valide-Sultán* (the Sultán’s mother) threaten to undermine her son’s presence as monarch.

The job of managing the harem falls to the *mudur*, usually a late middle-aged man or a widow, someone unaffected by the temptations presented by that much female beauty and able to navigate the convoluted politics that inevitably come into play. The *Valide-Sultán* usually advises her son about a suitable person for this position, although if the Sultán’s mother has died, the interviewing and hiring falls to the *ilka-Kadin*. In any event, the *mudur* gathers a staff of trusted servants and *bekcim* or guards and keeps the household running as smoothly as possible.

Wealthier harems contain some of the most beautiful women in all of Théah. There are actually a fair share of women from southern Ussura whose thick honey-blond hair and dark blue eyes are considered a most felicitous combination. For some, concubinage in the great harem of Iskandar is infinitely preferable to spending the winter trying to eke out a living in the rugged *Kurtlar-dag*. *Odaliques* (usually virgins) are not usually considered worthy of presentation to the Sultán, but rather are assigned specific tasks in support of a concubine or wife. Those who display extraordinary beauty and talent receive training in dancing, writing, music and of course practice in the myriad ways to please the Sultán. The life of an *odalisque* is not unlike that of a butterfly. If she is fortunate enough to be presented to the Sultán, she spends one night with him. If she does not become pregnant, she returns to her duties or is perhaps given to one of his courtiers as a sign of favor. Naturally, if she gives birth to a son, she moves up the hierarchy into favored status. As long as she continues to hold the Sultán’s favor (and does not run afoul of harem politics), her position is secure.

Tribute and Taxation

The sword, the compass and the pen — all three have I wielded. I have listened to commands and argued great truths and measured distances farther than the mind can see. In the end, I know that I shall go out by the same door from whence I came.

— from *Contemplations By A Fountain* by
Celik al’Bahri

Until the reign of Sultán Murakhan, the throne's income came from a variety of sources: the national treasury, the family's personal treasury, tribute from tribes and merchants, and the spoils of war. The problem was that these sources had a finite limit or were unreliable. When Murakhan ascended the Peacock Throne, he charged Grand Vizier Yusuf Yacob Harun with finding a solution to the problem. After all, without steady income, how could they turn Iskandar into a fitting capital for such a glorious nation? Harun Bey wished to fill the Sultán's coffers to bursting with little concern about how some tribesman felt about sending an extra sheepskin to the capital. The Grand Vizier was one of the "new men" who paid lip service to his tribal origins but preferred to think of himself as a Crescent national. Under his ministrations, the laws expanded to incorporate a variety of new taxes:

Kharaj

A land tax from the towns, cities and monasteries paid from their treasury, either in coins or useful goods.

Jizya

A poll tax which counts children from the age of one. This tax is calculated by assessing property; crops if any, and livestock; tents, wives, concubines and children; and personal funds and goods. Failure to pay results in stiff punishment, despite the fact that a man in prison cannot harvest his crops or shear his sheep to pay the tribute. The ultimate punishment involves the entire family, including children, being sold into slavery to pay the debt.

Diwan

A religious tax to help support local monasteries and wandering *rahibs*. This tax grew out of the tradition of the tribe's support of the shaman, providing living accommodations and food so that he or she can focus on spiritual matters.

Tukar'tyn

A finance tax, mostly affecting merchants. Merchants are required to submit a tally of their annual gains and losses and pay tax accordingly. They can also to pay a percentage on all profits during the year instead. This tax is assessed against both land merchants and those with a

seafaring business. It is especially challenging for those who have to protect themselves against pirates in addition to the *tukar'tyn* and any tariffs charged by individual bazaars.

Askar'tyn

There is no formal conscription in the Crescent Empire. However, there is a special tax used to support the armed services that can be paid in coin, provisions or personal entrance into the army. Provisions can include housing and food items or offers to maintain and/or repair tents, ropes and interior furnishings. The tax can also be paid in livestock. In times of crises, of course, able-bodied Crescents are expected to support the Sultáns with their service or through tribal levees.

Naturally, the Empire's autonomous tribes did not easily take to formal taxation. It was one thing to send a brace of game birds and several sheepskins to the nearby town, but they would not tolerate the idea that someone could come onto tribal lands and decide how much the tribe owed to someone they had never seen and probably never would. Over time, tax collectors learned to bring an armed escort with them; the threat of a little extra power made extraction of monies easier. Wise tax assessors use a different approach. Rather than demand that the tribe simply accept the tax, the assessor follows the age-old tradition of guest-host and approaches the chieftain with gifts. He usually leaves the encampment with a full stomach, the required funds, and everyone's honor still intact.

Yavanci (merchants or adventurers) are required to pay for a *dhima* or contract of protection, which grants them safe passage through Crescent lands. Each tribe issues its own *dhima*, so depending on relations between tribes, a *dhima* from one tribe might not work in your favor if you show it to a guard from the neighboring tribe if the two groups have become hostile. Even if they are friendly, an additional payment will probably be required to honor the *dhima*, or of course, you will have to buy a new *dhima* from the tribe whose lands you wish to enter.

The Sultán's treasury is filled in a variety of ways. In the ancient days, territory and goods taken in battle became the property of the victorious tribe, to be divided as the chieftain saw fit. With the advent of a centralized government, the spoils of war have to be shared with the Sultán

through his representatives, the tax collectors. For many tribesmen, this feels uncomfortably like a distant cousin by marriage demanding a share of spoils for which he has made no effort.

A disturbing trend among tax collectors was the sale of their "routes" to the equivalent of bounty hunters who collected exorbitant taxes so that they could honor their contract and still line their own pockets. By the time such an assessment passed through several layers, the people are being forced to support more than just the throne. Several of the tribal chieftains have begun to contemplate some sort of tax revolt.



"Citizens of the Crescent Empire eat a healthy, if somewhat unsophisticated diet that includes animal meat and milk from a variety of herd animals. A nomadic people, they use the hides from their animals for clothing and shelter. As the seasons change, the herdsmen move about the land, grazing their herds in expansive pastures by the rivers and on smaller grassy plains. In the colder months and among tribes living in the mountains, they leap upon their swift horses and hunt, striking with unerring aim, as if they were one with their mount. As harsh as life may be at times for them, they are not without pleasure in their lives: music, dancing and above all, storytelling occupies their leisure time.

"For the most part, they are short to medium in stature with golden or olive-tinted skin and dark eyes that can shed tears over the beauty of a hand-crafted artifact or turn as hard as onyx when their honor has been challenged. In combat, they are cunning, belligerent and aggressive; their women were as fierce on the battlefield as their men. Those living in the west bear a strong resemblance to their Vodacce neighbors. One can see the influence of Ussura in the northern tribes, while those living in the East have the golden ivory-colored skin and almond eyes of their Cathayan ancestors. The rest — those living in the plains and along the southern

shores — bear the classic features we normally associate with the people of this nation."

— High Lord Cheung Yang Yue, Cathayan ambassador to the Crescent Empire, writing to the Emperor of Cathay

Nomadic Life

The majority of Crescent tribesmen who do not live in cities or towns make their livelihood as nomadic herdsmen. Their way of life is proscribed by the turn of the seasons, forcing them to move from place to place to find new grazing land and exchange their trade goods for items that they need. They do not have much use for coins, which have more value as dowry decorations than legal tender. They raise sheep and goats for the most part, although the *Atlar-vahir* also breed marvelous horses for sale. Tribes on the plains often raise chickens and other small poultry while tribes along the eastern and southern coasts are expert fishermen.

Their diets are simple, based on the crops they raise plus a rustic type of cheese made from goat milk, rice (which can be easily transported) and whatever vegetables and fruits they can get through barter. Most can make a bread of sorts out of ground grains, but when some of the tribes began to settle more or less in one place, they raised wheat and vegetables. Common beverages include fresh goat milk, *kaffe* (see page 35), and juices when they find fruit. Some of the tribes in the east have begun to adopt the Cathayan habit of drinking *chai*.

Despite their constant migration, these tribes are extremely devoted to the basic values of *pataka* and the belief that the tribe is the most important thing in their lives. They are loyal to their chieftain, the *Meklis Kabal'e*, and their shaman. As a rule, men and women share tasks, although men do the heavier outdoor work while women perform more domestic duties. In the tribes, marriages are arranged for girls when they are fairly young. If girls like their chosen husband, that is an added benefit, but the purpose of the arrangement is first and foremost the continued health of the tribe.

Customs

There is a dizzying array of social customs practiced in the Crescent Empire and no outsider could ever hope to master them all. However, a

few simple ones could mean the difference between lavish hospitality and the business end of a scimitar.

Greeting

When Crescent men meet each other, they incline their heads towards each other while placing their right hand over the center of their chest. The degree to which they bend the upper part of their body towards each other is determined by their relative ranks. The lower ranking person is always more deferential to the higher-ranking one. When Crescent women meet each other, they too incline their heads toward each other but they cross both hands, right over left, in the middle of their chest.

These greetings are appropriate for closely ranked people, or for anyone lower than the highest nobility. When a member of the merchant class or lower is in the presence of a nobleman, the bow must extend from the waist.

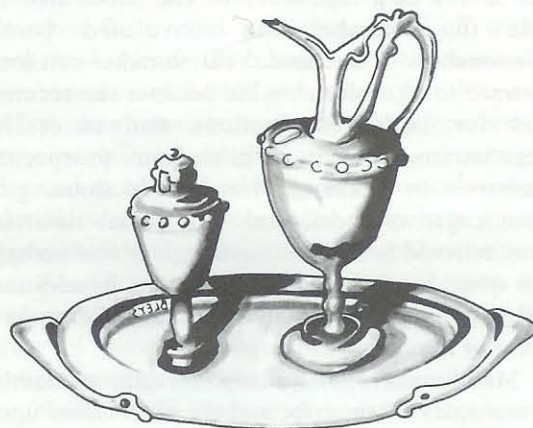
Servants must greet everyone above them with great deference; in the presence of nobility, they must kneel and remain in that position until given leave to rise. The only exception is if they are carrying food; then they must nod their heads as low as they can without spilling anything.

The presence of slaves is never acknowledged with any indication of deference; however, they are expected to bow to all servants and kneel in the presence of all above servant rank unless they are assisting a servant or accompanying their master or mistress. Failure to give deference is a punishable offense.

Eating

It is well known that Darkness sits at a person's left hand waiting to tempt them to stray from the light. Crescents never ever use their left hand to eat unless they are somehow unable to use their right hand due to loss of a limb or other disability. In their cases, they wear a blue bracelet as an indication that the a *rahib* or local shaman has blessed their left hand, relieving it of its customary stigma.

The first thing a host does when guests enter his house is to bring forth basins of scented water and fresh cloths, so that the guest may wash. A servant will come forward and assist the guest with the washing and removal of his or her shoes, offering soft slippers to be worn while the guest is in the house. In the case of extremely high-ranking guests, a servant will actually wash the guest's feet.



Thus refreshed, the host leads the guest into a central room where the ritual of *ekmeke ve sakal* is performed. Fresh bread is sprinkled with salt and offered as a token of all that the *mizafir-kalaba* or guest-host relation implies: while the guest is under the host's roof, no hostile action will be taken and no insult given. This is one of the most powerful customs in the land, one that no one takes lightly.

If the guest is present for a meal, the host offers him or her the choicest morsels. In response, the guest is careful not to take more than can be consumed. As a rule, there are no utensils at a Crescent table. Food is scooped up with pieces of *ekmeke* torn off large fresh rounds baked especially for the occasion. Utensils are considered an unnecessary intrusion in a person's enjoyment of food. Large cloth napkins are provided, as are bowls of water with lemon and rose petals for in-between washes. At the end of the meal, the hand washing ritual is repeated. Even in poor houses, there is at least one bowl of water and a clean cloth to be used at the beginning and end of a meal.

Gifts

When making a social call, one is expected to bring a small gift as a token. The gift need not be elaborate — a small basket of fruit or a single flower — but failure to express appreciation is considered highly insulting.

Matchmaking

One of the important people in any tribe is the matchmaker. Most matchmakers are widows who serve as part social director, part genealogist and

part wedding-planner. Along with the shaman, she serves as a repository of the tribe's history, able to remember the convoluted family relationships. A successful matchmaker can look forward to a comfortable life because she receives fees for both introductions and successful negotiations as well as gifts from prospective husbands in exchange for introductions, gifts from eager mothers, and "additional dowries" from relieved fathers whose daughter was perhaps not quite as attractive as her sisters. In addition, the matchmaker is invited to the wedding as a guest of honor.

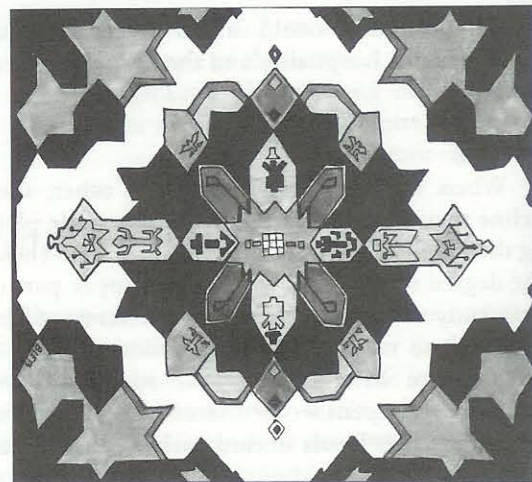
Matchmakers also keep records of family genealogies for the tribe and are often called upon when the time comes to name a child. Naturally, there are fees for such consultations as well. Matchmakers often have a close business relationship with the tribe's midwife.

Music

Most outsiders consider the music and instruments of the Crescent Empire to be somewhat reedy and atonal. However, it is simply a matter of taste. One does not find blaring metal trumpets here or whining violins, but rather items with strange names like *shebaba* (a long transversal flute), *doumbek* (a goatskin drum,) *bendir* (a hand-held drum like a tambourine without cymbals) and *karkabat* (double castanets made of metal). Crescents have songs for everything from birth to marriage to the passing into the next life. They sing a great deal and it is not uncommon to see a battle-hardened war veteran pick up a *shebaba* and play a song for his troops.

Textiles and Weaving

The Empire contains some of the most exquisite woven items around. This is especially true of the phenomenally beautiful woven carpets called *kilim*. Each tribe boasts a master weaver and apprentices who help create items that identify the region, tribe or village. Designs and colors vary widely; the only thing they have in common is the technique used to create them. A *kilim* is flat woven on a portable loom, so smaller or more mobile tribes tend to produce smaller *kilim*. Those created in the *Kurtlar-dag* tend to have geometrical designs and bold colors, which makes sense. On long winter nights you will feel warmer when you see a brightly-colored *kilim*. The further a tribe is away from any nearby walled cities, the simpler and more traditional the design. Weaving and preparation of weaving



materials is the purview of tribeswomen. *Kilim* have three main functions: as a prayer rug, as a kneeler and as a decoration for the home, whether a tent or a royal chamber.

Calligraphy

Another art one would not necessarily associate with nomadic people is that of calligraphy. "Calligraphy is a spiritual geometry produced with material tools," a visiting Montaigne once wrote. Under this writing style, most of the letters change their form depending on their position in a word. Soon the words begin to take on more and more complicated forms given the document a rich and multi-layered look. No one knows the origin of calligraphy.

Architecture

First-time visitors to the Crescent find the architecture similar to that of Vodacce and Castille. They see recognizable elements everywhere they turn, in the archways, a beautiful tiled floor, a courtyard built around fountains, or a jewel-like garden. Cities tend to revolve around a central market. Even in Iskandar, the grand bazaar is in the center of town with the Royal Palace set off on the eastern side.

Older cities contain a fair number of square one-story buildings that are almost always constructed of stone or brick, usually either whitewashed or painted a pale shade. In the setting sun, Crescent cities often appear to be glowing as the light reflects off the building exteriors. Domed buildings first appeared in the ancient capital of Bursa. When an earthquake destroyed most of that city, the new city of Edirne was built on top of the ruins. These more modern buildings tend to be light and airy, with deceptively light infrastructure, reflecting their origins in tent design.

Interior decoration often includes ornately carved panels of rosewood or ivory, brightly colored tiles in floors and walls, extremely comfortable furniture such as beds and couches, and small low tables to accommodate the lounging positions favored at home.

Religious buildings were very simple affairs until the reign of Murakhan, who was influenced by drawings of religious buildings from elsewhere in Théah. He felt that to make his nation more modern, they needed to build lavishly decorated shrines and tombs, rather than the earthwork *mastaba* of older times. The *mastaba* were simple tunneled affairs with several rooms in which items belonging to the dead were buried. Their existence lends support to the western theory that the Crescent people began in caves.

There is almost nothing a nomad loves better than having a chance to make a garden: a rare treat for people who are never in one place for very long. As a result, Crescents in cities and towns tend to lavish attention on their gardens. It is not unusual to find an elaborate garden in the middle of a fairly modest home. Crescent architecture abounds with fountains and moving or "singing" water as an element of decoration, undoubtedly a reaction to the nomads' constant need to find fresh water.

Food

The ritual of *ekmek ve sakla*, sharing bread and salt, is one of the most ancient expressions of hospitality. One who has accepted it from a host must behave according to a code as ancient as the caves of Mt. Karada. Whoever breaks the *mizafir-kalaba* bond will find no protection in any court in the land unless he or she can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that poison or other intent to harm was present.

The diet of the nomads is simple and hearty. Food had to be provided for the entire tribe, so they established a cycle to take advantage of what was available at the time. The proper utensil for eating Crescent food is your right hand and a piece of *ekmek* as a scoop. No real cutlery exists, although in the capital, the courtiers have begun to experiment with a two-pronged implement called a "took." Some see this as a sign of deterioration in the country's moral backbone, others as a sign of progress.

The basic protein in the Crescent diet is lamb; they have literally hundreds of ways to prepare it, depending on the social and economic standing of the household, its geographic location and its tribal affiliation. One of the most popular

methods of preparation is to place a large cylindrical haunch of meat on a vertical spit, cook it over an open flame, and pare thin slices off with a long-bladed knife. Everyone has their own secret combination of herbs and spices for this dish, called *shawarma*. It is usually accompanied by large rounds of *ekmek*, as well as mounds of steamed rice called *pilav* decorated with a variety of tidbits. Other favored dishes include ground legumes mixed with olive oil, garlic, nutmeat paste and lemon called *hummus*; sliced green vine melons in chilled soured cream; and a dazzling array of sweets, almost always served with the ubiquitous cup of steaming *kaffe*.

Dining is an important social activity even among the poor, and like so many other aspects of life, follows some prescribed rituals. Diners always wash their hands before and after the meal, a custom that initially baffles visitors from western Théah. However, they soon become accustomed to the activity and it has begun to find its way into dining practices in Vodacce and other border areas.

The Crescent Empire is fortunate to have such a wide variety of climates; merchants can make a fine living providing delicacies like webbed sweet melons or specially roasted *kaffe* beans to the discerning customer who is willing to pay for such luxuries.

The Culture of Kaffe

Coffee! That grave and wholesome beverage that heals the stomach and inspires the mind, assists the memory, revives sad hearts, and cheers the spirit without madness.

— Anonymous Avalon poet, 1654

More than any single thing, *kaffe* is the cultural mark of the Crescent Empire. In a nation that forbids alcoholic beverages, one might expect a sober and straight-laced populace, but the rituals and customs surrounding *kaffe* reveal a level of sophistication equal to any one might find even in the former royal court of Montaigne. *Kaffe* is credited as a medicinal panacea used for colic, a fortification of the liver and bladder, a blood purifier, a stomach soother and a stimulant for both the appetite and the mind. Other claims include its ability to induce sobriety and good sense, a valuable thing in a culture that relies heavily on trade and places a high value on domestic commerce. All negotiations in the Empire from the purchase of a horse to the

resolution of land disputes begins with *kaffe*. No *ajedrez* game can be considered complete without a steaming pot of *kaffe* which a gracious host keeps replenished throughout the game, accompanied by a variety of sweet and savory tidbits.

Kaffe is produced from a small bean, roasted over a fire and ground into a very fine powder. Just the smell of ground beans is considered a powerful aphrodisiac and stimulant. Cardamom is sometimes added while the beans are being ground. Another method of preparation is to boil extra whole beans with the liquid, then let them float to the top before being served. Sweeteners and spices are added to the ground powder before the fresh boiling water is added so that everything dissolves properly.

Thanks to the Bernoulli family, the rest of Théah has been introduced to this remarkable beverage. *Kaffe* proved to be a pleasant — and lucrative — change from the odd assortment of “delicacies” that had at one time or another included brined sheep’s eyes and fried chicken feet. *Kaffe* smells wonderful and tastes better. The Bernoullis found that it also made them feel alert and clear-headed: just the thing for those long stretches across the vast plains of the Crescent Empire. A variety of accoutrements and implements are required to produce the drink, which the enterprising Bernoulli are only too happy to provide.

For others in Théah, *kaffe* supplies — obtained through Bernoulli agents — made their fortune. In mid-1667, Edward Buck returned home to Avalon with a precious cargo. He had an idea to open a “coffee house” like the ones he had seen on his recent trip to Vodacce. Little by little, the people of Carleon began to flock to the charming shop that boasted a crisp green awning on which was displayed the proud proprietor’s coat of arms. Rising young entrepreneurs and artists alike gather here to enjoy a pipe and a mug of the dark hot brew.

Art

There are ancient paintings on the caves of Mt. Karada and the *Kurtlar-dag*, which indicates that the Crescent people have practiced this art form since pre-recorded history. The art form for which they are the most famous, however, is the creation of exquisite miniatures — portraits, depictions of legends, tiny little jeweled gardens, languid odalisques lounging on satin pillows. These

miniatures, like the beautiful fountains and gardens, show a side of the people that travelers do not expect. While the outlying territories still hold their share of wild-eyed barbarians, for the most part, the Crescent people — both nomads and city dwellers — are intelligent, artistic people with a fine creative eye, a strong sense of humor and an understanding of nature and the universe.

Crescent art celebrates the elegance of design, the curve of an oval, the detail inside a repeating pattern of paisleys, which is one of their two favorite motifs (the other is the circle). Although they tend to favor blue, they also understand color harmony and balance. You would never walk into a Crescent home and be struck by an item glaringly out of place. If your attention is drawn to something, it is intentional and if you take a step back, you will see how other aspects direct your eye to that point. Crescents who have seen art from western Théah tend to find it lacking in delicacy and refinement.

Domesticated Animals

Dogs

Because of their deep philosophical belief in the supreme power of nature, the people of the Crescent Empire are passionate about animals and the role they play in daily life. They are superior herdsman and breeders who take great pride in their animals, especially their horses and dogs (*kpegi*.) There are several lines of hunting dogs bred in the Crescent Empire, including Akbash, Kangal, Kars and Tazi. (All of them use the stats for canines, found on pages 155–156 of the *GMs’ Guide*, with modifications as listed.)

Akbash

These are long-coated sheepdogs of the plains tribesmen, used for herding and guarding. *Akbash-kpegi* are bred by the *Atlar-vahir*. Usually white or light brown, they have sturdy bodies, tremendous stamina and a high intelligence. They are also fiercely loyal and can actually be left to guard children without fear that they will harm their charges. (These animals have a +1 Resolve.)

Kangal

Similar to the *akbash*, these are also strong animals with black muzzles and ears, a flat head and a thick, soft coat that ranges from cream color to steel grey. The average male stands at least 30 inches at the withers and weighs on average 120

pounds. *Kangal-kpegi* are bred by the *Kurta-kir* and *Ruzgar'hala* and almost always wear a spiked iron collar. (These animals have a +1 Brawn.)

Kars

This breed may have come originally from Ussura. Bred by the eastern *Jadur-rihad*, the *Kars-kpegi* is an excellent herding dog, especially for sheep. They do best in mountainous areas where winter strikes hard. They come in all colors from black to white, although white chests and front legs are a common factor among most colors. The *Kars* is often born with a 3-4 inch stump tail; otherwise, they have a nice plummy tail. They are hard workers who seem to be able to assess threats quickly. (These animals deliver Bite Damage of 3k2.)

Tazi

This elegant dog is a gazehound, used almost exclusively for hunting and tracking. They have extremely keen eyesight and can actually ride across a saddle. *Tazi*, often stand as tall as 70 centimeters, and are strong, agile, even-tempered and extremely intelligent. Bred by the *Yilan-bazlik*, they are good runners, and can reach speeds of almost 45 miles per hour. They are also fiercely loyal and will put themselves at risk to protect their owner; because of this, they rarely need to be tied up. A *Tazi* will actually become morose if it cannot be near its owner. Crescents respect the dog's pride and treat it as a valued member of their household. (These animals have a +1 Finesse.)

Hanim-kpegi

Nobility and wealthy bureaucrats or merchants often gift their wives and concubines with small *hanim-kpeg* or "lady's dog." These lapdogs come from Cathay in a variety of breeds, all of which require constant grooming and attention.

Cats

Though the Crescents have their share of garden-variety felines, the Empire also a wide variety of exotic breeds which have been trained for domestic use. One of the most remarkable pets in the Crescent Empire is the *yuzmek-kedi* or "swimming cat." These large felines measure up to three feet long, white with colored markings on their ears and large fluffy tails. The rarest *yuzmek-kedi* have different colored eyes, and are highly prized by mystics, shamans, and those with spiritual inclinations. The careless are athletic,

fearless and demanding, with very sharp front teeth that they use to show their displeasure. Rather than hunt mice, they prefer to fish, spending much of their time near bodies of water. Tamed specimens can often be found cavorting in the pools and shallow baths of harems. (These cats use the standard "Feline" stats, found on page 156 of the *GMs' Guide*.)

The other common breed of cat is the *bulut-kedi* or "cloud cat." This medium sized feline (5-9 pounds) is very bright, fast and sometimes hot-tempered. A *bulut* is quite adept at doing whatever it takes to get what it wants. They are also intensely curious and often get themselves trapped in cupboards, closets and baskets. They like to ride around on their owner's shoulders, surveying what they regard as their domain. Their name comes from the condition of their fur, which is incredibly soft. *Bulut-kedi* are usually pure white or black with no extra markings.

Dance and Entertainment

Dancing is almost the exclusive purview of women in the Crescent Empire, although young men in certain tribes have been known to jump up and gyrate ecstatically to the sound of martial drum. The most recognizable dance form is *karinya*, performed by women of all ages clad in an assortment of short tops that bare their midriff and gauzy pants. They also wear a profusion of silk scarves and use tiny metal cymbals on their fingers called *zils* with which they tap out a counter beat to the music. *Karinya* can be performed to drum accompaniment, or to music provided by a variety of instruments. There are different *karinya* for different situations; some are joyous, some are mournful and some are designed to be extremely seductive (and performed only in the privacy of the harem).

The main type of dancing entertainer is the *k'vrimah* or "twirling girl." *K'vrimah* are more street entertainers than artists, combining *karinya* steps with twirling found in religious dances. Unlike women who perform *karinya*, the *k'vrimah* often wears a long double-circle skirt over white loose-fitting pants clasped around the ankle with bangles. The classic twirling dances are performed on holy days by *rahib* and involve turning and whirling to chanting and repetitive music. The person dancing often enters a trance-like state, which some Crescent believe will drive out evil spirits and purify one's heart.

Other forms of entertainment include reenactments of myths, puppet shows and a form of sleight-of-hand “street magic” intended for amusement only. The latter type of entertainers usually loiter around bazaars or taverns, and wise travelers take precautions against fast hands that can dip in and out of a pouch with inhuman ease.

Language

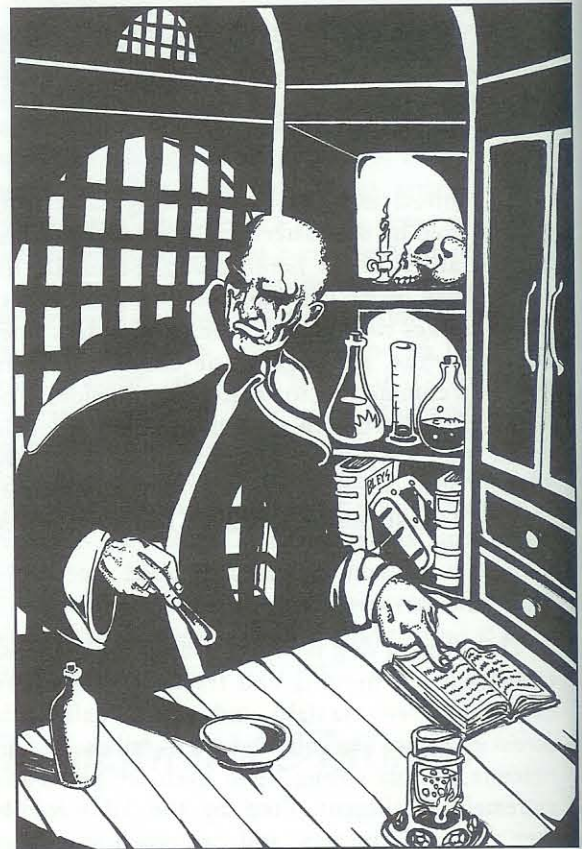
One of the most linguistically diverse nations in Théah, the Crescent Empire is home to a language with hundreds of dialects. The common root appears to be *Alto-Oguz*, a combination of basic dialects with its origins in Ussura and possibly Cathay. Except for some minor differences in vocabulary, the variants spoken through the Empire — especially in the rural and mountain areas — could be regarded as dialects that require only a bit of careful speaking to be understood across tribal boundaries. For details about the language, see Chapter 3, pages 81–85 and the Glossary on page 128.

Literature

The Crescent Empire has a literary tradition reaching back to its prehistory (when storytellers were revered). One of the most valued skills among Crescents is the ability to tell a great story; this person is treated like royalty regardless of his or her rank. Gaining the ability to record these stories did not dilute the literature at all; in fact, it enabled more people to read and appreciate it. Crescents especially favor poetry, and the position of Chief Poet of the Empire, currently held by Sey'r Celik al'Bahri is one of the most revered in all the land. His great compilation of poems, *Contemplations by a Fountain*, is widely regarded as one of the finest works ever produced.

Clothing

Both men's and women's clothing in the Crescent Empire is loose and flowing, comfortable and attractive regardless of the size of the wearer. Men's garb tends to include loose-fitting pants tucked into soft boots, long tunics bound by a sash or belt, long sleeveless vests or a sleeved long vest called an *aba*, which may or may not have hood. Most men wear a length of cloth bound



around their head in a variety of patterns depending on their tribe and location. When they are traveling, especially in and around the *Muglak'kum*, they can take the end of this *turban* and tuck it over their mouth and nose to prevent ingesting vast quantities of sand. Men's clothing tends to be woven in muted colors, with a predominance of black and earth tones. Green is rarely worn, as it is commonly associated with demons. Men also wear earrings, medallions, rings and bracelets, and (depending on their tribe), may wear kohl around their eyes and have various tattoos.

Women's clothing is similar: long loose pants worn under a long sleeved collarless dress with a keyhole neckline. A long sleeveless vest or a long scarf is worn over that. When home, women wear soft slippers or go barefoot. Other basic attire, worn more frequently in the harems of the wealthy or noblemen, includes a pair of loose pants made from gauzy material, and a short top that leaves the midriff bare (and sometimes opens on the front like a little short jacket). Women wear all types of jewelry including ankle bracelets. Makeup and coiffeur are very important, and women in the harem often spend hours at their mirrors in anticipation of a visit from the master.

On their wedding day, wives of wealthy men wear headdresses of coins representing their dowry. They also wear these on special feast days and when their children are named and married. Otherwise, they wear veils and may also wear a little hat that looks like a small round box decorated in rich fabric with metallic trimming. Their jewelry is often elaborate and heavy, sometimes containing huge gemstones. Almost every woman in the Crescent Empire, except the very poorest, has at least one bangle and one pair of earrings.

People who live in the mountains often wear long quilted coats lined with lambswool and covered in bright embroideries, and decorated boots. In tribal encampments, women often do the same work as men, so they save their more delicate finery for special events in the great tent.

Both men and women in the Crescent Empire use body scents, including sandalwood, patchouli, rose, orange, amber, clove and musk. Instead of permanent tattoos, women may apply *mendhi* or henna tattoos on various parts of the body for enhancement. Bathing is an integral part of the daily routine, and people who live in the cities sometimes bathe more than once a day, especially in the summer months and in the hot southern regions of the Empire.

Religion

The religion of the Crescent tribes has its origins in *sud'ya*, a primitive simplistic system that revolves around a belief in nature expressed by naturalistic practices. *Sud'ya* came to the Crescent Empire from Cathay and indirectly through Ussura. Like their predecessors, modern Crescents believe that they exist in a great cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. Their mythology is rich and detailed, and storytellers are held in high esteem, especially when serving as shaman or priests for their tribe. According to their beliefs, the universe consists of variations on four-fold systems: the four elements, the four seasons, the four phases of the moon, the four periods of life (infant, youth, adult, elder) and three sets of four zodiac signs.

Each tribe has a representative totem and symbol; when tribes go to war, they believe that their totem protectors do battle as well. In addition, there are "gods" or powerful spirits of great warriors or powerful wise women to whom men and women pray, with appropriate rituals and ceremonies. Attendance at these events is

restricted and those who cross the sacred circle without permission will be punished severely.

In the ancient times, gender was not regarded as an indication of superiority or submission. In honor of the Mother of Life, women actually have a holy place in the Crescent culture. In preparation for some ceremonies, a tribal shaman will grow his hair longer and practice speaking with a higher pitched tone, appearing more feminine out of deference to the sacred Mother. Over time, however, the prominence of the Mother of Life retreated to a more private and secluded worship exclusive to women, while the Great Father gained prominence and took on the role of the Great Creator, the most powerful force in the world.

In ancient days, worship was conducted under the open sky in the presence of the Great Father and the Mother of Life. When the weather prevented outdoor attendance, the tribe gathered in the great tent that served as a sort of reception hall. The great tent was used for all major tribal ceremonies, meetings and legal proceedings. As towns and cities were founded, the great tent was replaced by a mosque, usually built with a domed roof and a painted depiction of the heavens on the ceiling. Various prayer rooms, built off the main room, were used for spiritual consultations, prayers and small ceremonies. Regardless of whether the religious building is a tent or a permanent structure, a small lamp remains burning at all times as a symbol of the presence of the eternal Light.

Despite the differences between the tribes of the Crescent Empire — their holdings, totem animals, variances in dress and customs and different ways of preparing traditional dishes — they all spoke dialects of the same language, shared a common mythology and practiced their faith more or less the same way, as determined by the cycles of nature.

Then during a wild summer storm in AV 225, the Great Creator moved his hand across the land of the Crescents and altered their destiny.

The *Ilahi* Tomar

The month of *Jadur-rihad*, the Fire Dragon, is the time when hot winds blow across the sand, sucking the moisture out of every living thing. The Great Creator splits the night sky with bolts of lightning and roiling clouds that bring no rain. It was on such a night that a young herder was caught in a sandstorm near the base of the high mountains of the *Kutsal-dag*. He tried to keep his

flock together but he was so buffeted by the strong winds that he could barely crawl, let alone walk. He could make out a path that seemed to lead up, off the desert floor and he followed it on his hands and knees, unaware of the sharp rocks that cut into his skin and bloodied his palms.

As the narrow path rose, the wind subsided but still he crawled. Silence began to settle around him and the path softened with grass. He turned his head once to see a trail of blood behind him but he was too weak to be sickened. When he turned forward again, he could not believe his swollen eyes. Ahead of him stood an oasis set in a shallow valley of unbelievably verdant growth with flowers and a pool of dark blue water. He knew about mirages and how they could suck the unwise into their fantasy but the closer he got, the more real it all became. If it was the time of his passing, he could not have hoped for a more beautiful vision. He barely reached the edge of the pool when he fell, exhausted and spent upon the emerald grass in a deep fainting sleep.

When he awoke the sky around him was so bright that he had to shield his eyes. A deep voice seemed to rise up from the pool, telling him not to look away or be afraid. The young man did as the voice commanded, albeit with some reluctance, and was astonished to see a giant hand made of light rise up through the water, a scroll clenched in its fist.

The voice told him to take the scroll, which he did with some difficulty, for it was by far the heaviest thing he had ever lifted. "It is as heavy as the hearts of my people," the voice told him. "Read it, my son, that you may lighten their burden."

The herdsman untied the knot of heavy woven cord that was made of pure gold. As it fell away from the scroll, the oasis was filled with a rushing sound and the scent of rich incense. Bushes flowered and vine-covered trees shook their branches gently as the great *bahshé* of Paradise revealed itself to the awestruck young man. Although he had never learned to read, he could understand the words inscribed on the parchment. He read all day, through the night and the next day. As the sun set, he fell once again into a deep sleep.

When he awoke, the light was gone, as was the delicious scent of incense, and he knew that he had dreamed. He struggled for a moment to remember all that he had read. Then the beautiful words came rushing back to him and his heart was filled with joy. He knew that he must return to his tribe and tell them of the miracle.

As he rolled over to reach for his meager pack, his hand closed around a scroll. Perhaps it had not been a dream after all? He knelt in the traditional position of prayer, his head bowed low to the ground and for the first time, spoke the words of the prayers he had read. He knew that he had been chosen to hear and see the words of the Great Father.

With a light step, he descended from the magical garden and began to preach the lessons of *patika*. Calling himself *haberci*, or messenger, the herdsman left his tribe and his flocks behind and traveled across the Crescent lands, teaching with clarity and patience learned from long days and nights in the mountains.

The practice of *patika* has five basic *sutun* or pillars that define the faith: *dua* (prayer), *sefkat* (charity), *saflik* (purity), *seyahat* ("journey" or pilgrimage), and *tamin* (declaration of faith.) Through the *Ilahi'tomar*, the *Haberci* was able to explain how people could incorporate these *sutun* into their daily life by following the path of Light, as shown to him by the Great Creator.

In the beginning, some were reluctant to accept that the Great Creator would speak to a simple herdsman or change the way they had conducted their religious life for centuries. In the *haberci's* own tribe of the *Yilan'bazlik*, there were those who rejected the concept of *sutun* and doubted the veracity of the *Ilahi'tomar*. What was the point of writing something down for people who could not read? Those deeply involved in commerce were not particularly interested in having to stop their day to pray more than once, maybe twice a day.

The *Haberci* and those who became his followers faced resistance with patience. After all, they were tribesmen at heart and they understood the shamanistic ways that had guided their people for so long. This new faith, they explained, opened the way back to the Lake of Light. The *sutun* and the *Ilahi'tomar* proclaimed the wonder of the world that the Great Creator had given them. Those who followed the ways of *patika* would come to understand that their actions would bring enlightenment and gather the people into a nation. It also insured that the Passing would occur with joy rather than terror and darkness.

In addition, *patika* was a practical faith, addressing not only spiritual issues but also those that occurred in daily life. It offered guidance to parents and children, and those who wished to marry. It instructed how one should treat ones'

servants and slaves, how the house must be maintained, and the duties of a husband and wife to each other. It also provided a judicial system for a variety of crimes ranging from the most heinous to simple disputes. This was basically a codification of ancient tribal laws, providing for a council of judges to hear complaints. Punishments were swift and stern. If a life had been taken in cold blood, the criminal's life was forfeit by execution. A person caught stealing for profit lost a hand, while a person caught stealing to feed his or her family, received a measure of *sefkat*. Similar edicts existed for a wide variety of transgressions, each bestowing punishment as a measure of the severity of the crime.

Teachings from the *Ilahi'Tomar*

Here are the words of the Great Creator as revealed to his humble servant, he who serves as *haberci* to the people of every tribe. By these acts will you follow the path of *patika*, the True Faith, and so be guided back through the Lake of Light to the Blessed Gardens:

Tanim

This is a Declaration of Faith, proclaimed with an open heart and complete trust in the wisdom of the Great Creator. And you shall speak these words: "Blessed be the Great Creator who is all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing, all wise. He shall exist forever, beyond the end of the world."

Dua

Four times shall you turn your face towards Mt. Karada, the Holy Mountain, and bow in prayer. You shall perform a full cleansing of the body upon rising in the morning and upon retiring in the evening. Before mealtime prayer, you shall cleanse your hands and your face. If you are unable to perform a full cleansing, either in the morning or the evening, you shall at the very least cleanse your face and hands that you may wash away that which might distract you from the proper expression of *tarim*.

Sefkat

There are those among you who are too weak or ill or aged to care for themselves, and those upon whom life has visited a burden of sorrow. Unto them shall you show kindness, caring for them in their sorrow and helping to raise them back to the Light.

Seyyah

Once in each life shall you undertake the journey to Mt. Karada to see for yourself the miracle of the Blessed Garden wherein these words were given. When such a journey has been made, you may call yourself *haci* or pilgrim and take joy in a glimpse of the paradise to come.

Saflik

As the body must be cleansed, so must the soul also undergo purification. This shall be done before the celebration of every festival, that you may receive the measure of joy or solemnity that is the gift of the Great Creator. But on two festivals especially shall you submit to the deepest purifications. You will abstain from all those activities that bring you pleasure including meals, sexual congress, ingestion of stimulants or anything that may distract your mind from the contemplation of the Great Creator. And these two festivals shall be *Hediye* or Gift Day in the month of Ruzgar, when the *Haberci* received the *Ilahi'Tomr*; and *Hatirla* or Remembrance Day, when we recall the Passing of the *Haberci* from our world to walk with the Great Creator in the Blessed Gardens.

When the full cycle of the sun and moon have passed, you shall celebrate with a great feast with music and dancing in glorification of the gifts of the Great Creator, may His name be blessed for all time!

The Passing

According to the laws of *patika*, just before a child is born, the Great Creator chooses two *melik*, or angels, to escort the infant into the world. The Mother of Life takes a drop of water from the Lake of Light, and places it between the child's lips so that with the first cry, the drop is swallowed and becomes the soul. The two *melik* follow the new person throughout his or her mortal life not as protectors but as recorders of all the deeds performed. When the passing comes, the *melik* present their lists for judgment. If the person has been a sinful follower of Darkness, the gate to the blessed Gardens will not open and the person's soul is forced to walk in the shadows between Darkness and Light. If the list of good deeds outweighs the bad, the soul will return through the Lake of Light to the blessed Gardens where it stays for eternity with family and friends in unimaginable bliss.

There are some for whom the tally of deeds is not so clear, however. If the balance between good and bad deeds is even, the soul is subjected to a test. The list of deeds is thrown into a pot of boiling oil, followed by the soul. If the bad deeds outweigh the soul will burn until the evilness has been purged. If the good deeds outweigh the bad, the boiling will subside almost immediately. A *melik* will then reach down, grab the soul by its hair and remove it from the pot. This is why followers of the old ways keep their hair long, for fear that should they be put to the test, the *melik* will not be able to fetch them out of the pot and they will boil forever.

The promise of returning to the Lake of Light and the blessed Gardens is one of the reasons Crescent warriors do not fear death in battle, for they know that they will enter *savasi-bahshé*, the Garden of Warriors.

Medicine

"From the study of the body we shall learn what is healthy and what is not. Thus we shall preserve good health when it exists and restore it when it is lacking."

— Cey'r Abdallah ibn Sina, "Avicenna"

From the beginning, the people of the Crescent Empire have been fascinated with the study of medicine. Shamen and wise women consulted on a variety of herbal remedies for a range of ills. As their knowledge increased, so too did their understanding of the mysteries of the human body. Unlike their western counterparts, they believed that all areas of scientific study serve as glorification of the Great Creator.

During the course of history, three great physicians have distinguished themselves to the point where even the distant west knows their names. Because their writings had to be smuggled in through the agents of the Invisible College, they were known by secret names. "Serapion" was a 9th century physician and "Rhazes" was a brilliant clinician who wrote in the early 10th century. But the greatest of these was a man known as "Avicenna" who compiled a medical encyclopedia that both Joshua Daylen and the great Alvara Arciniega have studied at length.

With more sophisticated research methods, Crescent physicians unearthed information from ancient Numan and Arene sources. Crescent medicine takes into account the needs of the

people, from tribesman to pampered concubines in the Royal Harem, blending local and traditional practices with information gleaned from formal rigorous studies. The patient is not seen as isolated from the social and economic environment, and Crescent physicians carefully consider the effect of the mind upon the body.

In the tribes, one can still find the practice of *kehanet tibya*, or "prophetic medicine" which was an element of shamanism. Their treatments include extensive prayers and invocations in the presence of the patient as well as practical changes in diet; the administration of simple cures, including honey; traditional bloodletting; and cauterization as a means of closing wounds. They stopped short of surgery, however, and a number of prominent Crescent physicians believed that dissection prevented the dead from entering the Blessed Gardens. Therefore they refused to use it as a diagnostic tool.

The Plague Tracts

Castille's ability to ward off the ferocious White Plague attacks, especially between AV 1200 and 1300 was due only in part to its strong connection to the Vaticine Church. Crescent physicians had published extensive research studies about various plagues, including the strange disease affecting the neighboring nations of Vodacce and Castille. The work on plagues grew out of compilations of *kehanet tibya* from across the nation.

Medicines and Drugs

A tribal shaman establishes his reputation by his ability to cure his patients and thus spends a great deal of time preparing concoctions and potions. Crescent tonics include remedies for a wide range of ailments such as fevers, poisonous bites from snakes, protection from flying insects and other natural creatures, as well as a host of precautions for warding off the Eye of Darkness, evil spells and the ghosts of former wives. The patient's tent is often decorated with talismans and amulets to ward off spiritual or psychic attacks, while aromatic herbs were burned over a brazier to purify the air.

Some of the common tribal medicines include henna for burns, nosebleeds, chronic skin ulceration and various skin disfigurements like warts. Ground black onion seed produces oil that can be separated from the solids and dried to a powder. When mixed with various liquids, the it serves as a diuretic, stomach palliative and cure

for severe headache. The oil is also good for reducing earaches. Pure olive oil is used both externally to moisturize and reduce inflammation and ulceration. Perhaps its most popular use among the wealthy is as an aphrodisiac.

The Crescents do not neglect their oral hygiene. Twigs, cloth strips, bird feathers, small bones and quills serve as toothpicks among the various tribes. A plant indigenous to most of the plains and coastal regions in the Crescent Empire, called persica, can be ground into a paste that cleans the teeth and gums, and maintains fresh breath.

In the towns and cities, medicines are more sophisticated, although still based on simple ingredients. Wealthy clients are more prone to take medicines if they have a pleasant flavor.

Poisons and Antidotes

In a country full of snakes and stinging creatures, most people know how to treat the ills of zehir or poison. In addition to treatments for snake, scorpion and spider bites, there are numerous legends about poisonous plants such as aconite, mandrake and black hellebore.

A particularly famous treatise about antidotes was written in AV 1270 by Ceyr al Ansari. It not only discusses plants found within the boundaries of the Crescent nation but also touches on information about poisons found in Western Théah. It appears that he obtained information during his service at the Hospital of the First Witness in Zafara.

Alchemy

Unlike the rest of Théah, the Crescent Empire regards alchemy or *simya*, as a corollary study to titya. In fact, the word "alchemy" comes from the Crescent *al-kimiya*. Crescent scientists did not make a distinction between chemistry, medicine and alchemy. For them, the three were simply related branches of a single field of study. A Crescent alchemist can walk into an apothecary and find supplies without difficulty. Alembics, curcurbits, receiving vessels, filters, mortar and pestle sets and a variety of filters are commonplace items, and do not carry the evil reputation as they do in western Théah.

Because distillation is an integral part of preparing medicines, the alchemist, physician and apothecary work together. Alchemy is also used to prepare perfumes, rosewater and essential oils, all necessary cosmetics for both Crescent men and women.

The alchemist's goal is to achieve a balance among the elements in a formula. To do this, he or she must not only understand chemistry but also the arcane arts of numerology. Crescent alchemists believe that the conversion of the concoction's name into its numerical value will determine the proportion of its intrinsic pairs of attributes: heat/cold, fluidity/dryness, viscosity/clarity, and so on.

One of the foremost alchemists of the Crescent nation was Cey'Ceyrr Aydamir Jildaki, whose writings show an intense study into the mystical and allegorical aspects of alchemy as well as extensive research into practical science. Jildaki died suddenly in AV 1342, some say from ingesting a distillation he thought would prolong life.

Relations with Other Groups

Most Théan nations have nothing to do with the Crescent Empire, and the feeling is mutual. Two thousand years of war and isolation have built high walls between the Crescents and the rest of the world. Most contact takes place along the border and then only for brief periods of time.

Avalon

Living as they do at the far end of the world, the only real contact Avalon has with the Crescent Empire is through ancient legends from the time of the Crusades, and encounters with Kheired-Din. They have no particular interest in pursuing a trade agreement with the Empire, or of establishing relations with such a distant and alien nation.

Castille

The histories of the two nations are so deeply entwined that it would be impossible for Castillians to ignore the Crescent Empire even if they wanted to. For now, however, they are busy cleaning up after years of war with Montaigne, and the Crescent Empire presents no threat. King Sandoval is content to let the Empire be.

Eisen

Like Castille, Eisen is so enmeshed in restoring its lands and rediscovering its national identity that it barely has the energy or resources to deal with the nations on the immediate borders.

Montaigne

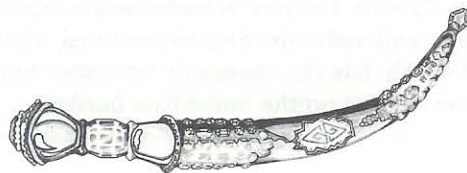
Overall, Montaigne has been far too busy waging war to worry about the Crescent Empire. They enjoy the exotic trade goods but for now they are perfectly content to allow other nations, especially Castille, to stand as buffers between themselves and the barbarians. They do lose a fair number of sailors and merchants along the coast but the Royal Navy is sorely in need of rebuilding after the Revolution, so they must rely on captains with private companies to protect their merchant fleet and bring them the kaffe they have come to crave.

Ussura

Relations between the Crescent Empire and Ussura are cordial enough to support a thriving exchange of trade goods along the coast of the Mirror. Land trade is less common, although occasionally a merchant caravan ventures through Somojez's southern holdings, carrying spices and other exotic goods to be exchanged for gold and precious jewels. The city of Soudal supports a thriving trade economy with goods from Cathay and the Crescent Empire. In addition, the harbor there is home to the majority of Ussura's fishing fleet. Although they cannot build large vessels, the shipyards do a brisk business in upgrades and repairs. A vessel being pursued by pirates can find safe haven here, making it a favorite stop for many Crescent traders. Soudal is also the site of the Battle of Demetrian's Pass (see *Ussura*, page 18), and as such, holds a special place in the hearts of both Crescents and Ussurans.

Vendel

Despite the Crescents' rejection of the guildler or any other form of paper currency, the Vendel would be happy to open direct trade with the Empire. A trade agreement with them would further weaken the Vodacce Princes, and perhaps destabilize the border between Vodacce and the Empire. Despite that, traditional prejudices against the "heathen" Crescents have prevented the Vendel League from making more of an effort to contact them. Individual Vendel traders still run the Vaticine blockade, however, and the wealth they bring back may soon prompt the League to act despite its misgivings.



Vestenmannavnjar

Though they sympathize with the Crescents' outsider status, most Vesten have no contact with the Empire unless Kheired-Din or some other pirate attacks one of their vessels. Then they will take to the seas to reclaim their own.

Vodacce

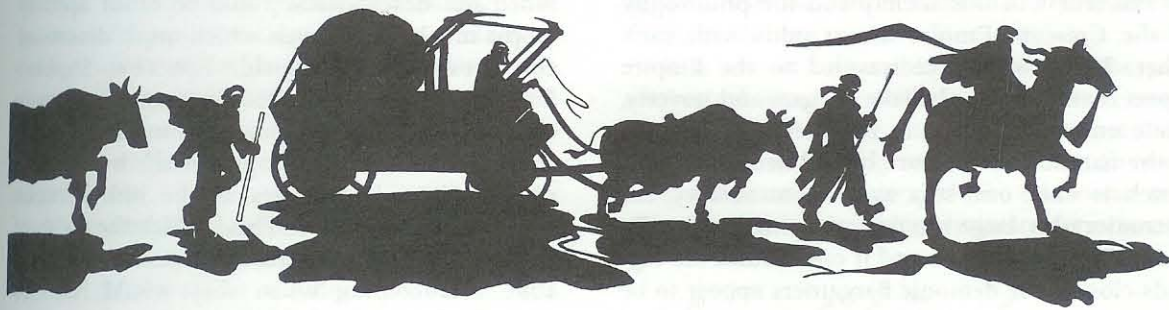
The Church has strictly forbidden any faithful Vaticine to have contact — commercial or otherwise — with the heretical barbarians in the Crescent Empire... except for the Bernoulli family of Vodacce. The family has Church-approved treaties that have proven extremely lucrative. Thanks to these commercial ventures, *kaffe* has been introduced to the rest of Théah and added to the already overflowing coffers of Prince Bernoulli and his kin. Should the opportunity ever arise, the Bernoulli control of eastern Vodacce could possibly unify Vodacce under their rule. Even now, the old Prince has escalated activities offshore to prevent Vendel encroachments into the Crescent Empire.

The Brotherhood of the Coast

Captain Allende always hated merchants who cheated him, winds that dropped off suddenly, bad food during a long journey, bad liquor anytime and most of all Montaigne. However, he managed to reserve a little hatred for Kheired-Din, who mercilessly preys on the innocent and vulnerable. His antipathy has translated into a dislike of the Empire in general. For his part, the Sultán wants little to do with "that band of ragamuffins," and has forbidden Brotherhood ships to enter his ports. Both sides seem content to ignore each other, although the odd Brotherhood ship still smuggles cargo from coastal Crescent tribesmen.

Die Kreuzritter

Despite the fact that the Crescent Empire is regarded as a nation of infidels, the presence of the Order is actually more extensive than in supposedly friendly parts of Western Théah. Vigilants have been assigned to ruins in the *Muglak'kum* to protect travelers and the ruins themselves. The Knights of *die Kreuzritter* have a sacre mission and will do whatever is required to see that they succeed. Under the direction of Sigrun Masthoff and some 30 knights, the Hospital in Zafara — considered the birthplace of the Order — continues its operations, which



include a collaborative research effort among physicians from several nations. The Order hopes that by these actions, the rift between the Empire and the rest of Théah can slowly be repaired.

Explorer's Society

Motivated by a genuine love of scholarly research, the Explorer's Society has devoted itself to investigating the Syrneath civilization through archaeological digs and painstaking research (and speculation) about the artifacts they unearth. Now that they have come under close scrutiny by the Church, they often find their work impeded or completely halted when a Church official confiscates a relic because it has "religious importance."

Fortunately, most Church officials are intensely uncomfortable and frightened by the prospect of spending time within the boundaries of the Crescent Empire (not to mention sleeping near a Syrneath site) so more and more members of the Society are heading for the desert and the southern islands.

Invisible College

Although it opposes the anti-intellectual dictates of the Inquisition, the Invisible College remains loyal to the Hierophant so most members follow his order to refrain from contact with the Crescent Empire. Some Objectionist members, however, as well as at least one agnostic in Vendel (Mus Borwin) pay lip service to religion to avoid persecution. These individuals may in fact have already established contact with people inside the Empire. If so, however, they must be completely secretive about it or risk losing their lives.

Knights of the Rose and Cross

Some sixteen centuries ago, a fraternity of men and women protected the Numan Imperator and rendered justice in his name. After the suicide of the group's leader during the time of the First Prophet, the fraternity formed a new brotherhood with their rivals to undermine sorcery but they were betrayed and killed. The journal of the last to die was not discovered until AV 992, when a monk named Brother Guillaume found it in a ruined Castillian monastery and vowed to restore the Order. His travels took him and his apprentice as far as the Crescent Empire when Brother Guillaume lost his life there, but his apprentice — known only as Rosenkreuz — continued his work. His famous meeting with a Crescent alchemist named Khalid led to the establishment of the Knightly Order as a fraternity of scholar/warriors devoted to learning and maintaining justice.

Sadly, this did not include restoring treasures and ancient books stolen from the Crescent Empire during the Crusades, especially the Royal Library of Alexia. Secret libraries and vaults scattered across Théah hold Crescent knowledge and wealth beyond imagining, as well as Syrneath artifacts taken from the deep deserts. Several members of the Eyes of the Peacock are dedicated to finding these sites and returning their contents to the Empire. Their task is arduous, however; after sixteen centuries, the Knights have become very good at keeping secrets.

Los Vagos

The members of Castille's secret society are too heavily preoccupied with the Inquisition to have any thoughts about the Crescent Empire. They occasionally enjoy the trade goods that filter into the country clandestinely, and a few use Crescent devices in their efforts to protect Castille, but they have little contact beyond that.

Rilasciare

The tenets of this society and the philosophy of the Crescent Empire are at odds with each other. Those who have traveled to the Empire report that Crescents believe beggars and poverty, while unfortunate, cannot be avoided. The roots of the national religion are buried deep in *sud'ya*, which is only one step away from sorcery. An uncomfortably large number of Syrneth ruins lie in the Crescent Empire and if one studies the legends closely, the demonic Bargainers appear to be at work even today. As for the corrupting force of Power, one need only look at the vicious methods used to preserve the royal line. A Sultán may order his own uncle or brother to be strangled to prevent a dreaded usurpation. Everything about the elaborate government structure of is offensive to the Rilasciare. Unfortunately the standard methods of ridicule, satire and pranks only result in the immediate demise of the protester. At the present time, there are no active cells in the Crescent Empire.

Sophia's Daughters

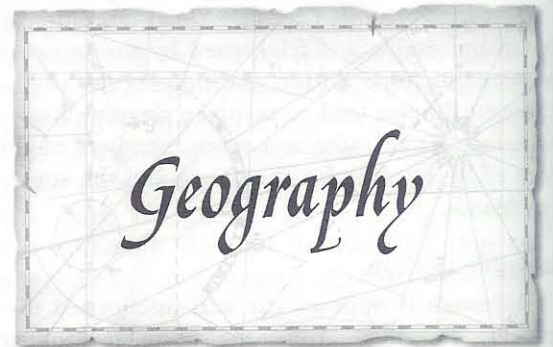
Unlike other Secret Societies, Sophia's Daughters has known about the Crescent Empire for a long time. From the vantage point of her hidden shrine on Mt. Olimpia, the first Sophia watched with a breaking heart as the battlefields below were stained with the blood of both Vodacce and Crescents. She wanted to go down and stop the violence, but she had seen the future



and knew her destiny. There would come a time when her descendents would be called upon to stop a much larger battle which would determine the future of the world. For now, Sophia's Daughters have established their contact point in the Crescent Empire. They focus not so much on the activities of the Empire itself, but on the opportunities it provides as the link between Cathay and the rest of Théah. With the focus of the world turning towards Cabora, they knew the time was coming when they would have to increase their silent presence.

The Vaticine Church

There is a strict ban on trade with the Crescent Empire, due to their refusal to give up their heathen faith and embrace the teachings of the Prophets. The Inquisition, under the direction of Cardinal Verdugo, has declared scientific research to be a sin, thus rendering many Crescent advances heretical. However, there may be a darker reason for this ban, which has to do with the Church's terror of Syrneth artifacts and their power. The Empire abounds with Syrneth ruins, and while most Crescenters share the Vaticine's concerns, the Church would rather sanction the whole country than threaten any of its faithful flock.



In the spring, the land awakens like a bride upon her wedding day, flowers in her flowing hair and tucked between her softly swelling breasts. A virgin once again, my beloved Dunya.

— "The Song of Dunya," anonymous

In many ways, the Crescent Empire is the reverse side of Ussura. It has a similarly prodigious land mass, but where its neighbor to the north is dominated by snow and ice, the Crescent Empire has a complete array of climates from snow in the northern mountains to endless waves of sand in the deserts. It also boasts some of the most fertile plains and fishing areas in all of

Théah. It is not a land that is easy to know, not because the terrain is particularly hostile, but because the people are extremely suspicious of *yavanci*, or strangers, in their midst. Even if a western Théan could traverse the entire nation, it would take more than one person's lifetime to map it thoroughly or to understand the full nature of the people.

Mountains dominate the western and northern borders, and another small but important range lies on the tip of the southern peninsula. The mountains on the west stand between the Empire and Vodacce, while Ussura shares the ones on the northern border. The foothills slope down to lush plains bisected by rivers. The mountains in the southern region are home to the most sacred religious site in the Empire and also to the most dreaded organization, the *Qatih'i*, a closed community of assassins.

On either side of the peninsula stand a set of islands. The majority of the land from the northeast to southeast is occupied by scrub forest and desert. The eastern edge of the Empire faces the Mirror while the southern edge looks past the Emerald Bay out to the Forbidden Sea.

Weather in the Crescent Empire ranges from wild snowstorms in the northern mountains to murderous sandstorms in the south. The rain that falls gently in the spring can turn into a ferocious torrent with sheets of lightning cutting across the sky. The Crescents believe that everything that happens in nature is an aspect of the Great Creator, even if it is a wild fire or a flash flood. In certain areas like the plains, rainfall can be sudden and torrential. Even the *Muglak'kum* desert has seasons of a sort; that is, in the spring and fall, the blistering heat is reduced and the nights are even colder than usual. Despite the temperature change, quicksand is always ready to claim another victim, and makes no concession to temperature.

For every natural disaster, there is something that celebrates the glory, whether it is a burst of spring flowers or a basket of summer fruit or the wonder of a newborn child. The range of flora and fauna would impress even the most jaded scholar. The people of the Crescent Empire worship the world around them and give thanks to the Great Creator for allowing them to be part of such a treasure.

This is also the place where the great Syrneth civilization once flourished. Ruins abound in the Empire and many adventurers have become rich by braving their terrors. Some believe that the

answer to the cataclysm which destroyed the Syrneth can be found somewhere beneath the Empire's shifting sands.

It is almost impossible to calculate the population of most of the cities in the Crescent Empire because of the migrating tribes that move in and out depending on the seasons. Crescent geography is usually divided into traditional tribal lands, which the Sultán administrates as best he can.

The Tribal Lands

The Great Creator cupped his hands around his mouth and blew, and the winds were born. One to sing across the plains, one to howl upon the sea, another to whisper across the sands, one to dance like a skipping stone, one to play with snowflakes in the north. The final wind he set as a sentinel, to chill the bones of all who hear it in the mountains of the west, for the Great Creator knew in his heart that one day, the Darkness would rise from the west.

— ancient Ruzgar'hala legend

Tribe: Ruzgar'hala (Spirit Wind)

Major places: Jesalute, Rahajeel, *Hayalet'dag*

The Crescent Empire shares its western border with Vodacce along the range of the *Hayalet'dag*. Travelers from western Théah will find this area vaguely familiar and may even be able to converse with the Crescents there, however haltingly, in a combination of trade language and pidgin Vodacce. Western Théans who venture this far east and claim they have been to the Crescent Empire will be in for quite a shock should they ever journey farther.

Rahajeel

Almost a sister city to Porto Spatia, Rahajeel is the first southern outpost on the western Crescent border. Located on a narrow curving beach, it holds a busy harbor that acts as a waystation for ships bound for larger cities. A captain can stock up here before making the next leg of a journey and the town does a fairly brisk business in minor ship repairs. Very much a border town, Rahajeel is neither Vodacce nor Crescent, but a strange hybrid where you can buy a pint of red wine in a store next to a *kaffe* house. The city offers niceties such as bathhouses and plumbing, as opposed to Porto Spatia where the air is pungent with the detritus of animals and humans alike.

No non-*patika* religion may conduct religious services in Rahajeel, although there are rumors that agents of the Inquisition enforce travel sanctions and make spot inspections on ships entering the harbor. Almost as a counterbalance, a small squad of *ghazi* are stationed in the city to keep an eye on the Théans, especially suspected agents of the Vaticine Church and those who traffic in contraband substances like alcohol.

The usual assortment of Crescent bureaucrats and tax collectors has offices near the port authority. The city bazaar does a thriving business in goods from the interior as well Vodacce, and provides a wide selection of cheap curios and trinkets. You can even purchase *dhima* to travel across *Ruzgar'hala* lands, but there is always a risk that some of the more suspicious members of the tribe may not honor it.

Rahajeel (as opposed to Jesalute) is an excellent place to begin the first visit to the Crescent Empire for Heroes who are not overtly religious. They can purchase gear, try to get information and perhaps even hire a guide or two. They can also dock a ship here or book passage east across the Forbidden Sea.

Jesalute

There are actually two parts to the "city" of Jesalute. The western section, which lies just inside the border of Vodacce, is home to the Abbey of St. Giovanna and regarded as the last outpost of the faithful before crossing the border into the Empire of the Crescent Moon. Leaving the western section of the city, they move east along a relatively well-maintained pass in the *Hayalet'dag* where the Vodacce and Crescent guards share an outpost separated by a wooden barrier stretching across the road. Shortly after clearing the checkpoint, the road begins its descent into the eastern portion of Jesalute.

Upon entering this part of the city, travelers are suddenly greeted by the Empire in all its glory. The sights, sounds and even the scents are dramatically different from anything in western Théah. The architecture is exclusively Crescent. The goods in the marketplace, which is larger than the one in Rahajeel, present a dizzying choice to the western visitor. The language is almost deafening in its cacophony, due to the variety of Crescent dialects that weave in and out of mercantile negotiations in *tikaret-baraji* as well as hawkers touting their wares, stockmen buying and selling horses, and music from street performers.

The city also contains a large bustling dock where travelers can find boats to take them along the Halya River to Iskandar. If travelers are going to rely on *dhima*, they need to find a vendor who will provide them with the proper papers to cross the territory of the *Atlar-vahir*. The backstreets of the city near the dock house an unsavory neighborhood where shady characters conduct clandestine trades in illicit items, including slaves. (While slavery is an accepted element of Crescent life, the government does not wish to have an open slave market so close to Vodacce.)

The mosque of Jesalute is beautiful, with its gold-washed dome and gleaming white walls. As in all Crescent cities, a *meyzin* sounds the call for the daily prayers. Those who can leave their business travel to the mosque where a *rahib* leads them. Those who can't stop whatever they are doing and face east, bowing and reciting beautiful prayers that thank the Great Creator for this world. It is a moment when all worshippers of *patika* pray as one, and even some faithful Vaticine said have been moved by the intense spirituality on display.

Unlike Rahajeel, a representative of the tribal chieftain resides here, acting as a clearing house for information and, when needed, a *hakim* to hear disputes. From time to time, the chieftain himself visits the city, but at the first indication of winter, he takes his tents and retires to the warm caves in the mountains southeast of Jesalute. members of the tribe know the location of his winter court but it is difficult and dangerous for those outside the tribe to find.

Tribe: *Atlar-vahir* (Spirit Wind)

Major places: Edirne, Alexia, Halya River, Tirza River

Run, horse, run. Toss your head and smell the wind. Take me far away. Thunder, horse, thunder. Drive your hooves across the plains, take me home again.

— traditional *Atlar-vahir* song

Alexia

Despite their nomadic life, the Crescents have a deep reverence for learning and knowledge. Rather than act as deterrent to the faith, they believe that *malamad*, or knowledge goes hand in hand with the practice of *patika*. Over the centuries, they amassed a huge archive of ancient learning, much of it written by the noted scholars of their day. The books and scrolls were often held in elaborately decorated cases, encrusted with

jewels. Six hundred years ago, Alexia overlooked the sea and at sunset the white and gold buildings of the city shone like gemstones themselves. It was a peaceful city filled with the sound of fountains, for the gardens around the library were numerous and exquisite. Four major gardens stood on the grounds of the library itself, dedicated to Science, Literature, Mathematics and History. It is impossible to describe the delicate quality of these gardens, lovingly attended by gardeners who held the position with pride.

Then, in 1088 the soldiers of the Inquisition came.

They trampled the beautiful gardens, sacked the Library and destroyed the buildings. They slaughtered those gentle souls who were trying to prevent the savagery and burned them along with many of the books. (Not surprisingly, a significant number of books somehow managed to find their way into private libraries in Vodacce.) So revered is the concept of *malamad* in the Crescent Empire that no one could imagine an attack on a sacred city devoted to learning. Sadly, the Crescent "forces" protecting the city were woefully inadequate to repel the superior invaders. This

act, perhaps more than any other, served as a brutal reinforcement of the nation's xenophobia and distrust of anything western.

It took the people quite a while to recover from the shock of the invasion, but little by little, the city was rebuilt. Today it serves as the center of the Empire's growing publishing industry. Here one can learn all of the skills necessary to prepare materials for books and scrolls, as well as the art of calligraphy. Scribes from all over the nation make pilgrimages here to see the ruins and rededicate themselves to the library's restoration. Chief among the supporters of this project is Sultán Timur. He hopes to enlist the aid of Bayana Meryam bint Saliha to conduct quiet negotiations with the Vaticine Gnostic Order in hopes of finding a way to restore the property so savagely stolen from them. He is aware that this may bring direct confrontation with Cardinal Verdugo, a man he has come to loathe and distrust, but he also wants to reclaim what belongs to him. This not a good place for outsiders to visit. Not only do the people of Alexia hate Vodacce (and by extension western Théah), but the chieftain of the *Atlar-vahir* has pledged that the city will never again be threatened by anyone. Outsiders must constantly be on their guard.



Edirne

Edirne is one of the largest cities in the Empire. It is very old, possibly the oldest in the western part of the nation. The *Atlar-vahir* claim that Edirne is one of the Mother of Life's favorite cities because she placed it in such a favorable location. The city is filled with mosques, bazaars and the famous Horse Market where true connoisseurs of equine perfection gather once a year for a huge sale and festival. It also boasts one of the few stadiums in the nation, hosting numerous foot-and horseraces, as well as *vurmak* tournaments and wrestling matches. One of the highlights of the annual festival is a national wrestling match usually attended by the chieftain and the Sultán himself.

Because of its placement on the open plains, Edirne remains a walled city, extremely well-guarded and protected. The surrounding farmland produces rich harvests, and the city's market is by far the best in the nation. A vendor or merchant who can strike a good bargain in the marketplace of Edirne is a fearsome haggler indeed. Edirne also boasts the finest *kaffehans* in the Western part of the Empire — better some say than in the capital itself. After a brisk game of *vurmak*, the teams often retire to a *kaffehans* to celebrate or console each other. Edirne is the best place, other than Iskandar, to get information, restock a *kervan* and enjoy the experience of a brisk trading session.

Tribe: *Kurtlar-dag* (Gray Wolf)

Major places: Razgrad, *Kurtlar-dag*

I do not fear the battle to come, I do not fear the enemy's swords, nor do I fear that my blood will flow. I welcome the battle to come, I embrace the challenge before me, I am kurta-kir and I walk with the Great Gray Wolf at my side.

— Kurta-kir battle chant

The tribe of the Gray Wolf (often called "the Great Tribe") rules the northern foothills and mountains that border Ussura. They are a fiercely independent and proud tribe that has produced more Sultáns than any other in the Crescent Empire. Their holdings reach from the top of the *Kurtlar-dag* south to the beginning of the great desert. It is a vast territory, ruled with an iron fist. Sultán Timur hails from this tribe; he would have become chieftain of the tribe had he not been chosen to lead the Empire, and his ties to them are very strong.

The *Kurta-kir* patrol as far south as the *Shehir'kum* but have no interest in tangling with the snake people or the desert. They prefer a good blizzard to a sandstorm any day. At least in a blizzard, you can take refuge in a cave.

Razgrad

Razgrad lies at the base of the *Kurtlar-dag* and thus enjoys some protection from the bitter winter cold that *Matushka* sends howling down from her realm. The university at Razgrad is probably the finest in the realm, although Sultán Timur hopes to restore *Alexia* to its position as the primary place of scholarship in the Empire. Students who attend the university also receive an education in foreigners thanks to frequent contact with *Ussurans* and the occasional *Cathayan*. Unlike other parts of the Empire, the people of Razgrad are somewhat more comfortable with the idea of *yavanci* in their midst.

Thanks to its location, students have ample land on which to ride and hunt: welcome diversions during their otherwise frantic and intense school year. Both men and women can attend classes, although chaperons must be present for all female students to ensure that everyone focuses on their studies (and that betrothal negotiations are not destroyed in the heat of young passion.)

The *ghazim* pay special attention to Razgrad. They know that students like to argue and sometimes fail to see the value of the old and proper ways. It usually takes only a bit of gentle prodding to remind them of their duty to their families and the ways of *patika*.

Razgrad also has the distinction of being the birthplace of a number of outstanding Crescent artists, musicians and poets.

Tribe: *Jadur-rihad* (Fire Dragon)

Major places: *Adaz'uk*, Erivan, Trebizond, Konya River

The dragon in my dreams, has onyx wings and ruby eyes, his beak is made of silver, his wings are tipped in gold, he takes me on his mighty back and soars above the mountains, together we are as one and I am not afraid.

— translation of a *Jadur-rihad* folksong

This is one of the least known places in the Crescent Empire. Here the influence of *Cathayan* can be seen in facial features, clothing style and food. The dialect has definite traces of both *Cathayan* and *Ussuran* vocabularies.

The *Adaz'uk* or Mountains of Faith are home (for now) to the Safadim, an isolated group of fanatics who have lived here for centuries. They are possibly a splinter sect from a *Kurta-kir* tribe, but more probably they came from a *Yilan-bazlik* group. They claim that their practice of *patika* is pure and untainted by the influences of city-bred weakness or Théan infidels. What distinguishes their culture is the complete and total disregard for women as anything other than chattel. Safadim women may not read, write, sing, dance or engage in idle conversation. They claim that Great Creator placed them on this earth to serve men, and therefore must be grateful and subservient. Women must be covered and time that she leaves her house, which she may not do unaccompanied.

Erivan

Erivan boasts the second largest slave market in the Crescent Empire with a brisk trade of potential slaves and concubines from Ussura and Cathay. Pirates who wish to avoid imperial entanglements prefer to bring their cargo here, where the locals tend to ignore their criminal activities. As long as no trouble breaks out, the Market Master turns a blind eye, especially when he is handsomely compensated.

The Safadim might have continued in their repressive practices unnoticed had it not been for the slave market at Erivan. On occasion they bring women to the market and engage in the normal business activities. Recently the women and children they have brought appear to be malnourished and show signs of abuse, something the Market Master does not tolerate. When he spoke with several of the Safadim about this, they brushed off his concern with disdain, calling the slaves "cattle" and claiming the right to do with them as they pleased. The Market Master allowed as how that was their right but made it clear that he was not interested in doing business with them if they were not going to take better care of their merchandise; he did not want his market to get a bad reputation. The local ghazim have been altered.

Trebizond

Trebizond is to the north what Rahajeel is to the west; a hybrid city where Ussurans and Crescents live more less congenially. It is easier to reach Ussura from Trebizond because there are no mountains to cross. It was originally a small kingdom of its own that claimed autonomy from



Syrneth Artifacts

Syrneth ruins abound in the Empire, far more than any other nation. For Crescenters, especially the *Yilan-bazlik*, whoever built these strange monuments must have been extremely powerful and wealthy, and were therefore owed respect. If perhaps someone stumbled upon a passage in the mountains or an archway in the desert, they enter at their own peril. There is no strong drive to dig up these ruins. In fact, several tribes have used them as burial grounds, adding to the treasure and mystery.

The *Yilan-bazlik* do not take kindly to anyone, especially infidel *yavanci*, looting these sacred sites. The chieftain of the tribe has placed a sizeable bounty for the capture of anyone caught poaching. Some whisper that the brotherhood of assassins is actually financing the reward. The only *yavanci* permitted to go about the ruins unmolested are the strange Vigilants of die Kreuzritter. Their task is to protect the ruins from those who seek to strip them of their secrets, and they are respected for their asceticism and devotion to their mission.

Some sites do not require one to enter the dreaded *Muglak'kum* and tangle with the Snake People. At the top of the *Hayalet-dag* on the border between Vodacce and the Empire, an aged Poor Knight faces a rock wall, standing guard. He has been here as long as anyone or anyone's oldest relatives can remember. It is said that he serves as the sentinel who watches over the Syrneth ruins within the mountains. Others say that he guards against the advent of the Fourth Prophet. He does not stop people from entering the passes nor does he ever speak except once to thank a caring traveler for a drink of water.

There are other sites commonly connected with the Syrneth that most Crescents know about. One is the Great Puzzle Maze and the other is the island of Cabora. As of Septimus 1, 1668, everyone else in Théah found out about the Isle of the Sunken Eye. Now, as ships begin converge on the Mirror, the safety of the Crescent Empire is questioned, a situation that Sultán Timur must address soon.

the rest of the Empire. Under its ruler Alexius, it offered to send tribute to the Crescent Empire in acknowledgment of Crescent superiority. An agreement was struck and matters proceeded quietly for a while until the Grand Vizier noticed the richness of the goods. Why should the Empire

have access to such wealth only once a year, he reasoned, when it could become part of the Empire and afford him direct access to their treasury? Rather than dispatch a regiment, he sent spies to undermine Trebizond's stability so that eventually the kingdom would turn to the Empire for help.

When things began to fall apart, Trebizond had three options: Cathay, Ussura or the Crescent Empire. Reasoning that those whom they were most like would understand, they turned to the Empire. It was a mistake for which they paid dearly. The Vizer plundered their treasury, in-stalled a puppet administrator, and sent loyal army units to occupy the city. Today, it is but a pale shadow of its former self, dependent upon the Sultán's good graces and trade from Ussura. Through old laws (created by the Vizer), it cannot mint any funds of its own and must depend upon trade for its monies. A caravan arrives once a month bearing the wealth it needs and removing any excess good gained in trade. In this manner, Trebizond remains bound to the Empire.

Tribe: Yilan-bazlik (Magic Snake)

Major places: Muglak'kum, Shehir'kum, Basra, Kulkadir, Urfa

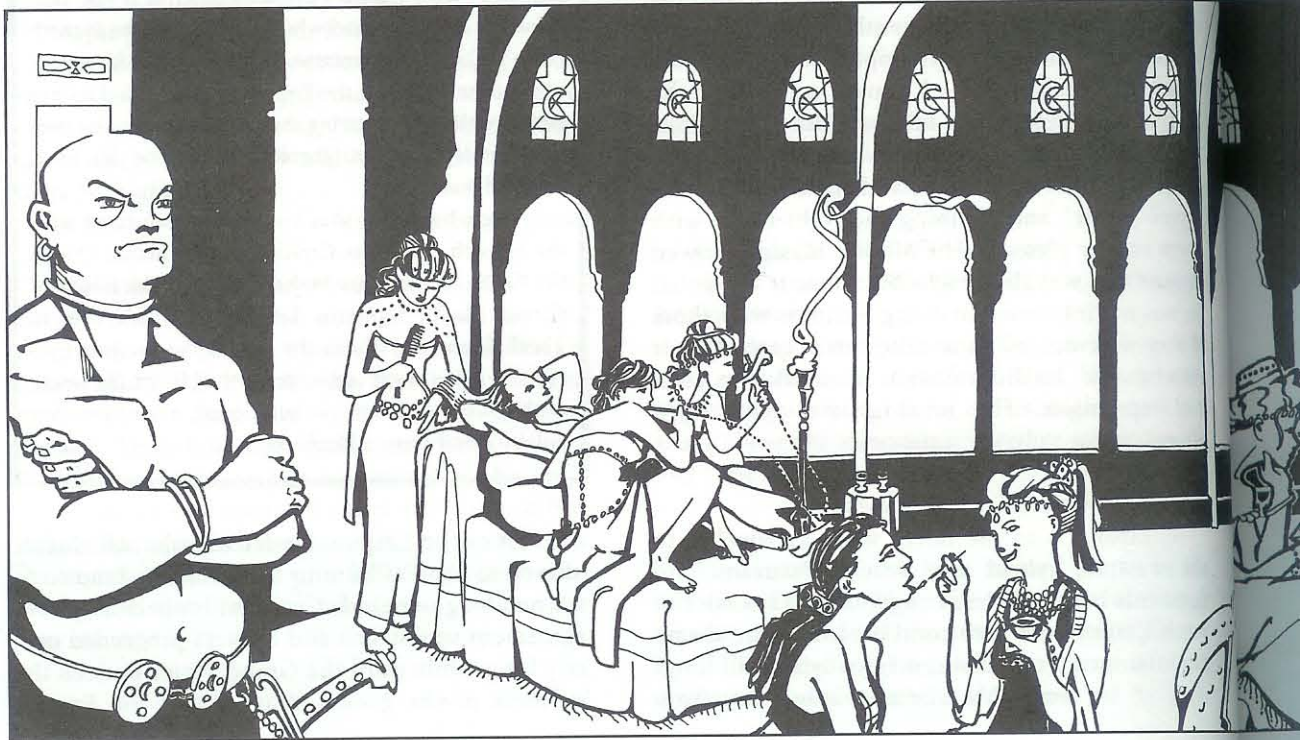
This was the most dangerous part of my trip, through the lands of the dreaded Yilan-bazlik. These

are most threatening people, many of whom shave their heads and bodies (both men and women) and adorn them with strange glyphs and markings. I have heard tales that their religious practices include sitting motionless of hours trying to achieve an altered state of consciousness. Although I am not personally afraid of serpents, after a week or so, I found that my flesh began to crawl when I heard the distinctive slithering sound of the dreadful creatures. I shall be glad to reach Iskandar.

— High Lord Cheung Yang Yue, Cathayan ambassador, writing to the Emperor

Snakes, sand and Surneth ruins. These three words describe the three key elements of life for the *yilan-bazlik*. They are generally regarded as the strangest of tribes, and their ways are as secretive as a viper hiding under a rock. They live for the most part in the lesser desert great desert of the *Muglak'kum*, although there are settlements on both the east and west edges of the peninsula.

The desert itself is one of the most dangerous places on the Théan continent: an unbroken sea of shifting dunes, deadly mirages and treacherous quicksand. A rider could travel for weeks and see nothing but desolate rock. The temperatures climb to well over one hundred degrees in the day, and sink down below freezing at night. High winds create devastating sandstorms, swallowing up whole caravans without a trace. Animal life is



scarce and the few reliable oases are jealously protected by the *yilan-bazlik* tribesmen.

Worse than all this, however, are the rumors of the terrible things which lurk beneath the sands. Local tribesmen speak of Syrneth ruins, forgotten for centuries only to be exposed by the shifting winds. Tales abound of great statues coming to life, of creatures taller than a mountain, and of strange visions shared by travelers who pass along its length. Few who venture into the *Muglak'kum* ever return... and not all of them are felled by thirst or sandstorms.

Basra

This ancient city serves as a contact point for the people of the Dakalan Islands that lie off to the west. The original city was set on the coast and served as an important port for centuries; however, soil erosion and constant buffeting of the sea caused the city to slowly deteriorate. Rather than rebuild on the same site, it was decided to move further inland and maintain paths to the shore. No longer a prominent center of commerce, the city has become quite second-rate. Prosperous merchant establishments have been replaced with one-story shelters and rickety stalls. It is not much of a metropolis but to weary travelers coming out of the *Muglak'kum* it shines like an oasis.

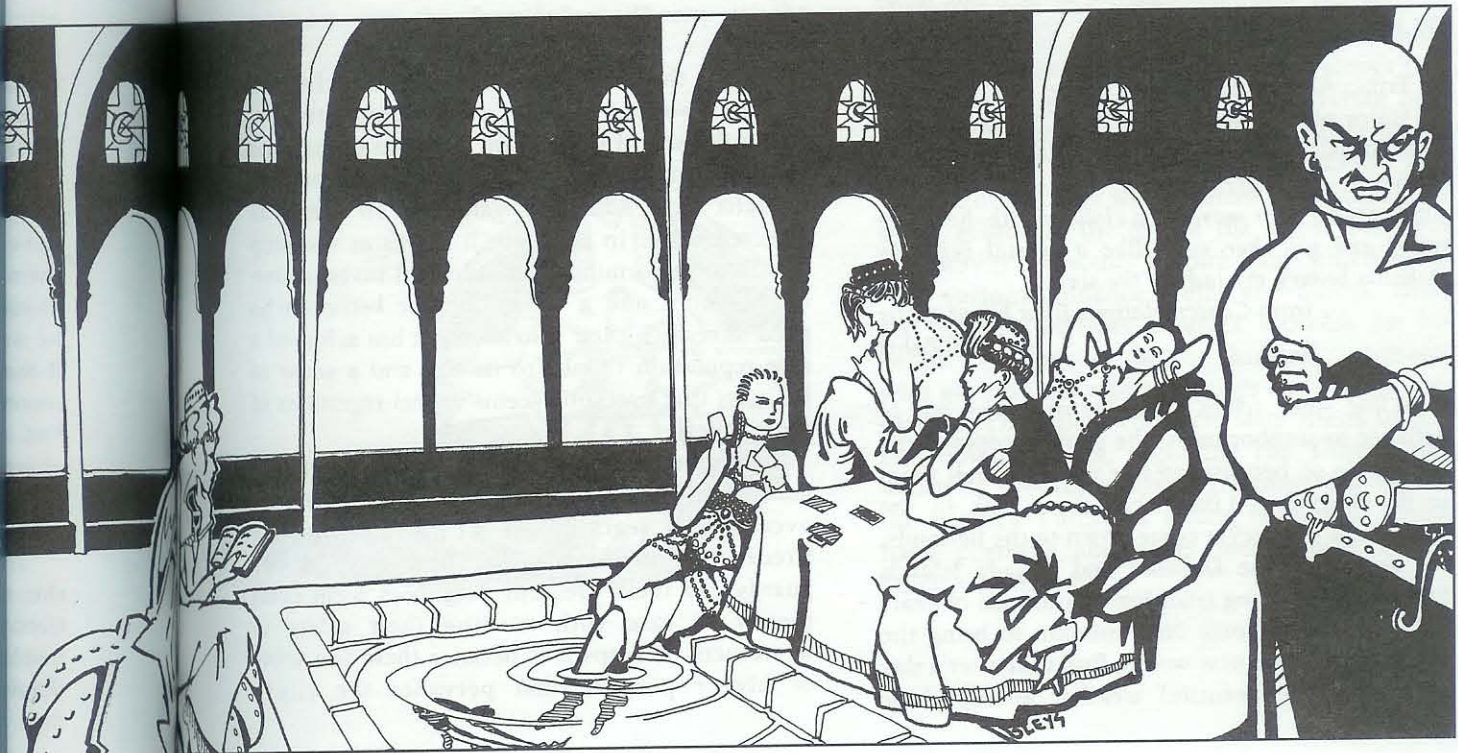
Basra is like Rahajeel but without any Vodacce influence. It could be equated to a frontier town where the rule of law is tenuous and the merchant with the largest cadre of hired scimitars rules the roost.

Kulkadir

Kulkadir is the furthest continental point east in the Crescent Empire. Once an obscure fishing village with ties to local pirates, the town has seen a marked increase in its fortunes since recent activity in the Mirror Sea. Kulkadir boasts one of the best fish markets in the Empire, thanks to the efforts of the fisherman of the Cinada Islands. Now that trade has picked up, bureaucrats and tax collectors seem to have materialized out of thin air. The pirate influence remains evident however, and it is only a matter of time before the authorities try to tame the city's wilder side once and for all. In addition, the added tension of foreigners in the city makes the locals quite uneasy.

Urfa

Urfa is the largest city in the *Muglak'kum*, built around a deep oasis thousands of years ago. Legend holds that Urfa was actually built on top of even older ruins, but there are so many stories about "the ruins" in this part of the Crescent Empire that no one can know for certain without



digging up every inch of the sandy terrain, and digging in sand can be a very frustrating activity. One story that persists however, is that the bodies of the Second Prophet and his followers were taken here during the terrible storm that heralded the First Crusade. Some among the Vaticine faithful claim that the bodies lie somewhere deep under the sands, in a mausoleum lined in gold. Each body, they say, is wrapped in a shroud of some shining material that keeps it from decaying. Why, scholars ask, would Theus put someone as holy as the Second Prophet in the deepest part of a nation of the unfaithful? A sect which calls itself the Keepers of the Shroud say it is because Theus returned the Second Prophet to his place of birth. Others say that it is the safest place to keep him until he rises to protect them against the coming of the Fourth Prophet. In any event, all of this conjecture makes Urfa a desirable destination for those who are interested in solving the mystery.

Urfa has all of the amenities one would expect in a town on the edge of the desert. While accommodations and food are not lavish, they are clean. Explorers can buy provisions for their expeditions and take a day to sit in a pleasant *kaffehan* and exchange stories about the Surneth ruins, the strange Snake People and how best to get sand out of delicate places. Although it is somewhat inland from the coast, there are numerous small towns, really nothing more than docks and a few merchant stalls, but it is enough to make a safe landing and head inland.

Tribe: *Aldiz'ahali* (People of the Star)

Major places: Mt. Karada, Mt. Ozayrat, Zafara, Dakalan Islands, Cinada Islands, Rumelia River

When she danced for me, her smile was like starlight, her hair was like a cloud of silk, her body round and soft, her voice like a crystal bell. My Dakalan beauty, my lady of the stars.

— from *Contemplations By a Fountain* by
Celik al'Bahri

While some tribes keep the old ways out of defiance or stubbornness, the gentle people of the Islands do so because no one comes to tell them to do otherwise. Like tribal clans high in the mountains who never come down to the flatlands, the people of the Dakalan and Cinada Islands have been following traditions thousands of years old. Those who come on a mission to bring the Islanders into the new world, find that after a day or two in the beautiful weather among these

unhurried people who seem to laugh all the time, "going native" is almost irresistible. This is due in part to an *Aldiz'ahali's* deep understanding of the sea, of knowing when to resist and when to bend. For them, life is very simple and cyclical, and they live in harmony with their surroundings. There are no mosques here; *patika* is practiced as it is in the encampments: in tents under the spiritual guidance of a shaman.

When the tax collector comes to assess them, they always ensure that his visit is most hospitable. Like everyone else, he finds himself walking more slowly, taking extra time with his *kaffe*, fantasizing about a moonlit walk on the beach — this is the magic of the Islands.

On the mainland, this tip of the southern peninsula holds perhaps the most important landmark in the Crescent Empire — Mt. Karada, the holy mountain. The object of a pilgrimage undertaken at one point or another in the life of a faithful Crescent, the mountain rises as the highest peak of the *Kutsal-dag*. Somewhere nearby (the exact location is known only to those who need to know) is the secret entrance to Mt. Ozayrat, home to the dreaded *Qatihl'i*, the Order of the Assassins. So carefully guarded is it, through the use of natural and unnatural terrain, that anyone foolish enough to search for it will find himself at the mercy of a variety of horrors, including a wall of hissing, biting serpents. (More on the *Qatihl'i* can be found in the GM's Section.)

Zafara

This is the one city other than Rahajeel where one finds *yavanci* walking about unmolested, for this is the site of the ancient Hospital of the First Witness, run by Sigrun Masthof. Sitting along the Rumelia River, Zafara is regarded by all Théans as a sacred place. In addition, it serves as rest stop for those performing archaeological investigation of the ruins, and a waystation for *kervans* who need to restock their provisions. It has achieved a rare reputation thanks to its age and a sense of holiness that everyone seems to feel regardless of their beliefs.

The predominant feature in Zafara is, of course, the hospital which has been operating for over 1,000 years. Most of the 30-odd die Kreuzritter knights who live here serve as city guards, yet their Crescent neighbors seem completely at ease with trusting their safety to westerners. Perhaps it is because there is a sense of higher purpose that pervades the city.

addition to caring for the sick, the hospital feeds the homeless and invalid. It never turns anyone away, even those unable to pay for care. Under the gentle guardianship of Sigrun Masthof, the scars from thousands of years of hatred and war are slowly healing. It is a hopeful sign, especially in these times of great turmoil.

Iskandar

Population: 40,000

The capital of the Crescent Empire can certainly be considered a jewel by anyone's standards, even mine.

— High Lord Cheung Yang Yue, Cathayan ambassador to the Crescent Empire

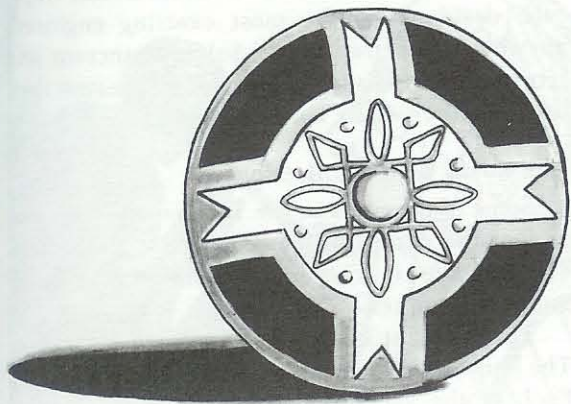
Perched between the southern forks of the Halya River, the beautiful city of Iskandar sits above the Bay of Emeralds. Although the original city is very old, the newer sections began some 200 years ago by Sultán Mahamat II, a brilliant general and ambitious civic planner. An avid student of historical architecture, he designed sewage and water systems in addition to streets and public buildings. He hired the renowned architect Zuleiman to create a city that would "shine like a diamond in Dunya's crown." According to Zuleiman's distinct areas were created for markets, craftsmen and tradesmen. Hospitals and schools received special sections, as did military barracks and religious buildings. In short, Iskandar was the first "planned" city in the

Empire. But architectural planning was not the only part of the program.

Artisans from all over the Empire came to Iskandar to decorate it: painters, tile makers, weavers, miniaturists, woodcarvers, stone cutters, gem setters and landscapers. The saying goes that the only place in the world with more gardens than Iskandar are the Gardens of Paradise themselves. You cannot turn a corner without finding a fountain or a gazebo or a tiny jewel-like garden full of exotic flowers and topiary. One of the neighborhoods was designed solely for the nobility, and here one can find small gleaming palaces and mansions separated by high walls and guarded by stern, well-muscled men. The homes of successful merchants and other well-to-do tradesman, bureaucrats and scholars stand nearby. In addition to the national Mosque of the Faithful, each neighborhood has a local house of worship.

Naturally the city holds a university, not quite as famous as the one in Razgrad but definitely striving to reach that level. Education is an important aspect of Crescent life, and a special concern for *Ilka-Kadin* Hasna who is also the patroness of the orphanage and the main hospital. The bazaar of Iskandar is undoubtedly the largest in the Empire. Goods come right to the docks and are transported directly to the bazaar so they do not have time to sit or fall prey to thieves and pickpockets.

The government offices (the Council of Ministers and the Secretariat) and the Hall of Justice stand on the east side of the bazaar, flanking a long walkway of shining white stones that leads east to the Royal Palace. A reflecting pool marks the formal entrance to the immense palace grounds. This entrance is called the "Lion Gate" because of the huge white marble lions sitting like silent guards at the top of the steps. The next entryway is called the "Empire Gate" which opens onto various audience rooms and offices. Here, the Sultán's advisors conduct business on his behalf and he himself meets with government representatives and foreign dignitaries. The Sultán conducts state affairs in several official courts, including the Third Court which he uses for private ceremonies. The Hall of the Peacock Throne is a long hallway in which hang portraits and other memorabilia of the Sultán's predecessors.



It is extremely rare that a *yavanci*, no matter how high-ranking, will be permitted into the next area of the Palace. The chambers here are opulent, displaying the Sultán's wealth and power, and none can take offense at the elegance or level of hospitality. An additional feast hall can be found here with an special kitchen that caters to foreign palates. (Even at a feast, the Sultán's meals are prepared and tested in his private kitchen under strict supervision.) This area also houses the Hall of Records where scribes work furiously to record information received from outlying areas including tax data, reports, letters, petitions, proclamations and the detailed chronicle of the Sultán's reign.

The passage through this administrative area ends at the "Peace Gate" which leads to the ultra-private world of the ruler of the Crescent Empire: a 22-acre fairytale array of gardens, paths, fountains, and gazebos, all painstakingly maintained. This is the Sultán's private garden in which only he can walk (or ride, if he so chooses.) Sultán Timur enjoys spending summer evenings in the garden with his children, playing games and rolling about in the grass like any other family.

The personal family area contains a dizzying array of chambers, baths, gardens, small offices, libraries, pavilions, the Royal Stables, and the exquisitely carved "Felicity Gate" that leads to the Grand Harem. The walkways, alleys, baths, gardens, stables, kitchens and building keep a small army of workers busy all day and night. The interiors are even more lavish with every kind of decoration imaginable. One of the Sultán's prized possessions is a magnificent set of celadon porcelain dishes, which he received as a wedding present from the Emperor of Cathay. The kitchens in the palace are busy all the time, feeding everyone who lives within the compound. The Sultán has a private kitchen, as does each of his four wives. At least three tasters are employed to protect the Sultán.

There are two areas in the family quarters that are even more carefully guarded than the other rooms: the Treasury and the Harem. The Treasury lies deep beneath the palace, and consists of four rooms. The "Ambassadors Room" stores tribute and gifts of all varieties. For state occasions, various items are selected for display as an indication of the Sultán's wealth and power. Some of these include weapons, armor, goblets, trays, lamps and candlesticks, inlaid boxes, walking sticks, fabrics, *kilim* and carved statues. Jewelry,

including uncut stones, remains separate and is distributed among members of the Harem as the Sultán sees fit. He always gives a new mother in the Harem a gift, and if she has given birth to a son, it can be quite lavish. Unlike his predecessors, he permits *Ilka-Kadin* Hasna to come into this room when she pleases, as long as she notifies him of what she has taken. Sultán Timur always carries his favorite item with him, a string of carved emerald prayer beads.

The Royal Harem also has living quarters and secret passages that allow people to sneak behind a heavily carved partition and watch the Sultán or spy on each other. Each room in the family quarters is decorated in the finest materials: satin and silk from Cathay, rare woods, precious metals and gemstones, delicate carvings, soft linen and gauzy bed hangings. Small tables inlaid with mosaics and mother-of-pearl hold beaten gold trays on which sit various tidbits and morsels to delight the palate. Servants wait in nearly every room, ready to serve a steaming cup of fresh *kaffe* or a chilled glass of lemon essence or bracing *sekan-jabin*. Bathing facilities are never far away, nor is a servant trained in the arts of massage.

The Sultán has several private bedchambers, some of which he uses when he spends time with his children. Another is reserved for the presentation of an *odalisque*. One houses the *Ilka-Kadin* when she visits. And one, which can be regarded as the inner sanctum, holds the bed which the Sultán shares with no one, not even one of the many small pets that run about the living quarters.

Needless to say, these areas are guarded by hundreds of the fiercest soliders in the Empire. The Treasury also contains countless deadly traps, each designed by the most exacting engineers anywhere. Penetrating the Sultán's sanctum and returning alive is a feat worthy of the greatest thief or adventurer in the land.

The Royal Gems Collection

Some of the gems in the Treasury are too valuable or too dangerous to be stored with the rest. They are kept in a separate chamber under heavy guard at all times.

The Starlight is a six-sided sapphire pendant. The body sits on foot made of six matching pearls. Each of the sapphire's sides is framed in solid gold. The cover of the pendant is sculpted in delicate gold latticework encrusted with pale yellow topazes and diamonds. This is a relatively recent acquisition, sent as a gift to Sultán Timur's grandmother by the *Aldiz'ahali* chieftain.

The Heart of Dunya is an emerald pendant, some 55 centimeters long with a 4-centimeter long emerald above that. An assortment of round and hexagonal emeralds hang from the longer emerald in a cascade. The pendant's chain is actually 17 strands of graduated pearls, connected to the setting with diamond clasps.

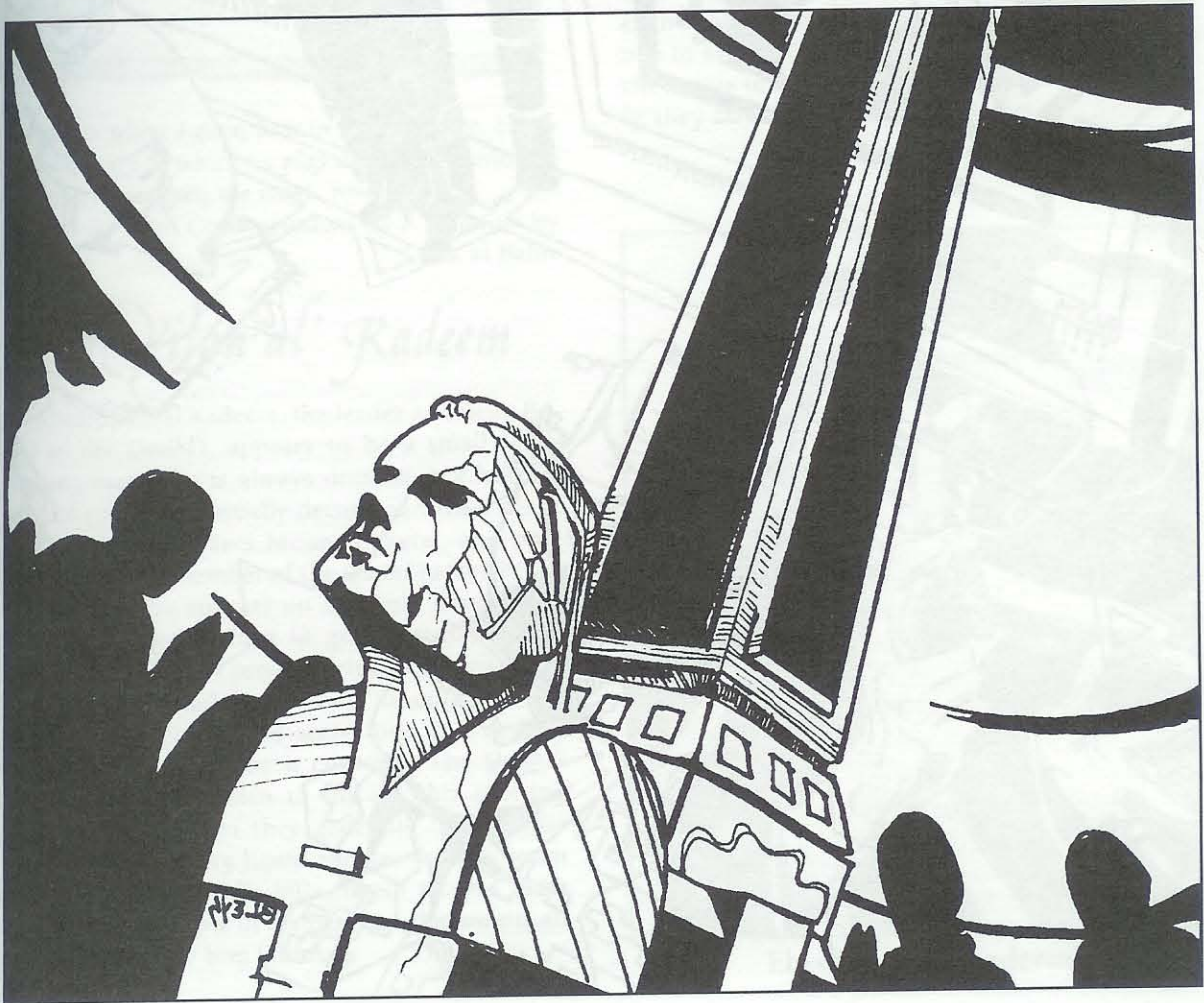
Probably the most famous non-jewelry piece in the collection is the famed *Kilik Parlak* dagger, a gift from the ruler of Trebizond. The hilt measures 35 centimeters, and features three very large emeralds. An 8-sided emerald sits in the pommel, surrounded by rows of tiny diamonds. The back side of the handle is inlaid with mother-of-pearl and enamel. The Sultán wears this dagger on state occasions, and it figures in the coronation ceremony as well.

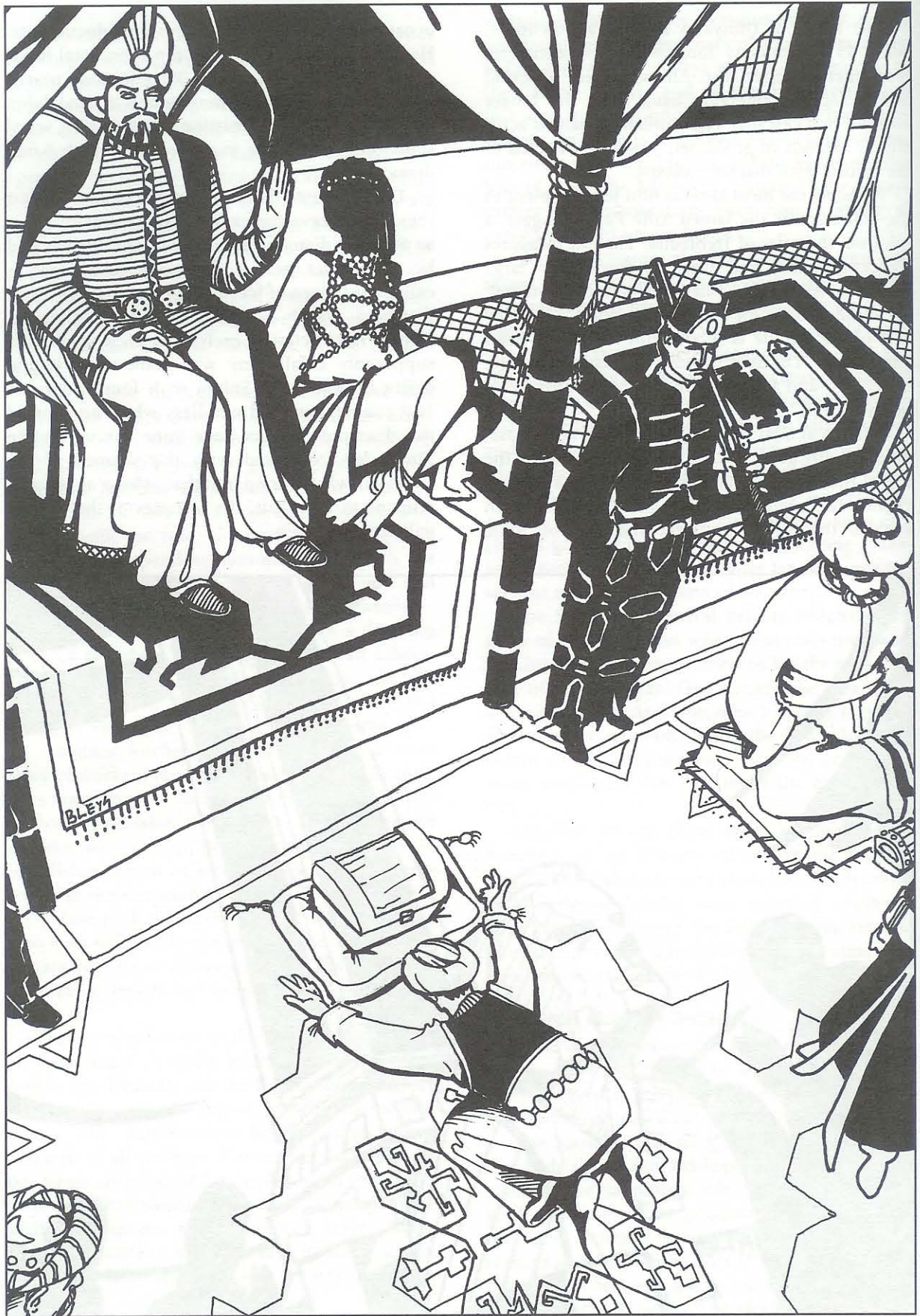
The Great Seal remains here when not in use. Made of pure gold, it has a perfect diamond on the top of the seal. It rests in a blue and pink enamel cylinder decorated with diamonds. A gold chain enables the Sultán to wear the seal on state

occasions and to sign important documents. Hanging from the bottom of the cylindrical holder are 45 strings of matched 38-centimeter pearls.

A former Sultán commissioned a candelabra for his person use, consisting of a matching set of solid gold candelabra, each decorated with 6,666 diamonds.

There are two diamonds in the collection, but they never leave the vault. The Princess of Ice is an 86-carat diamond set in silver and surrounded by 49 smaller perfect diamonds. The other is called the Queen of Ice, an egg-shaped 105.6 carat diamond which supposedly carries a curse. Princes have betrayed each other for it, and doom supposedly befalls any who look upon it and desire its wealth. A Sultán with four wives and 100 concubines died childless when he claimed the diamond. Others have gone insane. Sultán Timur has consulted with the shamen of the *Kurta-kir* who assured him that as long as the gem remains in the vault, the fortunes of the Empire will remain secure.





The Second Scroll

Prominent People

New NPCs

No matter where I gaze, be it in or out, above, below
I see the stage on which we play as actors, phantoms,
shadows — and yet, the magic remains.

— from *Contemplations By A Fountain* by
Celik al Bahir

Ebedi Yilan al'Kadeem

Ebedi Yilan al'Kadeem, the leader and deity figure of the *Qatihl'i*, appears to be a small, odd-looking man who is always dressed in a hooded robe of some sort, usually decorated with a snake motif. He never leaves Mount Ozayrat, and only rarely does any member of the *Qatihl'i* actually see him. He always appears on the holy days of the *Qatihl'i*, and leads them in great rituals, during which every *Qatihl'i* present drinks a sacred drink provided by al'Kadeem himself in solitude. The recipe is an ancient and secret one and no one knows for certain what it contains. The *Qatihl'i* are expressly forbidden to discuss this meeting with each other, but they generally believe that ingestion of the fiery liquid enables them to reach a state of otherworldly bliss. Ebedi assures them that this is a glimpse of the paradise that awaits all those who follow him faithfully.

Almost everything known about Ebedi is based on rumor and word of mouth. It has been centuries since anyone other than the *Qatihl'i* has seen him, but nobody doubts that he still lives. Every year, he sends the Sultán ten percent of the money that his agents charged for their services during the year. He also sends a letter, wishing the Sultán a peaceful year, discussing recent political events, and reminding the Sultán not to send anyone to Mount Ozayrat. The royal archives collect the letters to the Sultáns from Ebedi and amazingly, they all have the same handwriting.



Ebedi Yilan al'Kadeem

Yakub al'Marikk

The *Atlar-vahir* have given the Crescent Empire many fine soldiers. Children of the Wild Horse are raised on stories of tremendous battles in which a mighty hero always vanquishes hordes of enemies, even if he or she dies on the field. When young Yakub ben Salim al'Marikk sat around the campfire with the other children, his huge dark eyes would shine with visions of himself galloping across the plains of Edirne astride his beloved mare Saldira. The elders of the tribe would smile at the young boy; he was definitely a rock-mover, that one. As he grew to manhood, he more than filled the promise of his youth, becoming one of the great military leaders of the tribe and eventually the entire Empire.

If his character had a flaw, it was perhaps that he had inherited a full measure of *gezmek-ayak*, wandering feet. His father wisely arranged for Yakub to spend time as a bodyguard for a wealthy merchant who ran caravans from the *Hayelet-dag* east to the Mirror. During a visit to Erivan, Yakub became fascinated with Cathayan acrobats who entertained in the local bazaar. Their style was very athletic, involving flips, somersaults and a great deal of turning and twisting. They used a variety of props during their performances including sets of square-hilted daggers with curved blades that looked like flames. A natural athlete, Yakub bargained with one of the acrobats for some props; he entertained himself on the ride home by devising elaborate moves with his new toys that eventually became the core of the Marikk School.

As the chief's eldest son, Yakub knew that one day he would assume the responsibilities of leadership but for now his father and brothers were healthy and the call of the imperial army was tempting. By virtue of his uncommon martial skills, Yakub rose through the ranks and soon forged a strong friendship with the young Prince Timur who appointed him commander in charge of all his armies. The *kumandan* was adored by his soldiers because he was more than a pampered bejeweled nobleman playing war. He loved all forms of competition, could drink most of his men under the table, and was always ready for a good practical joke, even at his own expense.

As was fitting, he returned home regularly and in time married the daughter of a fellow tribesman. Their first child was a son whom they named Kursis. He was the apple of his father's eye,



Yakub al'Marikk

and as soon as the boy could close his chubby little fists, his father put training batons into them. Kursis became his father's most adept student, devising his own variations on Marikk School teachings. Yakub had other children but Kursis remained his favorite above all.

When he realized that he did not wish to assume the mantle of chieftain, he conferred with his ailing father to pass the responsibility to Kursis. A bride was chosen for the boy — a tribal girl he had known since childhood — and all the arrangements were made. Unbeknownst to Yakub, however, his son had other plans. After a "chance" encounter with Hochmeister Schmidl of die Kreuzritter, the boy learned about something larger than even the tribe or the Crescent Empire. Despite his deeply conflicted feelings, he did what he had to do and disappeared in what appeared to be an assault on his encampment. The tents were burned to the ground, the horses were gone, and on the ground the most damning piece of evidence — the amulet the boy received at birth which he never removed. It had been found on the scorched ground, smashed to pieces and spattered with blood.

When word reached came that his eldest son had apparently been murdered, the warrior who had never flinched in the heat of battle fell into a dead faint. When he awakened, he was filled with a blind and bitter hatred for the person or people

who had done this to him and his family, and before the High Priest, he swore the *adak kutsal davasi*, the oath of sacred vendetta — the strongest one that a Crescent can take. Those who took this pledge would hunt their target and exact the ultimate revenge, even if they had to do it from beyond the grave.

More on Kursis can be found on pages 58–59 and 96–97 of *die Kreuzritter* sourcebook.

Yakub al'Marikk has the broad high cheekbones and wiry body of a plains tribesman who has probably spent more time on horseback than on his feet. His dark piercing eyes reveal his cunning and quick intelligence. He is bald, save for a topknot braid worn long down his back.

Sigrun Masthof

This saintly Eisen woman runs the venerable Hospital of the First Witness in the coastal town of Zafara. Although quite elderly, Sigrun walks with the energy of a woman many years younger. Her round, kind face is crowned by a corona of white braids that she wears in the Eisen manner. Clad in her simple black and white attire, she is regarded by all who meet her as a holy woman. As she walks through the wards, the sick reach out for her gentle touch and she can often be found in the central garden of the hospital surrounded by children.

Gretchen von Stollenzahl was born in Eisen to a wealthy merchant family. While other girls, including her sisters, moved from playing with dolls to thinking about ballgowns and husbands, Gretchen continued to pretend that her toys were her “patients.” She kept detailed records of their ailments and nursed them constantly, often going into the woods to find herbs from which she made tisanes and poultices. She naturally turned to the study of medicine, although it was not common for women of her standing to do so. When her father announced that he was traveling to the fabled city of Zafara, she would not be consoled until her parents promised that she could accompany him.

On the way, she had many strange dreams. Sometimes she appeared as a Crusader, sometimes a Crescent. Sometimes she saw herself die in battle and other times she found herself a beggar child in the streets. Gretchen was not certain what all the dreams meant, but this much she knew her fate was tied to the city of Zafara. She

immediately fell in love with the shining hospital and convinced her father that she should remain there to study medicine, under the watchful eyes of a very respectable Eisen family. Despite his misgivings, he could not deny her enthusiasm and a most excited Gretchen began to attend healing classes within the wall of the ancient Hospital.

It was only a matter of time before she came to the attention of the Black Crosses there who marveled at the young woman's determination, intelligence and obvious healing skills. By some remarkable coincidence, the Eisen family with whom she had been living were called back to their homeland. The young woman cried bitterly as she was forced to return to Eisen and she vowed that one day she would return.

It was many years before she could keep that vow. Soon after her return, she was approached by a Knight of *die Kreuzritter*, under the guise of a suitor. Her family found the young man eminently suitable and the marriage was arranged. The day after the wedding, the happy couple began the journey to the groom's hometown. Sadly, the young bride was taken with a fever along the way. Her family was grief-stricken when word reached them of their daughter's death. Thus the life of Gretchen von Stollenzahl ended, and Sigrun Masthof was born, an acolyte of *die Kreuzritter* who fulfilled the promise she had made to herself to return to Zafara. Since then, she has



Sigrun Masthof

administered the hospital with a skill few others could match, finally realizing her dream of treating the sick and invalid of the world.

Sigrun is a sturdily-built Eisen woman with a sweet round face and twinkling blue eyes. Her hands are those of a woman accustomed to hard work, yet they have a gentle healing touch. She is an intensely devout healer who views her work as a way of erasing the evils performed during the Crusades.

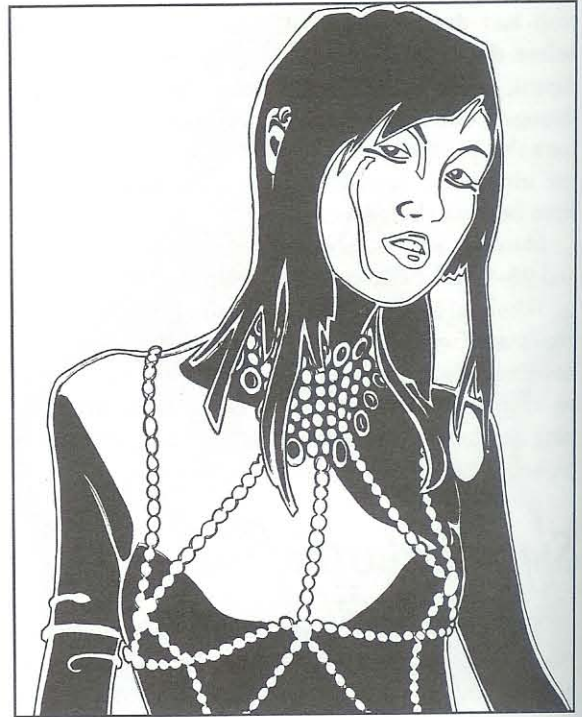
Bayana Roxelana Belika

The trade route across the Crescent Empire is dotted with slave markets and even Rahajeel, the closest city to Vodacce, has a dark underbelly where a woman down on her luck can make a living of sorts. The Vodacce who fathered a child on the *Ruzgar'hala* whore was not wealthy by any standard, but offered a warm meal in addition to paying the fee. He drank a fair quantity of cheap wine and used her quite hard, so it was almost a full day before she awakened in a rumpled bed to the acrid smell of sex and wine. Nine months later, she gave birth to a daughter whom she fancifully named Roxelana.

The girl was beautiful and rarely cried, a good thing because her mother soon left Rahajeel and headed east to Edirne. As Roxelana grew older, she attracted the attention of several local slavers who offered to buy her on the spot. Her mother realized that if the child was so saleable, she could probably get an even better price at the big slave market in Iskandar. Her assumption proved correct when Roxelana was purchased by a wealthy merchant who believed that the young girl showed "special promise."

For the first time in her young life, Roxelana could bathe every day. She had beautiful clothes and a full stomach. She learned how to sing, dance, and tell stories. There were other things she was forced to learn, but they were not as terrible as eating garbage off the street or listening to her mother moaning and grunting in the darkness. When the merchant felt the time was right, he took Roxelana, now a beautiful and accomplished young woman, in a covered *palanquin* to the palace with hopes of selling her into the harem of the Sultán himself.

Sultán Timur already had several wives, including the exquisite *Ilka-Kadin* Hasna, and



Bayana Roxelana Belika

over 100 concubines, most of whom he received as tribute or the spoils of war. Roxelana took advantage of the harem's highly political structure to work her wiles on the other women and the guards. She was charming, attentive, eager to learn, and careful to hide her true nature. She could perform devastating imitations, to the delight of the other concubines. An avid game player, she was always ready for a round of dice or cards, or her real passion, *ajedrez*. She soon gained the nickname *Khourrem* or "Laughing One," for her cheerful demeanor and wonderful stories.

It was only a matter of time before she came to the attention of *Ilka-Kadin* Hasna who viewed the young woman with great suspicion, despite the good reports of her character. The *Kadin* had not maintained her position by trusting those around her. She could find no fault with the girl but kept her under observation just the same. It was not long before Roxelana was called to the Sultán's bed. Before she could be presented to the Sultán, however, her fortunes took a remarkable turn.

Apparently *Ilka-Kadin* Hasna was so impressed with the girl that she arranged for Roxelana to enter the household of a worthy nobleman who happened to be *Kumandan* Yakub al'Marikk's second-in-command. Roxelana was surprised but knew better than to press her luck. As Second

Wife, she would be in a far better position from which to control her own destiny than she might have been in the royal harem. She ingratiated herself with the head wife who grew fond of the girl and was actually pleased when Roxelana bore a son. In return, Roxelana became a devoted nurse when the poor woman breathed her last, struck down by a mysterious illness. Soon thereafter Roxelana was installed as head wife and foster mother to the dead woman's daughter.

Roxelana's indulgent husband can deny her nothing, and is pleasantly surprised that she rarely asks for jewels or precious items. When she first joined his household, she confessed to him that she would much rather spend her day working in a garden, so he built her an exquisite greenhouse and solarium. She spends many hours a day there in seclusion, ostensibly tending to her flowers and plants so that she can prepare *tisanes* and other medicines for the people under her care.

Roxelana is an extremely beautiful woman with long brown hair and thick-lashed dark gold eyes, a gift from Vodacce father. Every gesture she makes is a study in sensual grace, whether arranging flowers, pouring a steaming cup of *kaffe*, or slipping the last layer of her silk garments off before lying down next to her husband. She is just as meticulous in her private chambers where she pores over ancient tomes of lore to perfect her knowledge of things past... and things yet to come.

Ilka-Kadin Hasna

From the day she was born, Hasna's destiny was set, foretold by the high shaman of the *Aldiz'ahali* in the traditional fashion. There were definite indications of both *atlar* and *cikar*, pointing the path for a figure of authority, organization and leadership. Overriding both was the fortuitous sign of *aslan*, the lion, indicating that this child was destined to live in a sphere of great power. As was the custom, her horoscope went to the palace so that her name could be added to those of other potential royal consorts.

Hasna received traditional training in a variety of skills including the cultural and sensual arts. She could paint miniatures, play several musical instruments, read, write passable poetry and dance. Her real talents, however, lay in her ability to read people quickly and accurately and in her excellent negotiating skills. Her beauty and quiet

strength was exactly the combination required if one hoped to become *ilka-Kadin*, First Wife, to the great Sultán.

Although she was fully prepared to be a dutiful daughter and bring honor to her tribe by marrying the Sultán, her husband turned out to be a handsome and kind man. He treated her with consideration and respect, and even allowed her to manage the harem. Fortunately, the *Valide Sultán* was very pleased with her new daughter-in-law and Hasna intended to keep it that way. Hasna had heard many horror stories about mothers who hated their son's wives. Because of her intelligent and fair dealings with her household, *Ilka-Kadin* Hasna was genuinely respected, which helped her monitor the level of subterfuge and internecine politicking common to any harem, especially the royal one.

The *Ilka-Kadin's* rare combination of flawless beauty and wise intelligence rivals that of the magnificent Elaine of Avalon. Dark gray eyes flash beneath expressive brows and her full mouth is almost always turned up in a slight smile. She moves with quiet elegance and often visits the Sultán late at night to bring him *kaffe* and rub his shoulders while he works. He treasures her calm demeanor and helpful assistance, and thanks the Great Creators every night in his prayers for the mother of his sons.



Ilka-Kadin Hasna

Khan Atagun Bahadar

Like any living legend, Khan Atagun can actually do much of what the stories attribute to him. He could ride before he could walk and knows the workings of the equine mind so well that many people wonder if he might not be part horse himself.

So who is Atagun Bahadar? Is he the ultimate "pirate of the plains"? Can he really satisfy all the women in his harem in one night? Can he really shoot blindfolded while riding backwards on a galloping horse? Does he have a treasure stored somewhere in the caves at the headwaters of the Halya River? Does he slit the throats of his enemies and bathe in their hot blood?

Or is he the wise leader of the ancient *Atlar-vahir* who dispenses justice with a fair and even hand? Is he the kindly father of almost 50 children, a patriarch who loves nothing better than spending an evening teaching *ajedrez* to the oldest ones or pretending to be a shaggy pony for the youngest?

Atagun describes himself as a simple, old-fashioned man who follows the ancient ways of his people. He is loyal to his Sultán but keeps his distance, and focuses on the business of his tribe. Under his leadership, the *Atlar-vahir* continue to thrive and control the wide fertile plains that dominate the western half of the Empire.

He is highly distrustful of all *yavanci* and advocates no more contact with the rest of Théah than absolutely necessary. He believes that the trade routes should be even more closely watched and hefty tolls paid to insure safe passage through tribal lands. He recently made a mutual fostering arrangement with the chief of the *Kurta-kir* that involves their oldest sons, and there is talk of a marital alliance between the two great tribes.

Khan Atagun has an ageless face, burnished by hours under the sun. He wears his black hair long in the old style and his dark almond-shaped eyes display the wily and practiced gaze of a plains hunter. He has a fondness for the rich red dyes of Cathay and enjoys draping his private tent with long swathes of fabric. There is probably no more generous host, except perhaps the Sultán himself, and no more ruthless enemy if offense is given. Atagun's philosophy is simple: the best way is still the old way.



Khan Atagun Bahadar

Sey'r Celik al'Bahri

Celik al'Bahri was born Celik ibn Ibrahim al'Khayyami. He began speaking at a remarkably early age and loved to repeat the stories he heard around the campfire of his *Aldiz'ahali* tribe. His family came originally from the Dakalan Islands where storylore teems with poetry and music about the sea and the stars. He was nicknamed *yavas* or "soft voice" because he could hold people spellbound for hours. Celik served briefly in the military but found that he much preferred the scholarly life, so he made his way first to Basra and then to Iskandar.

He was an excellent mathematician, but far preferred the study of literature. He began to write poetry, at first simply for his own amusement, but soon he was reading his verses aloud at a popular *kaffehan* in the capital. He soon attracted the attention of a wealthy patron, Omar al'Bahri who adopted the young poet into his household. Eventually, Celik appeared before the Sultán's mother, who was *Kadin* at the time, and from there, his fortunes continued to improve.

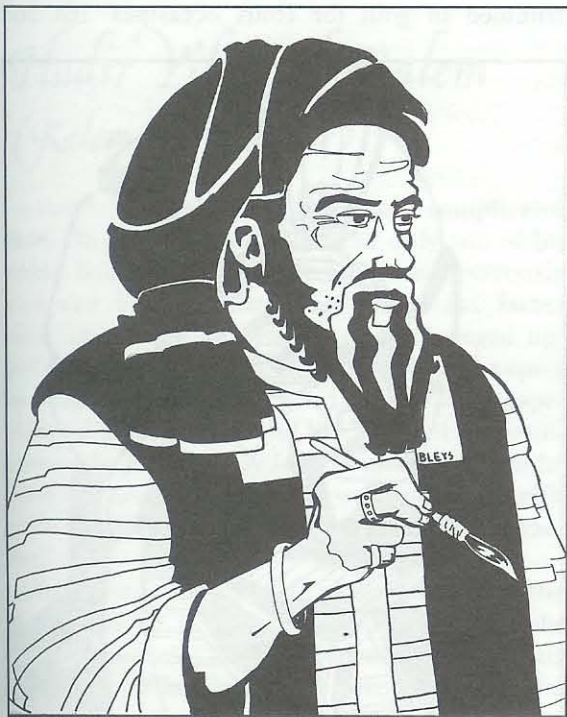
For all the romance of his poetry, he also enjoys solving puzzles of all types, although he is somewhat skeptical that the so-called "ancients" existed at all.

"As for this myth of the Ancients, we have no true work from them regarding complicated problems; perhaps after having been confronted with an insurmountable conundrum, they were unable to fathom their solution. Or perhaps there is no work on the subject because these creatures are simply figments of our fertile imaginations."

Sey'r Celik is a handsome old gentleman in his late 60's with a long, aristocratic face and snow-white beard. He is fond of wearing brightly colored silk turbans. His wives and concubines adore him and he especially loves spending an evening reading poetry to his family as they gather in the elegant gardens of his estate. He has never lost his eye for beauty, whether the face of a young concubine or a beautiful work of art.

Bayana Meryam bint Saliha

Instead of going to bed and dreaming of handsome princes on white stallions, little Meryam would sneak out of the harem and hide in



Sey'r Celik al'Bahri

a corner behind the carved panels surrounding her father's library. Here she would listen to scholarly discussions about philosophy and mathematics. Her head full of theories, she spent her days scribbling notes and drawing on scraps of parchment when she was not playing with her dolls or casting their horoscopes.

One night she fell asleep while listening to a particularly fascinating discussion about planetary movement and the effect of geography on tribal migration. When her nurse came to awaken her in the morning, she found the carved ivory bed empty and hysteria ensued. Could the Master's favorite daughter have been kidnapped, or worse? The *bekcim* were told that they must find the child or forfeit with their lives. Then a young guard, barely more than a child himself, found her tucked in the corner, asleep amidst a pile of sketches and notes.

Meryam was confined to her chamber under strict supervision while heated discussions about dire punishments ensued in the library. Her father paused for a moment to calm himself and his gaze fell upon the drawings. The more he looked, the more amazed he became. When he showed them to his colleagues, they too were amazed. Meryam never had to hide in a shadowy corridor again.

Over the course of her studies, she authored numerous tracts on diverse subjects, including botany, medicine, celestial navigation, alchemy and the less exact sciences of astrology and prognostication. Her intellect is astounding and yet her thirst for knowledge remains unquenched. She has studied the texts of Eudoxus of Arene and expanded the material to calculate planetary orbits, as well as eclipses, the length of the seasons, and even the length of a solar year.

Bayana Meryam is in her early 40's, with a very strong face, deepset eyes and a determined chin. She is a handsome woman who carries herself with great dignity, which belies her wonderful sense of humor. Her dark reddish-brown hair is usually twisted up on her head, providing a safe haven for a variety of writing implements. She married as a young woman, but lost her husband and child to a mysterious plague that ravaged her hometown approximately twenty years ago. Since then, she has lived in private chambers at the University, serving first as an *obretma* or teacher and eventually moving up the ranks to the educational leader of her division. There is talk that she might actually be offered the stewardship of the university, which is utterly amazing because no woman has ever filled that position.



Bayana Meryam bint Saliha

Sultán Timur al'Aslan Cihangir

Timur Cihangir grew up in the royal harem of Iskandar, the eldest son of the Sultán. He was fostered to the main *Kurta-kir* encampment in the mountains of the *Kurtlar-dag* where he learned the ways of his tribe. He also came to understand the effect that migration to city life has had on the Crescent culture. However, he remains steadfast in his belief that the Empire must move forward to survive in the dynamic maelstrom that currently exists in Théah.

An avid reader, Sultán Timur or *Al'Aslan* (the Lion) as he is called, often stays up through the night, poring over philosophical, literary and historical texts from other nations in an effort to grasp how the *yavanci* think. Personally, he deplores the restrictions of the Inquisition and does not see any comparison between that organization and the Eyes of the Peacock: unlike the Inquisitors, the hierarchy of *patika* — including the High Priest — does not act separately from the government. He has sent gifts to struggling Eisen as a gesture of condolence for their dreadful misfortunes. He is especially concerned with maintaining a close watch over the actions of both Castille and Vodacce, although

he did dispatch aid to the victims of the recent earthquake which claimed Caligari's island. Unfortunately, he is not certain whether the entire amount made it safely in the wake of both violent aftershocks and a pitched battle between the Explorer's Society and the Caligari family. He also worries about the unchecked pirate activity along the coast. The Sultán is well aware that the only impression many people have of the Crescent Empire comes from the terrible Kheired-Din.

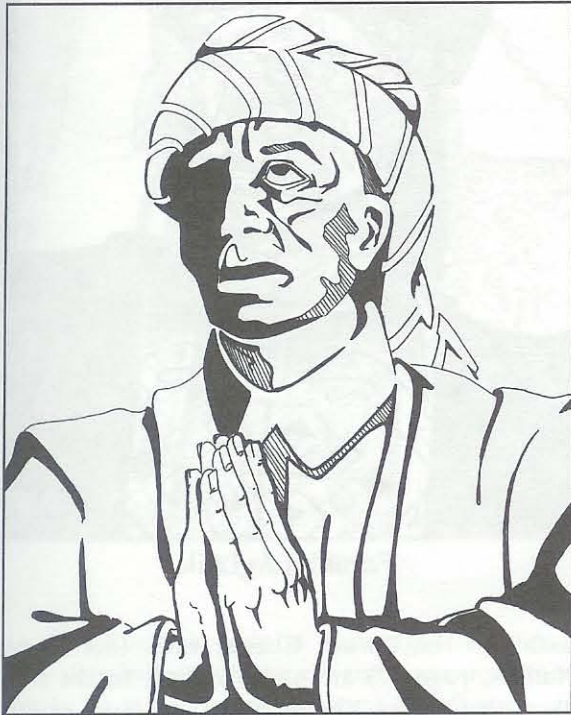
As if that were not enough, the Sultán grows increasingly anxious about the convergence of *yavanci* on the Mirror Sea. He is less worried about encountering Syrneth than he is about what the rapacious adventurers will do to his nation with the things they unearth. While he is confident that his army can win any war thrust upon them, he does not wish to risk the lives of his people or the potential damage to his beautiful nation.

The Sultán of the Crescent Empire is a handsome man by any Théah standard. Although he lacks the towering height of his western counterparts, his erect carriage and noble demeanor make him seem taller than any other man in the room. His features are classically Crescent: dark burning eyes, an aquiline nose and sensitive mouth framed by a dark silky beard and mustache. He wears his wavy dark hair long in the traditional tribal style. He prefers dark clothing trimmed in gold for court occasions. His one



Sultán Timur al'Aslan Cihangir

indulgence is jewels, both for himself and his favorites. Despite his prodigious wealth and power, he remains an approachable and warm person, and his love for his nation is evident in his words and deeds.



“Kalem the Believer”

Hadir Yilan al’Kalem (Kalem the Believer)

Hadir Yilan al’Kalem is a most complicated man. On the one hand, he is the only son of his noble father’s second wife and was generously endowed by his inheritance when his father died. Thanks to the benefits of a privileged upbringing, he has all the skills one would expect in a courtier. He enjoys a good conversation, especially religious debate, and like many of his countrymen, he is extremely fond of *ajedrez*, which he plays whenever he can. Many women find his rich voice and piercing gaze more than a little attractive.

But there is another side to his life. Kalem the Believer, as he is known to many, is extremely, almost fanatically, devout and observant in his practice of *patika*. He is also a noted scholar of the occult who is frequently consulted on such matters. When Kheired-Din is in need of advice or information, he calls upon Kalem the Believer for answers, and he has never been disappointed.

Kalem has never actually served aboard the galleys, however, because he believes his talents are better used to gather funds and information.

An outspoken supporter of the infamous pirate and his Corsairs, Kalem provides them with vast amounts of money without asking for any share of the profits in return. He does this as a patriotic Crescent, in praise of their tireless efforts to protect the Empire’s power at sea. The source of Kalem’s wealth is something of a mystery; even his family’s considerable fortune does not account for all the money he has given to Kheired-Din and his followers over the years.

Hadir Yilan al’Kalem is a tall, fit man with a deep cleft in his chin, who appears to be in his early thirties although in fact he is several decades older. His shaved head sports a wide, white stripe of a tattoo with snake-themed borders running from his forehead, across the top of his skull, and down to his neck. Oddly enough this does not detract from his overall appearance and in fact, adds an air of intrigue to his presence. Although his garments are always quite simple, they are made of the very finest fabrics and obviously created by master weavers. Customarily he wears hooded, dark blue robes and a wide sash of red and white striped cloth. He has a deep baritone voice that rumbles within his broad chest, especially when he laughs. His dark hooded eyes show a great intelligence as well as the deep intensity of his faith.

Farat Al’Agizlik

The High Priest of the Crescent Empire, Farat Al’Agizlik, is a distinguished middle aged man from the Yilan-bazlik tribe. He usually wears ornate robes decorated with a snake motif, reflecting his heritage. Farat is a polite, even-tempered man whose main concern is the spiritual well-being of every single citizen of the Empire. If the Sultán is the stern father of the Crescent Empire, then Farat tries to be a wise but friendly uncle. His warm eyes, handsome face and melodious voice aid him greatly in his endeavors. He is an excellent public speaker, able to capture the attention of a large audience. He is even more potent in a smaller discussion, where he can use his persuasion and knowledge to make other people agree with him.

Rahib Farat has served as High Priest for twelve years now. He gained the position after his predecessor, Tuqo Al’Ramar, succumbed to a lengthy illness. Because he has lifted many of the

strict policies that Al'Ramar decreed, Farat has enjoyed great popularity among the common people of the Empire.

He dislikes violence, especially between citizens. He almost always counsels for diplomacy instead of aggression; in his words, "it might be possible to save a man's soul while he yet lives, but impossible to do so after he has died." On the other hand, he does not have any reservations about using force for defense.

Rahib Farat has a warm and kindly face with bright dark eyes under heavy brows. He has a wide face and strong chin, and when he laughs, one cannot help but laugh with him. His wide-palmed hands are those of a working man, and in fact, he still cares personally for his vast gardens, though he could easily afford to pay others.

Previously Published NPCs

Kheired-Din

The scourge of the Théan seas, Kheired-Din and his Corsair fleet seem to travel at will, materializing suddenly from a wall of mist, taking what they please and then disappearing as silently and swiftly as they came. Driven by a mad desire to bring about the next age of the world, the pirate presents an image both hypnotic and terrifying. His well-muscled body is hairless except for a dark red beard on his prominent chin. Not much is known about his origins or even his true age, but it is clear that he was born an *Aldiz'ahali*, for his sailing and navigation skills are exceptional and he possesses a small blue star tattoo on the inside of his right wrist — a custom practiced by the Star People who inhabit the southeastern part of the Empire.

Even before he launched his quest, his intensity and fierce demeanor were legendary. His cadre of captains swear an oath of loyalty that binds them for life under his flag. Once inducted into the Corsairs, a captain may sail for his or her own reasons as long as never breaks the loyalty

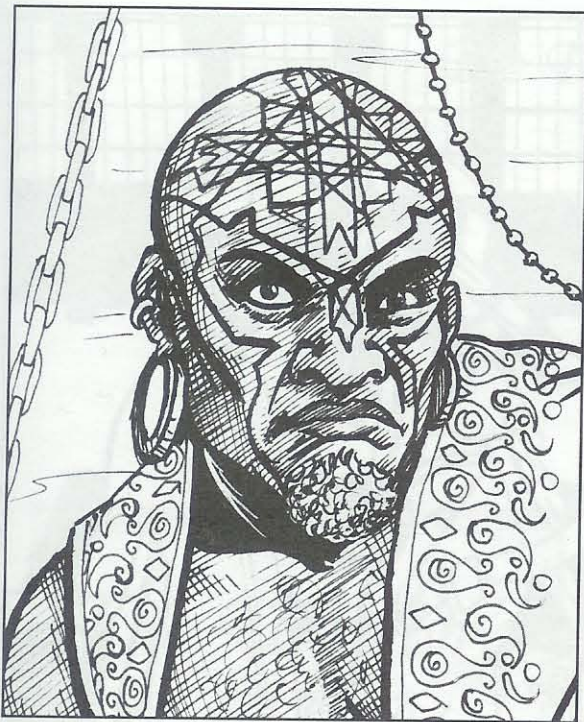


Farat Al'Agizlik

oath and the Corsair Charter rules (See *Pirate Nations*, page 57) are never broken. In the rare event that occurs, Kheired-Din's vengeance comes with fabled swiftness. While there are a few just captains in the fleet, life for captured slaves aboard a Corsair ship is basically an unending nightmare of hard labor and sadistic punishment. The rules are simple: the harder one works, the more food one receives and a slave who is too weak to row is thrown overboard. (See *Waves of Blood*, pages 148-153.)

There are rumors of spies within the Corsairs, perhaps even from the Eyes of the Peacock, but they are so deeply incognito that trying to determine their identities is an exercise in futility. Mutiny rarely occurs aboard a Corsair ship and if it does, Kheired-Din hunts the mutineers down with ruthless efficiency. Oddly enough, the only ship that he does not seem to be hunting actively is the renamed *Freedom's Key*, captained by Ernesto Castillius.

With the recent rise of Cabora, Kheired-Din's methods have shifted somewhat. He retreated to the mainland on a "personal pilgrimage" as he called it, and left his captains to their own devices. Without his leadership, they have lost some of their potency, but the Corsairs remain a fearsome force nonetheless. Those who sail the Théan seas dread the day when Kheired-Din's self-imposed exile ends.



Kheired-Din

The Corsair's body is a strange amalgam of sun-scorched sinewy muscle and fantastic tattoos. He is for many the embodiment of evil upon the high seas, a basilisk of the waves whose strike is swift and deadly. More on Kheired-Din can be found in the *Waves of Blood* sourcebook.

Jazhani bint Noura

As a favored concubine in the harem of *Tukar Tamir ben Ha'atim*, Jazhani enjoyed the benefits of a pampered life which included a rich education. Her studies of medicine and alchemy were particularly interesting, and she spent much of her time concocting medicines and ointments to help her aging lord. During a particularly intense study session, she fell asleep and first received the call from an agent of the secret society known as *Sophia's Daughters*. After a series of incidents, she realized that although she could not travel like other members of the Order, she could still serve them through her work.

Born a *Ruzgar'hala*, Jazhani spent her early childhood in the foothills of the *Hayalet-dag* where she learned much about herbs and natural medicines from the tribal shaman and wise women. She was originally sent to *Tukar Tamir* as part of the annual tribute in thanks for his caravans that brought rare goods from Erivan and

Cathay to Vodacce. She so delighted the kindly merchant that he made her one of his wives, which made life in the already pleasant surroundings even better. Although many men in the Crescent Empire preferred not to give women such overt power, *Tukar Tamir* realized that an intelligent and well-educated woman was even more attractive than a merely beautiful one. There was a brief period of adjustment for Jazhani who was accustomed to a higher degree of personal freedom from living in the mountains so close to Vodacce. In Erivan women were more secluded, due in part to influence from Cathay.

Thus Jazhani's thirst for knowledge was heightened by access to books and teachers. It was clear to the *tukar* that he had received quite a treasure in the lovely young healer. He even went so far as to permit local doctors to attend upon her from time to time to discuss medicines and treatments. Jazhani has also gone into the city — veiled and with appropriate escort of course — to tend to women and children in need.

Jazhani is a very beautiful woman, though quite unassuming about her physical charms. She would rather spend her time attired in comfortable clothes with a book or a scroll than dressed in elegant finery. Regardless of her garb, she has a lovely speaking voice and a smile that lights up the room. More on Jazhani can be found on pages 57–58 and 114 of the *Sophia's Daughters* sourcebook.



Jazhani bint Noura



BLEYS

The Third Scroll

Drama



Put a rock on the path and place your young child before it. The child who tries to take the rock shall become a merchant. The child who orders others to move the rock will become a leader. The child who contemplates the rock is called to the ways of faith. The child who climbs over the rock shall become a great warrior.

— Excerpt from the *Ilahi'Tomar*.

Creating Crescent Characters

Overview

Crescent Heroes are created in the same way as Heroes from other nations. You choose a profession and a Swordsman School, then assign Traits as described in the *Players' Guide*. One of the most important things about Crescents is their strong tie to their tribe regardless of how far away from the nomadic life they may be. Each tribe in the Crescent Empire is treated like a nation for purposes of determining your Trait bonus.

After you have selected your tribe and received your Trait bonus, you continue with the character creation process as described in the *Players' Guide*, spending points on Skills, Advantages,

Backgrounds, and Arcana as normal. The only other special consideration when creating a Crescent Hero is defining Wealth and Income: the guilder and any other paper currency is worthless within the Empire's borders. (See below for more information.)

Bonus by Tribe

After you spend points on Traits, add one free Rank to one Trait, as determined by your Hero's tribe on the table below. This may increase the Trait to 4.

Note that pirates such as the Corsairs and other outsiders who do not feel a strong connection to their tribe must still determine their tribal background, both to receive their Trait bonus and for the purposes of purchasing tribe-specific benefits such as Advantages.

Wealth and Income for Crescent Heroes

The guilder is not recognized within the Empire of the Crescent Moon. Other Théan coin-based currencies are accepted, but only for their precious metal content. In the Crescent Empire, bartering is not just the means of exchanging goods and services, it is also an art form. Although somewhat xenophobic by nature, most Crescent merchants would never walk away from a good bartering session, regardless of the customer in question.

Tribe	Trait Bonus
Aldiz'ahali	+1 Wits
Atlar'vahir	+1 Resolve
Jadur'rihad	+1 Panache
Kurta-kir	+1 Brawn
Ruzgar'hala	+1 Finesse
Yilan-bazlik	+1 Wits

The Crescent currency is based on a gold coin called the *altyni*. The sub-denominations of the *altyni* are the silver *arjanti* and the copper *bakir*. 1 *altyni* = 12 *arjanti* = 144 *bakir*.

Crescent Heroes who take Advantages that give them Wealth or Income (such as Noble) receive a number of *altyni* equal to the number of guilders they would have received from those Advantages with other nationalities.



New Background

Qatih'l'i Target

Somehow, you have provoked the wrath of the *Qatih'l'i* and now they are trying to eliminate you. The number of points you have in this Background determines how often they send their agents to kill you, and how powerful those agents are. (See section on *Qatih'li*, page 86 below.)



New Civil Skills

Shirbaz (Magician)

A skilled *shirbaz* uses sleight of hand and carefully-prepared props to make it seem as though he possesses supernatural powers. Some perform their tricks to entertain an audience; others do it to make themselves appear more powerful than they actually are. Some are street performers or theatrical entertainers, while others place them-

selves and their talents at the disposal of those who pay well for such deception.

Basic Knacks

Etiquette: While it might be acceptable to throw the bones of your meal upon the floor in some regions, it is certain that another lady would faint upon seeing some ruffian toss a greasy bone on her new rug. You have learned the niceties of events sponsored by Crescent nobility and can avoid such social *faux pas*. When you are using this Knack outside the Empire, you suffer a penalty of -2 unkept dice.

Fashion: Unless performing in a play of some kind, it is an affront to appear ill-attired before Crescent nobility, and magicians learn to clothe themselves appropriately. Dressing well also lends the magician an aura of authority. The *shirbaz* keeps careful tabs on the latest trends in fashion, no matter how ridiculous they are. With enough knowledge, he can quickly throw together a presentable outfit, even if the materials at hand are less than satisfactory.

Oratory: Honeyed words of praise flow as easily from your lips as whispered words of poison, while Oratory allows you to convince your listeners more easily of the truth of any argument.

Advanced Knacks

Cold Read: This is the art of deducing things about a person from his or her appearance and mannerisms. Handedness might be determined from a callus upon a knuckle, while a nervous twitch could reveal much to an observant eye. With this Knack you can always enter a conversation with at least a little information about the other person. More often than not, this Knack will be used in Contested Rolls against the Resolve of another, or against one of his other Knacks.

Pickpocket: Armed with a feather-light touch and an arsenal of distractions and tricks, you are skilled at divesting passersby of their possessions without their knowledge. Your training could just as easily plant evidence on an unsuspecting target or quietly palm an item off a table. This Knack is commonly used as a Contested Roll against the victim's Wits.

Prestidigitation: Small magic tricks such as making coins disappear and reappear, stacking decks of cards, and producing flowers out of thin air are all examples of prestidigitation. You can earn a living simply by using your skills to impress noblewomen at the Sultán's court. This Knack is commonly used as a Contested Roll against the victim's Wits.

Sincerity: Even the most adept lie is useless if the listener detects a tremor of fear or downcast, nervous eyes. While Oratory allows you to utter glib words for entertainment or impact, Sincerity puts the ring of truth behind them, concealing even the most bald-faced lie behind a veneer of honesty.

Rahib

A *rahib* (female *rahib'i*, plural *ruhbân*) is a member of one of many religious orders with vows of humility, poverty and chastity and a desire to reach some form of spiritual enlightenment. Because of their lifestyle, the people of the Empire consider them holy and wise. *Ruhbân* earn their meals by acting as spiritual advisors, and teachers to the commoners, and by begging or performing menial work when necessary. Most orders of *ruhbân* shave their heads, though a few, especially among the *Jadur'rihad*, allow a single long braid to grow from the backs of their heads.

Basic Knacks

Calligraphy: You can write in a very formal, decorative hand, and illuminate the pages of a book. This Knack is only useful for those languages you can read and write, or those which share a common alphabet with those you do (see the Language section on page 163 of the *Players' Guide* for details).

Chanting: The ability to maintain the right tone without wavering is only part of your secret. Breath control and stamina count for just as much. This Knack gives you the training to use your voice to its fullest as you chant in meditation or ritual activity.

History: More than just knowing what has come before, history has a great many lessons for those willing to listen. Tragic military defeats have been transformed into glorious victories by a schooled historian, and more than a few have learned from failed political maneuvers as well. You know the ways of the past and how to learn from them today, using them to illustrate your point convincingly. This is not a magical skill, but rather excellence in the art of debate.

Menial Tasks: This Knack allows you to perform all the common labors that any servant must perform in service to his lord (e.g., cleaning and taking care of his estate, doing laundry, answering doors, etc.). Failure with this Knack will likely result in unemployment or worse.

Philosophy: Beyond facts there are ideas, and those ideas can change the world. Theoretical debates are a hobby of yours, and with this Knack you might well win them.

Unobtrusive: Sometimes a servant's best Knack is remaining unnoticed while his employer works off a fit of rage. This is not actually hiding, but rather blending in with the background. It plays upon a noble's tendency to ignore servants, and so works best on them. Like the Stealth Knack, Unobtrusive is used to generate a TN that those about the servant must make a Contested Wits Roll against to notice him.

Writing: Your quill flies across the page with the gift of prose, setting down words that can entertain the reader, outrage the nobility, or call the people to arms. Your words make beggars into kings or topple the most entrenched tyrants. This Knack encompasses poetry, plays and other written works.

Advanced Knacks

Diplomacy: The art of diplomacy is the art of peace; words have prevented more wars than guns ever caused. Your soothing reassurances can calm all but the most enraged duelist, and keep your blood where it belongs — in your veins.

Mooch: With a combination of entertaining conversation, hollow promises, and sheer audacity, you can convince others to provide for your needs. Care must be taken not to do this in one place for too long, however, as even the most flattering guest must eventually wear out his welcome.

Occult: When considering the Occult, there is precious little knowledge to be learned. However, you have acquired some of it and know how to use it, be it a trivial fact about a certain brand of sorcery or the solution to an ancient puzzle.

Scrounging: You know where potentially useful trash has been deposited. While it is unlikely that you will scrounge up a diamond, you would certainly know where best to find food, clothes or a makeshift weapon. Successful rolls with this Knack will grant you items or resources found within the city, as determined by the GM. You are at a penalty of -2 unkept dice (-2k0) when using this Knack in an unfamiliar city.

Storytelling: Seated around a flickering fire, all attention is on you. Your voice and mannerisms are calculated to enthrall your audience completely. Storytellers can, in addition, sometimes collect small sums of money for telling their tales, or a good meal.

Theology: Divine will is a difficult subject — everyone feels he's right. You, however, have studied faiths dispassionately, looking for correlations and unseen connections, regardless of personal beliefs. You know who others pray to, how they worship, and how they live because of it.

New Martial Skill

Sling

While the sling is one of the most primitive missile weapons, it still sees some use in the Empire of the Crescent Moon. The advantages of this weapon include its light weight and the abundant supply of ammunition, especially in the rocky terrain on the Empire's northern, western and southern borders.

Basic Knacks

Attack (Sling): Attack is simply the ability to hit your enemy. Slings take 1 Action to reload.

Advanced Knacks

Snapshot (Sling): When skilled enough, some slingers focus on speed as much as accuracy. With this Knack, you require only one Action to reload and fire, but you must make two Raises in order to do so. When firing and reloading as one Action, this replaces the Attack (Sling) Knack. This Knack cannot be used from horseback.

Trick Shooting (Sling): For each Rank of this Knack, you subtract 5 from any penalties to your shot (range, cover, etc.) when you are using a sling. Trick Shooting cannot lower your TN below the base Target Number to be hit. For example, if a target has a TN to be hit of 15, plus 15 for modifiers, a Hero with Rank 5 Trick Shooting (Sling) would negate all 15 points of modifiers, but he would not lower the base TN to be hit (15).

New Knacks

Calculus

Crescent mathematicians have begun to unlock the secrets of higher mathematics. You have learned the fundamental concepts of differential and integral calculus, including derivatives, definite integrals, limits, and concepts involved in finding maximum and minimum values, as well as a smattering of analytical geometry. This is an Advanced Knack for the Scholar Skill. Your Rank in this Knack may not exceed your Rank in the Mathematics Knack. Non-Crescent Heroes may not begin the game with this Knack.

Cavalry Attack

This replaces the Attack (Fencing) Knack when using a fencing weapon from horseback. This is an Advanced Knack for the Fencing Skill, but swordsmen from the Gustavo School (see *Los Vagos*, pages 80-81) treat it as a Basic Knack.

New Swordsman Schools

While the influence of the Swordsman's Guild does not reach into the lands of the Crescents, there are several styles of fighting which are roughly equivalent to the Swordsman Schools of the other nations. These Schools are not available to non-Crescent characters during character cre-

ation. The only School from outside the Empire of the Crescent Moon that a Crescent character may have at the start of the game is the Rogers School (found on page 94 in *The Pirate Nations* and page 104 in *Waves of Blood*), which costs 35 HP instead of 25. Each School listed below is available to any Crescent Hero at the start of play. Each one originates from a single tribe. A Hero may spend 25 HP to learn a Swordsman School from his own tribe, or 35 HP to learn one from another tribe.

Daphan

Country of Origin: Crescent

Tribe of Origin: *Aldiz'ahali*

Description: The Daphan style uses a scimitar to make bold, aggressive attacks. While it does make the slashing attacks that are the forté of the scimitar, it also makes creative use of chopping attacks with the straighter section of the blade near the hilt.

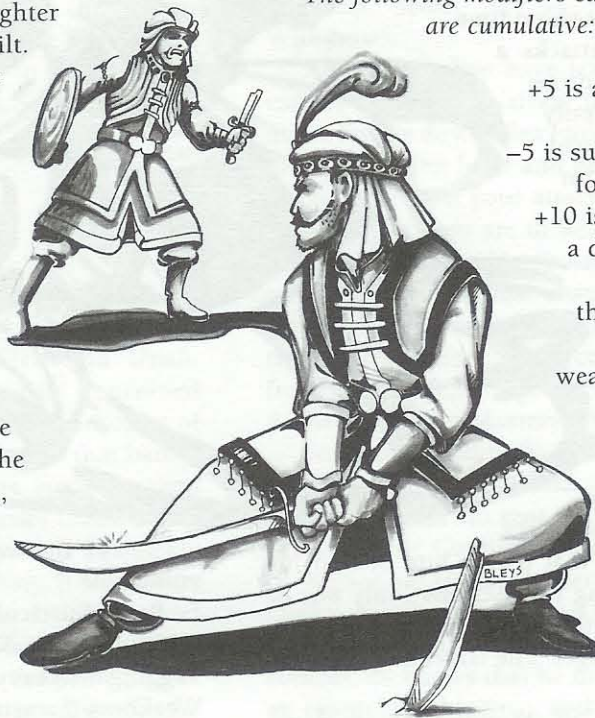
Another signature move of the Daphan style is a weapon-breaking technique using a forceful turn of the wrist while the opponent's blade is between the scimitar's guard and blade. The weakness of this style is its lack of moderation; nearly every attack, parry, and beat comes with the full weight of the swordsman's body behind it. An alert opponent can see the swordsman's muscles tensing as he prepares to spring into action, and react appropriately.

Basic Curriculum: Fencing, Athlete

Swordsman Knacks: Beat (Fencing), Lunge (Fencing), Pommel Strike (Fencing), Exploit Weakness (Daphan)

Apprentice: The first lesson an Apprentice of the Daphan School learns is to attack vigorously. You may attack one Phase before the Action Phase shown on each of your Action Dice. If an Action Die shows Phase 1, you act on Phase 1 but your Initiative Total is increased by 5.

You do not get free membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, you get one extra Rank of one of your Swordsman Knacks for free.



Journeyman: Daphan Journeymen have learned how to break their opponents' weapons by snapping them between the blade and crossguard of their scimitars. Some Daphan swordsmen, including Kheired-Din, use a modified scimitar with weapon-breaking grooves and teeth to aid them in performing this maneuver. A scimitar with this modification costs 50% more than normal. When your opponent makes a successful Active Defense using Parry, you may choose to spend a Drama Die to attempt to break your opponent's weapon. You must make a successful Brawn roll against the TN of the weapon you are trying to break.

Fencing – 30

Heavy Weapon – 35

Others – As GM allows, but TN is at least 40.

The following modifiers can adjust these TN and are cumulative:

+5 is added to the TN for a quality weapon.

–5 is subtracted from the TN for an inferior weapon.

+10 is added to the TN for a dracheneisen weapon.

–5 is subtracted from the TN if your scimitar is modified to have a weapon-breaking section near its hilt.

Master: Masters of Daphan may make extremely forceful attacks.

You may Raise and spend a Drama Die to roll and keep an extra die (+1k1) of

Damage instead of merely rolling one extra die.

Marikk

Country of Origin: Crescent

Tribe of Origin: *Kurta'kir*

Description: Yakub al'Marikk's ancestors began the fighting style that bears their family name, but he perfected it. His family has been

known since time immemorial as excellent knife fighters, but Yakub's athletic prowess allowed him to turn their methods into a complete style of fighting. The Marikk School teaches its swordsmen to use two *katars* with great speed and grace. The main weakness of the style is that its focus is entirely offensive, and that the *katars* are especially inefficient parrying implements.

Basic Curriculum: Knife, Athlete

Swordsman Knacks: Double Attack (*Katar*), Lunge (*Katar*), Whirl, Exploit Weakness (Marikk)

Apprentice: Marikk teaches its students to relentlessly attack its enemy with both *katars*. The student suffers no off-hand penalty when using a *katar*. In addition, for each attack on a single target during a round that the Apprentice makes, the target's TN to be hit is reduced by twice the Apprentice's Mastery Level when he attacks. Thus, the second time that a Journeyman attacks a TN 25 target, the TN drops to a 21 for him and only him. A Brute Squad counts as one target for these purposes.

You do not get free membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, you get one Rank of the Leaping Knack for free.

Journeyman: The Journeyman has mastered an extraordinary somersaulting attack that places him behind his opponent. By spending two Actions (only one of which need be currently "legal,") he may perform a rear attack on his target. The target may Actively Defend.

Master: Masters of Marikk can perform extremely deadly attacks, and their movements are especially gymnastic. You may keep 1 extra die (+0k1) of damage when using a *katar* (2k3 total). Furthermore, you get a free Rank in both the Leaping and the Rolling Knacks. This can increase each of these to Rank 6. If it does not, each may later be increased to Rank 6 from Rank 5 by spending 25 XP.

Sersemlik

Country of Origin: Crescent

Tribe of Origin: *Ruzgar'hala*

Description: The Sersemlik School uses a massive curved sword called a *dilmekiri*. Most people use this sword with two hands due to its great length, but the swordsmen of this style spin their weapons constantly, allowing the angular momentum of their blades to provide the force necessary to chop or slash an enemy. They are so proficient that they usually have only one hand on their blade at a time, and perform trick maneuvers that use a change of hands to throw off an opponent's guard.

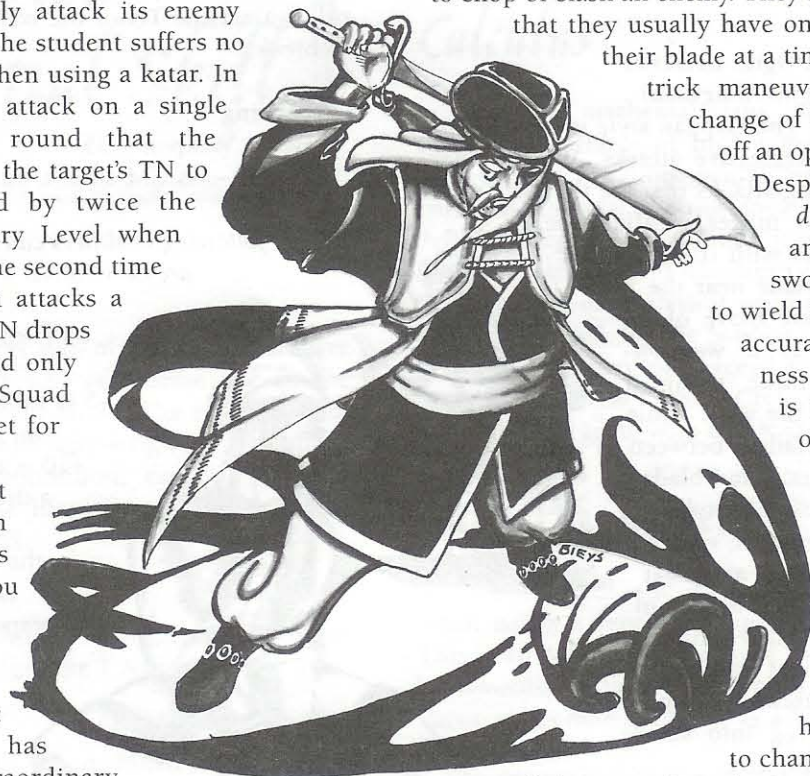
Despite the *dilmekiri's* size and weight, the swordsman is able to wield it with pinpoint accuracy. The weakness of this School is its dependence on momentum to provide extra power for its attacks. When one of the swordsman's blows connects, or if he suddenly has to change the direction of the sword's path, he is momentarily

vulnerable.

Basic Curriculum: Heavy Weapon, Athlete

Swordsman Knacks: Feint (Heavy Weapon), Tagging (Heavy Weapon), Whirl, Exploit Weakness (Sersemlik)

Apprentice: Once a Sersemlik swordsman gets his blade moving, he is able to overcome its weight and bulk. You may wield a *dilmekiri* with one hand, provided that you have enough room (4 feet) to your flanks to allow you to spin it. You have no off-hand penalty when using a *dilmekiri* in this fashion and thus may fight with one equally well using either hand. You may also change hands without taking an Action or any penalty to any roll when you do so.



Swordsmen of the Sersemlik School do not gain free membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, they may perform a sword-twirling display of prowess to perform an Intimidation Repartee Action with one Free Raise per Mastery Level.

Journeyman: Journeymen of the Sersemlik style spin not only their swords but also themselves, becoming a cyclone of bladed death. You get a one Rank of the Whirl Knack for no cost. This may increase your Rank in this Knack to a 6. If it does not, you may later increase your Whirl Rank to 6 by spending 25 XP. You may also add your Rank in the Whirl Knack to your roll when you attempt to perform a sword-twirling display to make an Intimidation Repartee Action.

Master: Masters have learned to apply their abilities to take down groups of untrained opponents towards taking down individuals who display a bit more talent. You may add the bonus to hit given to you by the Whirl Knack to attempts to attack Henchmen as if they were Brutes. You may also add your Whirl Rank to damage rolls made against Henchmen, Heroes, Scoundrels, and Villains.

Vahiy

Country of Origin: Crescent

Tribe of Origin: *Atlar'vahir*

Description: Like Eisen's Steil and Unabwendbar Schools, Vahiy is primarily concerned with mass combat. It is more of a philosophy of war than a style of fighting. It teaches that battlefields are places of chaos, where situations can change in an instant. Vahiy proposes that the best way to deal with this change is to react as quickly as possible, with speed and mobility. It teaches its students to rely on the mobility of the cavalry and to maximize the deadliness of a unit of horse archers. Those trained to follow the principles of this philosophy become expert cavalry officers. They learn the strengths and weaknesses of the mounted soldier, and how to deploy these troops in such a fashion that their strengths are best used and their weaknesses cannot be exploited. Cavalry is most effective when it has room to maneuver, and it becomes vulnerable when it has to fight in tight quarters.

On the field, this commander seeks to have his force attack at his foe's flanks, where the enemy can bring the least force to bear. He will harass them with long-range fire, while keeping his own

forces out of reach of enemy blades. His ultimate goal is to surround his enemy with a circle of his horse archers who keep moving and firing until the enemy surrenders or is eliminated.

Vahiy's focus on the speed and maneuverability of cavalry means that these commanders have a disdain for infantry forces, which they see as too slow. They also have a low regard for artillery, because it is difficult to maneuver in the field and requires special preparations before battle, limiting its use in sudden encounters. When one of these commanders does have a force that consists of these units, he typically offers them up as bait in a trap for his enemy. This difference in status between the units gives the commander a very elite cavalry force, but his other units suffer from low morale.

Basic Curriculum: Commander, Rider

Swordsman Knacks: Horse Archery, Orders (Advance, Charge, Envelop, Flank, Hold Ground, Regroup, Scout, Set vs. Charge, Trim Line, Withdraw)

Apprentice: You have learned that the enemy cannot fight as effectively if their chain of command breaks down. You look carefully for officers in the opposing force and make a special effort to target them with your attacks. While you are not engaged (i.e., you are in Reserves or Disengaged) and you are using Horse Archery, you may select an opposing individual character who takes damage as if his Personal Results Roll was 2 higher than it is. Because of your constant practice firing from the saddle, you get a Free Raise to all Horse Archery rolls per Mastery level.

Students of Vahiy do not get free membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, they get the Archer Skill for no cost, as if it were part of the School's Basic Curriculum. You must have Rank 4 or higher in Horse Archery and three of your Orders Knacks to become a Journeyman.

Journeyman: When a Journeyman goes into combat, he knows that he must present himself as an example to his men, and so he often performs spectacular feats to boost their morale. At the beginning of any fight in which you are on horseback, you gain a Drama Die. At the end of the battle, this Drama Die is lost if it has not already been spent. This Drama Die never becomes an experience point.

In large battles, the Journeyman maneuvers all over the field, appearing where he feels he can do the most good, and using his archery skills to keep enemy officers pinned down. You may change your level of Engagement to any category,

regardless of your last category. You may also make a Horse Archery roll with a TN equal to an opposing character's TN to be hit to prevent another character from changing her level of Engagement.

You must have Rank 5 in Horse Archery and four of your Orders Knacks to become a Master.

Master: By becoming a Master of Vahiy, you have become an expert at performing flanking and enveloping maneuvers. You get an extra Rank of Orders (Flank) and also one of Orders (Envelop). Both of these may be increased to a 6. If either of these does not become a 6, you may increase to a 6 later by spending 25 XP.

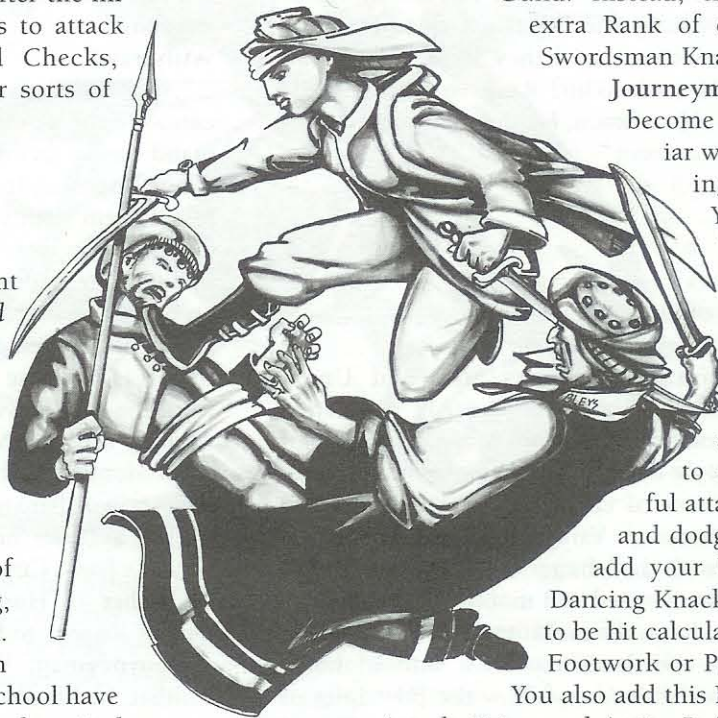
A Master of Vahiy seems to become more alive when he is astride a horse, as if the animal's vitality was merged with his own. While mounted, you may re-roll any roll once per round and keep whichever of the two results you prefer. This re-roll must occur immediately after the initial roll is made. This applies to attack rolls, damage rolls, Wound Checks, Initiative rolls, and any other sorts of rolls you may need to make.

Yael

Country of Origin: Crescent

Tribe of Origin: *Jadur'rihad*

Description: Yael (pronounced Yah-el) is an obscure fighting style, even in the Empire of the Crescent Moon. Like the Aldana style, it combines dance with the art of the sword, but it uses the flowing, twirling dances of the East instead of the leaping, bobbing dances of the West. Because of the emphasis on dancing, the students of this School have an unusually large female-to-male ratio, but the style is not dismissed as "woman's fighting." Yael uses two scimitars (sabers or cutlasses can also be used) to create a deadly pattern of slashes and feints, made in time to the tempo of the swordsman's favorite tune. Like the Aldana style, this School's weakness lies in its reliance upon a musical tempo. If the opponent can recognize the beat of the tune, he can attack in between the beats of the dance.



Basic Curriculum: Fencing, Performer
Swordsman Knacks: Disarm (Fencing), Double-Parry (Fencing/Fencing), Feint (Fencing), Exploit Weakness (Yael)

Apprentice: Yael teaches its students to use two slashing swords together. You may spend two Actions to make two attacks at the same time, but only one of the Action Dice needs to be currently "legal" (i.e., showing the current Phase or Held) during this Phase. The second Action die can be showing a later Phase. Thus, in Phase 4, if you have a 4, a 7, and a 0, you can spend the 4 and either the 7 or the 0 in order to attack an opponent twice. Both attacks must target the same opponent (Brute Squads count as one opponent). You do not have an off-hand penalty when using two scimitars, cutlasses, or sabers.

Students of the Yael School do not get free membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, they get one extra Rank of one of their Swordsman Knacks for free.

Journeyman: As you become more familiar with the fighting style of Yael, you learn the true importance that dancing has to the School. It allows you to make graceful attacks, parries, and dodges. You may add your Rank in the Dancing Knack to your TN to be hit calculated from the Footwork or Parry Knacks.

You also add this Rank to your Attack, Feint, and Active Defense (if performed with Footwork or Parry) Rolls.

Master: Masters of the Yael School are able to make a quick flurry of attacks, allowing them to eliminate an opponent with a sudden explosion of slashes. Once per round, you may make such an attack. You may declare a number of attacks up to your Dancing Knack Rank or Panache Rank (whichever is lower). Note that you must spend all such Action Dice at once, but only one die needs to be currently "legal." All of these attacks happen immediately, regardless of the Phases showing on their Action Dice, and all must target

the same opponent (a Brute Squad counts as one opponent.) If any attack fails to hit your opponent due to his Passive Defense (not an Active Defense), any subsequent attacks in this flurry also miss so you do not need to bother rolling for them; their Action Dice are considered spent. For example, if a Yael Master has Panache 3 and Dancing 5, he gets to make 3 attacks in this Phase, and does so. The first attack hits, but the second attack misses, so the third attack misses as well.



Double Attack

When you use this Knack, you make two quick attacks against your opponent, one right after the other. You must declare that you are Double Attacking before you attack, and then roll the two attacks using this Knack. The TN to hit your opponent is raised by 10 when you are using Double Attack.

Horse Archery

This replaces the Attack (Bow) Knack when firing a bow from horseback. This is the same as the Horse Archery Knack in the *Players' Guide* except that it is considered a Basic Knack for students of the Vahiy School.

Orders (Advance, Charge, Envelop, Flank, Hold Ground, Regroup, Scout, Set vs. Charge, Trim Line, Withdraw): Each of these Swordsman Knacks for the Vahiy School corresponds to an entry on the Army Tactics chart on page 101 of the *Eisen* book. When a General chooses a tactic that he has the Knack for, he adds a number of points equal to his Mastery Level (Apprentice = 1, Journeyman = 2, Master = 3) times his Rank in the appropriate Orders Knack to his Strategy roll for that Round of battle. Thus, a General who is a Master and has

the Charge Knack at 5 would add 15 to his roll each Round he chose Charge.

Whirl

Whirl is a spinning attack designed to take out multiple unskilled enemies at once. For each Rank in this Knack, you may add 2 to your Attack Roll when attacking Brutes. Thus, a Hero with a Rank 3 in Whirl would increase a roll of 19 to 25 when attacking Brutes.



Duman'kir (Kurta-kir)

Knacks: Fangs, Mist, Pack, Senses, Silence

Apprentice Degree: Call the Mist

Adept Degree: Predator in the Mist

Master Degree: Man of the Mist

Duman'kir is the magic of the *Kurta-kir* tribe, a result of their descent from *Dur-Kan*. Those of his bloodline are magically connected to the wolves and mist that he came to know so well. The power of *Duman'kir* allows the sorcerer to hear, smell, run, and fight like a wild wolf, and to run with a pack of wolves. It also grants him the power to create a mist or fog, which he can use to conceal his comings and goings.

While *Duman'kir* does not allow the sorcerer to transform himself into a wolf, such rumors have persisted for centuries, and are most likely the cause of legends about horrible shape-shifting monsters called *rakshasas*. The legends maintain that these beasts never have green eyes, and so cannot be Pyeryem sorcerers. Khorovo bin Lehena was a vicious double-blooded sorcerer with both Pyeryem and *Duman'kir*. Three hundred years ago, he tried to claim a small area of land just to the south of the Trade River as his own kingdom, and is most likely the cause for the majority of these legends, especially the ones that mention *rakshasas* taking a tiger-like appearance.

Apprentice Degree: Call the Mist

You have just begun to unlock your magic's true potential. You know how to call up a fog. You may spend a Drama Die and roll Wits + Mist against a TN of 20 to call this mist. If it is within one hour of dawn, you get a Free Raise to your roll. You may make Raises to this roll to make the mist thicker. This fog makes any vision-based Perception Checks more difficult, requiring one more Raise than the number of Raises you made on your roll. The fog lasts until you dismiss it or an hour has passed, at which time it dissipates entirely. This has no other effect on the weather in the area. You get a Free Raise to your roll if there was rain at your current location within the last twenty-four hours.

Adept Degree: Predator in the Mist

Your understanding of the magical connection you have with mist grows deeper. While you are surrounded by fog, your outline seems to blur, making you harder to distinguish from the mist around you. Any Perception Check to see you has its TN increased by your Rank in the Mist Knack. When you are in the mist, your TN to be hit increases by your Rank in the Mist Knack. You also gain a bonus to any Ambush Rolls equal to twice your Rank in the Mist Knack.

You can also try to vanish within the mist. By spending a Drama Die and making a Resolve + Mist roll with a TN of 30, you can move from any one point within the mist to any other, up to one hundred yards away. When you do this, you move silently, instantaneously, and without passing through any of the space in between your starting point and your destination. You take damage from this sudden motion. Roll one die for every ten yards or fraction thereof that you moved, and keep the highest to determine the damage you take. For instance, if you moved 47 yards, you would take 5k1 damage. Your inanimate possessions may be transported with you, but not animals or other people.

Master Degree: Cloud of Mist

You have realized the full power of your magic. You know how to turn yourself into a cloud of mist. You may spend a Drama Die and make a Resolve + Mist roll with a TN of 20 to perform this. You can only transform your own body into a mist. Therefore, any possessions you were carrying, including clothes, weapons, and makeup, fall to the ground when your body becomes a vapor. As a vapor, you are completely intangible, but also cannot make any physical impact with

the world. You cannot go through solid objects as a mist, but you can enter through any crack that is large enough to allow air to pass through it. While you are transformed, you cannot be harmed by physical attacks, but your mind can still be affected by anything that influences it directly (such as emotion-influencing Lærdom Knacks). While you are transformed, you follow the same rules for movement or chases as you do in your normal form.

The Knacks

Fangs

Just as a wolf has fangs, so do you. All four of your canine teeth are extendable, and may be made almost twice as long as the rest of your teeth. Your fingernails can also extend to become claws. You can use your claws and fangs by rolling Finesse + Fangs to hit your target. A clawed strike does 0k2 damage and your fangs do 1k1 damage. When you do not wish them to be extended, your claws and fangs retract to their normal levels. If you display your claws or fangs when attempting to make an Intimidation Action, you get a Free Raise.

Mist

This Knack represents your magical connection with fog. This Knack is used in a variety of ways, each of which is described under your Apprentice, Adept and Master Degrees.

Pack

Your kinship with wolves causes them to accept you as a member of their pack. Wolves will not attack you unless you deliberately provoke them. You can make a Contested Roll of your Wits + Pack against a wolf's Resolve to empathically give it an imperative to fulfill. This command cannot be anything that the wolf would not think of doing on its own, so you cannot command it to get a key or retrieve a pistol, but you can tell it to attack someone, or to howl or flee.

Senses

Just as a wolf's senses of smell and hearing greatly exceed those of a human being, so do yours. Any Perception Check you make using smell or hearing is made using Wits + Senses instead of Wits. You also get a number of Free Raises equal to your Rank in this Knack when you attempt to make a Tracking roll.

Silence

When a wolf stalks its prey, it becomes nearly impossible to hear, and you move almost as quietly as it does. You get a number of Free Raises equal to your Rank in this Knack to any Shadowing or Stealth rolls you attempt. You may add your Rank in this Knack to the result of any Ambush roll you attempt.



Accurate Slinger (3 Points, 2 for Ruzgar'hala)

You are a natural with the sling, and rarely miss your targets. Years of practice have left you able to judge distances and the wind accurately. You gain a Free Raise for all Attacks made with a sling.

Ajedrez Master (1 Point)

Whether by long practice or natural talent, you are a superior player of the game of *ajedrez*. You gain a Free Raise for any Gaming or Cheating rolls you make concerning a game of *ajedrez*.

Commission (Yenicer'i) (Varies, Crescent Only)

The *Yenicer'i* consists of loyal troops, representing the Sultan's personal bodyguard as well as the standing army of the Empire of the Crescent Moon since the late 14th century. It recruits almost exclusively from the children of its sol-

diers, although from time to time the Sultan may award a commission to someone as a reward for meritorious service. The cost of this Advantage is one higher than the cost for the Commission Advantage of the same Rank found in the Players' Guide. Your military upbringing allows you to begin the game with any one Martial Skill of your choice at no cost.

Crescent Accent (0 Points, Crescent Only)

An accent is an identifying characteristic or characteristics in the way a person speaks indicating that he's from a particular area. Only a Hero fully proficient in the language can identify accents. Language Acquaintance and Pidgins are no help, and non-Crescents may never have one of these accents. Multiple accents can exist among each tribe. *Crescent Heroes* with one of these accents pay slightly different costs to learn foreign languages. The costs on the tables below replace the costs on the table in the Language Advantage that appears later. Each table gives the costs for the Accents for one tribe.

Aldiz'hali

There are three distinct accents among the *Aldiz'ahali* tribe: *Dakalan'ya*, *Cinada'ya*, and *Peninsular*.

Dakalan'ya: Those with this accent are from the *Dakalan'ya* Islands, west of the southern peninsula. Because these islands are used by the Corsairs as a location for building galleys, the inhabitants have more exposure to modern *Théan* languages than the rest of the *Aldiz'ahali*, but their contact with the *Jadur'rihad* is more restricted. Other *Aldiz'ahali* find that their speech is slightly slurred and they tend to drop closing consonants. Languages such as *Castillian* and *Vodacce* are easier for the people of the *Dakalan'ya* to learn, while languages such as *Jadur-baraji*, *Ussuran*, and *Teodoran* are more difficult.

Cinada'ya: Those with this accent are from the *Cinada'ya* Islands. They are quite isolated from *Théan* languages, and have more contact with the *Jadur'rihad* than most other *Aldiz'ahali* do. Their speech is slow, carefully enunciated and more reliant on pitch for meaning. Languages from the west are more difficult for the people of the *Cinada'ya* to learn, but they learn *Jadur'rihad* and ancient languages such as *Teodoran* quickly.



Aldiz'ahali Accents

Peninsular Cinada'ya Dakalan'ya

Aldiz-baraji	0	0	0
Atlar-baraji	2	2	2
Avalon	3	4	3
Castille	2	3	1
Eisen	3	3	3
High Eisen	5	5	5
Jadur-baraji	2	1	3
Kurta-baraji	2	1	2
Montaigne	4	4	3
Ruzgar-baraji	2	2	2
Teodoran	3	2	4
Théan	3	4	3
Tikaret-baraji*	0	0	0
Tikat-baraji	4	3	4
Tirala-baraji	1	1	1
Ussura	3	3	4
Vendel	3	4	2
Vodacce	4	4	3
Yilan-baraji	3	3	4

Peninsular: Aldiz'ahali with the Peninsular accent hail from the southern tip of the long peninsula in the southeastern portion of the Empire of the Crescent Moon. This is the Aldiz'ahali accent described in the Language Advantage section, above.

Atlar'vahir

There are three distinct accents among the Atlar'vahir tribe. These are Tirza, Halya and Plains.

Tirza: Atlar'vahir with a Tirza accent come from the land between the branches of the Tirza River. The speech of this area still shows a strong influence from the era when Castille and the Empire shared a common ruler. People with this accent learn to speak Castillian more easily than other Atlar'vahir, but they have less knowledge of the languages of the tribes that are located north-east of them.

Halya: These Atlar'vahir come from the lands near the Halya River at the north of their territory. Practically everyone from this territory speaks Kurta-baraji as fluently as a Kurta'kir does, and their speech is full of that language's patterns.

Atlar'vahir with the Halya accent speak Kurta-baraji for free, but they have a harder time learning other languages such as Ruzgar-baraji.

Plains: Atlar'vahir with this accent come from the plains between the Tirza and Halya rivers. This is the Atlar'vahir accent described in the Language Advantage below.

Jadur'rihad

There are three distinct accents among the Jadur'rihad tribe. These are Adaz'uk, Trebizond and Erivan.

Adaz'uk: People who speak with this accent hail from the Adaz'uk Mountains in the northern reaches of the Jadur'rihad tribe's territory. They tend to speak slower and draw out their vowels. Due to their isolation, their speech is something of a throwback, employing archaic pronunciations and words long out of fashion elsewhere in the Empire. The Safadim have this accent.

Erivan: Those with this accent hail from the land south of the Adaz'uk Mountains and east of the Konya River. This is the Jadur'rihad accent described in the Language Advantage below.



Atlar'vahir Accents

	Plains	Tirza	Halya
Aldiz-baraji	2	2	3
Atlar-baraji	0	0	0
Avalon	3	3	3
Castille	2	1	2
Eisen	3	3	3
High Eisen	5	5	5
Jadur-baraji	2	3	2
Kurta-baraji	1	2	0
Montaigne	4	4	4
Ruzgar-baraji	2	2	3
Teodoran	2	2	2
Théan	3	3	3
Tikaret-baraji*	0	0	0
Tikat-baraji	3	2	3
Tirala-baraji	2	2	1
Ussura	2	3	2
Vendel	3	3	3
Vodacce	4	3	4
Yilan-baraji	2	2	2



Jadur'rihad Accents

	Erivan	Adaz'uk	Trebizond
Aldiz-baraji	3	3	3
Atlar-baraji	2	3	3
Avalon	3	4	3
Castille	2	4	3
Eisen	3	4	3
High Eisen	5	5	5
Jadur-baraji	0	0	0
Kurta-baraji	2	1	2
Montaigne	4	4	4
Ruzgar-baraji	2	3	2
Teodoran	3	1	2
Théan	4	3	4
Tikaret-baraji*	0	0	0
Tikat-baraji	2	1	3
Tirala-baraji	3	2	3
Ussura	3	2	1
Vendel	3	4	3
Vodacce	4	4	3
Yilan-baraji	2	3	3

Trebizond: Those with this accent come from the narrow stretch of land between the Adaz'uk Mountains and the Konya River. They speak with an accent similar to that of Ussurans from the Somojez region, and Ussurans find this dialect more comforting and familiar than most. *People with this accent have an easier time learning Ussuran than other Jadur'rihad, but they find Yilan-baraji to be far more difficult.*

Kurta'kir

There are three distinct accents among the Kurta'kir. These are Iskandar, Kurtlar'dag and Razgrad.

Iskandar: Kurta'kir from the delta of the Halya River, including the capital city of Iskandar, speak with this accent. Their speech shows a strong influence from the Atlar'vahir with whom they sometimes trade for horses. Almost everyone in this area speaks Tirala-baraji as well as they do Kurta-baraji. *Those with this accent have an easy time learning Atlar-baraji but have a hard time learning languages like Jadur-baraji. They can learn Tirala-baraji for free.*

Kurtlar'dag: People with this accent are from the Kurtlar-dag Mountains. Their speech patterns show a strong influence from the Ussurans to the north but far less influence from tribes to the south. Like the Trebizond, Ussurans find this accent similar to their own speech patterns. *Characters with this accent have an easier time learning languages from their north and a harder time learning languages from their south.*

Razgrad: This accent is spoken by people from the south of the Kurtlar'dag Mountains to the borders with the Yilan-bazlik tribe, bounded by the Konya River to the east. *This is the Kurta'kir accent described in the Language Advantage below.*

Ruzgar'hala

There are three accents among the Ruzgar'hala tribe. They include the Hayalet-dag, Jesalute and Coastal.

Hayalet-dag: This is the most common accent among the Ruzgar'hala. It is spoken by those who live within the Hayalet-dag Mountains but not near the Forbidden Sea or the trade city of Jesalute. *This is the Ruzgar'hala accent described under the Language Advantage below.*



Kurta'kir Accents

	Razgrad	Iskandar	Kurtlar'dag
Aldiz-baraji	2	2	3
Atlar-baraji	2	1	2
Avalon	3	4	3
Castille	2	2	3
Eisen	3	3	2
High Eisen	5	5	4
Jadur-baraji	2	3	2
Kurta-baraji	0	0	0
Montaigne	4	4	4
Ruzgar-baraji	1	1	1
Teodoran	1	1	1
Théan	3	2	4
Tikaret-baraji*	0	0	0
Tikat-baraji	3	3	3
Tirala-baraji	1	0	1
Ussura	2	2	1
Vendel	3	3	3
Vodacce	4	4	4
Yilan-baraji	2	3	3



Ruzgar'hala Accents

	Hayalet-dag	Coastal	Jesalute
Aldiz-baraji	2	2	3
Atlar-baraji	2	2	1
Avalon	3	3	4
Castille	2	2	2
Eisen	3	4	4
High Eisen	5	5	5
Jadur-baraji	3	4	4
Kurta-baraji	2	2	1
Montaigne	4	3	4
Ruzgar-baraji	0	0	0
Teodoran	3	3	3
Théan	2	2	1
Tikaret-baraji*	0	0	0
Tikat-baraji	4	3	4
Tirala-baraji	2	2	2
Ussura	3	3	3
Vendel	3	3	3
Vodacce	2	1	1
Yilan-baraji	2	3	3

Coastal: This accent is spoken by Ruzgar'hala who live along the coastline of the Forbidden Sea. Their speech shows much more of a connection to Vodacce than the rest of their tribe. *People with this accent find it easy to learn languages like Vodacce, but more difficult to learn languages of far-away tribes, such as Jadur-baraji.*

Jesalure: The trade city of Jesalute sees vigorous commerce between merchants from the Bernoulli family of Vodacce, the Kurta'kir and the Atlar'vahir. Virtually everyone in this place learns at least one of the languages spoken by those merchants (other than Tikaret-baraji). *Characters from this city may pick any one of the following languages and learn it for no cost: Atlar-baraji, Kurta-baraji, or Vodacce. Alternately, they may choose to be literate in either Tikaret-baraji or Ruzgar-baraji for free.*

Yilan-bazlik

There are three accents among the Yilan-bazlik tribe. These are Northern, Muglak'kum, and Kulkadir. These dialects, especially Muglak'kum have an inordinate number of words in their vocabulary that refer to sand.

Northern: This is the accent of the people who live between the border with the Kurta'kir tribe and the latitude of the city of Urfa. This area includes the cities of Shehir'kum and Urfa. They have less contact with the Aldiz'ahali and more contact with the Kurta'kir. *Characters with this accent learn languages such as Kurta-baraji more easily than other Yilan-bazlik do, but they have more difficulty with Aldiz-baraji.*

Muglak'kum: This is the typical accent of the people who live in the southwestern section of the Yilan-bazlik tribe's territory. This region includes the famed city of Basra and extends as far east as the longitude of Mt. Karada. *This is the Yilan-bazlik accent described in the Language Advantage below.*

Kulkadir: This is the accent of the people who live in the southeastern part of the Yilan-bazlik tribe's territory. They speak with a strange hissing lisp, as if they were imitating a humanoid serpent. Others find the accent somewhat unsettling, though there is nothing inherently sinister about most practitioners. *Deeply spiritual languages like*



Yilan-bazlik Accents

	Muglak'kum	Northern	Kulkadir
Aldiz-baraji	3	4	1
Atlar-baraji	2	2	3
Avalon	3	3	3
Castille	2	2	4
Eisen	3	3	4
High Eisen	5	5	5
Jadur-baraji	2	2	2
Kurta-baraji	2	1	2
Montaigne	4	4	4
Ruzgar-baraji	2	2	3
Teodoran	3	3	1
Théan	4	4	4
Tikaret-baraji*	0	0	0
Tikat-baraji	2	2	1
Tirala-baraji	2	1	1
Ussura	3	4	4
Vendel	3	3	4
Vodacce	4	4	3
Yilan-baraji	0	0	0

Tikat-baraji are easy for these characters to learn, but they have a harder time with languages that have been corrupted by contact with westerners.

Crescent Servant (6 Points, 5 for Crescents)

You have a Crescent servant in your employ at the start of the game. In addition to performing normal servant's duties, he or she is also skilled linguist. The servant is considered a Henchman and should be built as other Henchmen are. In addition, he or she gets the Linguist Advantage and 15 points of Languages in addition to the 75 HP a Henchman is built with. The servant can be from any Crescent tribe.

Khêl-kalb (Bond with Horse 10 Points, Atlar'vahir only)

The finest horsemen of the *Atlar'vahir* seem to reach a special bond with their horses, such that the rider and his steed become much more than the sum of their parts. You can communicate verbally with your horse, and make a Panache roll with a TN of 15 to try to understand it when it tries to communicate. Also, your mystical connection to your horse allows you to add its Rank in a Trait to any Simple or Contested roll involving that Trait while you are riding it. You also get to add its Brawn Rank to your Damage rolls, and its Panache Rank to your Initiative Total. These are bonuses to the total of the rolls, not bonus dice to

the roll. This link also allows your horse to gain similar bonuses based upon the Ranks of your Traits. This link can only exist between you and a single horse; no other kind of equine will suffice. By spending a Drama Die as an Action, you may remove one of your Dramatic Wounds to give one to your horse, or remove one of your horse's Dramatic Wounds to take one himself.

Language (Varies)

You can speak more than one *baraji* or language. Note that the language called "Crescent" in the *Players' Guide* is a trade language called *tikaret-baraji* by the Crescents. *Tirala-baraji* is the "high tongue" used in the courts of the Empire, and *tikat-baraji* is a secretive language used in religious ceremonies and magical rituals. Each of the tribes also has its own tongue as well. The *Kurta'kir* speak *Kurta-baraji*, the *Jadur'rihad* speak *Jadur-baraji*, and so on.

The point cost for different languages can be found using the methods below. Note that literacy (The ability to read and write, rather than just speak) increases the cost of a language by 1.

The cost for characters from foreign nations to learn Crescent languages is determined by the chart below. Find your native country across the top, then find the language you want to speak in the left column and look where they meet in order to determine the modifier. Add this number to the character's cost to learn Crescent as determined by his nationality and any Accent Advantage that he may have in order to determine the cost. For example, a *Vodacce* Hero from with a *Teramo* Accent can learn Crescent for 2 HP. The modifier for *Ruzgar-baraji* is -1, so he can learn to speak it for 1 HP.

Crescent Languages for Foreigners

	Avalon	Castille	Eisen	Montaigne	Ussura	Vendel	Vodacce
<i>Aldiz-baraji</i>	+1	+0	+1	+1	+1	+0	+0
<i>Atlar-baraji</i>	+1	+1	+2	+2	+0	+1	+0
<i>Judur-baraji</i>	+1	+2	+2	+2	+1	+2	+2
<i>Kurta-baraji</i>	+1	+1	+2	+2	+0	+1	+1
<i>Ruzgar-baraji</i>	+0	+0	+1	+0	+2	+1	-1
<i>Tikaret-baraji*</i>	+0	+0	+0	+0	+0	+0	+0
<i>Tikat-baraji</i>	+2	+2	+2	+2	+1	+2	+2
<i>Tirala-baraji</i>	+1	+1	+1	+2	-1	+1	+1
<i>Yilan-baraji</i>	+2	+0	+1	+2	+2	+2	+0

Languages for Crescents

	Aldiz	Altar	Jadur	Kurta	Ruzgar	Yilan
Aldiz-baraji	0	2	3	2	2	3
Altar-baraji	2	0	2	2	2	2
Avalon	3	3	3	3	3	3
Castille	2	2	2	2	2	2
Eisen	3	3	3	3	3	3
High Eisen	5	5	5	5	5	5
Jadur-baraji	2	2	0	2	3	2
Kurta-baraji	2	1	2	0	2	2
Montaigne	4	4	4	4	4	4
Ruzgar-baraji	2	2	2	1	0	2
Teodoran	3	2	3	1	3	3
Théan	3	3	4	3	2	4
Tikaret-baraji*	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tikat-baraji	4	3	2	3	4	2
Tirala-baraji	1	2	3	1	2	2
Ussura	3	2	3	2	3	3
Vendel	3	3	3	3	3	3
Vodacce	4	4	4	4	2	4
Yilan-baraji	3	2	2	2	2	0

Every Crescent character knows how to speak Tikaret-baraji and his tribe's language for no cost. He can learn any other Crescent languages by finding his tribe on the top of the following chart and the language he wants to learn in the left column and looking up where they meet in order to determine the cost.

Membership (Eyes of the Peacock) (4 Points, Crescent only)

You belong to the Eyes of the Peacock, the Sultan's elite spy network and personal guard. See the description of the Eyes of the Peacock in Chapter 1 for more about the benefits of this Advantage.

Membership (Qatihl'i) (5 Points, 4 for Yilan-bazlik, Crescent NPCs only)

You are a member of the assassin cult known as the Qatihl'i. You are welcome on Mt. Karada and will not be attacked by the snakes there. You may

be trained in the Qor'qunq school. The secret Sorcery known as *Afa* is available to you. Subtract 10 Reputation Points from your Reputation. This Advantage is not available to Heroes under any circumstances.

Pattern-Welded Steel Weapon (Varies, Crescent only)

You have a sword or other item made of ornate pattern-welded steel, a technique that has only been perfected in the Crescent Empire. Various types of high and low carbon steels or iron are used to create this amazing material. Alternating layers of these steels are heated and forged together into a blank. A high layer count is built up by cutting, folding and re-welding the blank. Twisting, drilling, punching, folding and filing the blank during forging can bring out interesting patterns that are then enhanced by an acid etching process. The end result of is a weapon made of stronger steel, with an attractive pattern in its finish. A Pattern-Welded Steel Weapon adds 3 to any rolls made with it. This includes Attack Rolls, Damage Rolls, Parry Active Defenses, and any Swordsman Knacks that involve the weapon's Skill. In addition, 5 is added to the TN of any attempt to break the weapon.

The cost of a Pattern-Welded Steel Weapon is determined by the type of the weapon. Knives cost 6 HP, fencing weapons and hand axes cost 7 HP, heavy weapons cost 8 HP, and polearms cost 9 HP. The cost of this Advantage is reduced by 1 if you have the Noble Advantage. You may purchase this Advantage multiple times to have multiple Pattern-Welded Steel Weapons. The cost of each one after the first is reduced by 1. For example, if you are Noble and decide to get a pair of Pattern-Welded Steel katars (Knives), and a Pattern-Welded Steel scimitar, the first katar costs you 5 HP and the second one costs you 4 HP, while the scimitar costs you 5 HP.



Rimāl (20 Points, Yilan-bazlik only)

Some members of the Yilan-bazlik tribe, known as the *rimāl*, have the magical ability to manipulate the sand. The *rimāl* come from all walks of life within the tribe, and there seems to be no pattern as to who will become one and who will not. They are frequently used as scouts in the desert.

If you possess *rimāl*, you cannot be harmed directly by sand. You may fall any distance onto sand and you will not take damage. Any amount of sand may be poured upon you from any height and you will take no damage, as long as the sand comes into direct contact with you or your possessions. If the sand contacts you indirectly, you will take damage as normal. For instance, forty pounds of sand in a bag that is dropped on you from a great height is considered an ordinary forty-pound object because the fabric of the bag prevents the sand from contacting you directly.

Furthermore, airborne sand does not limit your vision, allowing you to see clearly in a sandstorm. Also, sand does not obstruct your breathing, no matter how much of it is around you. Therefore, you can be buried under any amount of

sand and you will not have any difficulty breathing. Sand does prevent your motion normally when you are covered in it, so being buried in it will still render you unable to move, and it also does not let your voice carry through it any more than anyone else's would. You never leave a footprint when you walk on sand.

You may spend a Drama Die to create a sandstorm around yourself, provided that there is plentiful sand nearby. Make a Resolve Roll against a TN of 15. For every Raise you make, you make the current weather one category rougher (one box toward the top of the 7th Sea Weather Table in the *Game Masters' Guide*.) Take the damage done by that table, add 2 dice (+2k0), and inflict that damage upon everyone in the area on the beginning of Phase 10 of every Round until the sandstorm ends or they find some form of cover. You may also spend an Action to cause sand in a sandstorm you have created to target one particular person. Roll Finesse to attempt to hit your opponent, who may not use Parry Knacks to defend against this attack (neither for determining the TN, nor for attempting an Active Defense).

Roll a number of dice equal to your Resolve and Keep the highest one to determine the damage made by this Action. The sandstorm lasts for a number of Rounds equal to twice your Panache, after which it dissipates, returning the weather the state it was in before you created the sandstorm. You may end the sandstorm at any time before that, merely by spending an Action. Therefore, if a *rimāl* with Finesse 2, Resolve 4, and Panache 3 creates a sandstorm when the weather is in its default state (0k0, 1 day) and makes 4 Raises, the resultant sandstorm will do 4k2 damage to everyone around him, and last for 6 Rounds. If he attempts to target someone with a specific blast from the storm, he rolls 2k2 to attack and 4k1 for damage.

When you create a sandstorm, you can spend one extra Drama Die to give the sandstorm a shape, such as a giant copy of yourself or a pack of giant wolves made of sand. When you do this, the sandstorm gets +1k0 to hit and +0k1 damage for each Attack, but does -1k0 damage per Round. Therefore, when the *rimāl* in the example above spends a Drama Die to give his sandstorm the shape of a giant serpent and makes 4 Raises, he creates one that will do 3k2 damage to everyone around him and will last for 6 Rounds. If he attempt to target someone with a specific blast from the serpent-storm, he rolls 3k2 to attack and 4k2 for damage.

Ruzgar'canli (10 Points, Ruzgar'hala only)

The Ruzgar'hala believe that the spirits are all around them, carried on the wind. The Ruzgar'canli have the uncanny ability to speak with these spirits.

Once per Story, you may spend a Drama Die and make a Resolve roll with a TN of 25 to ask the Ghost Wind one question. The question must be something that the Wind can answer. The Wind is only able to see things exposed to the wind, so anything indoors or hidden underground is beyond its ability to answer. The Ghost Wind has a great memory, and can answer questions about the past, but it knows nothing about the future.

You also have the ability to make a Resolve roll against a TN of 15 to get the Ghost Wind to carry a message from you to any one person who is within its reach. The message may only be one word long, plus one word per Raise you make on the roll. The message will be relayed to the intended person, who will hear the message as an eerie whispering in his ear.

Sharkici (20 Points, Jadur'rihad only)

The sharkici, one of the orders of rahib among the Jadur'rihad, practice tonal chanting as a means of driving away and combating supernatural spirits.

You get the Rahib Skill for free, and you also get one extra Rank of the Chanting Knack for free. You may use your chanting to affect any supernatural creature, including Sidhe, Sorcerers and Syrneath creatures. This also applies to the Opahkung of Kanuba, Vendel Astrologers, and Vestenmannavnjar Sympathetic Healers, as well as characters with similar Advantages from other books. The final list of which creatures are affected by this power is up to the individual GM, but the following should definitely be included: Asprey, Ghoul, Ghost, Hinde, Night Terrors, Ruin Monsters and Zombie. The Sharkici may spend a Drama Die to make a Contested Roll of his Resolve + Singing against his target's Resolve. Whichever one wins by a greater margin inflicts a number of Flesh Wounds equal to the amount he succeeded the roll by on his opponent. Make a

Wound Check as normal. This ability has no effect on items made by supernatural forces such as Sidhe Weapons or Twisted Blades.

Sulimaq (10 Points, Yilan-bazlik only)

The Sulimaq'i is a special kind of holy person among the Yilan-bazlik. His abilities to keep his community supplied with water in the desert are one of the biggest reasons that his tribe has not only survived but also prospered. Not only can he find water hidden under the sand, he can also, in times of great need, try to bring a rainstorm from nowhere in order to save his people.

You may spend a Drama Die to dowse for water. Upon doing so, make a Panache Roll against a TN of 5. If you succeed, you find a location where, with about ten minutes' digging, you can recover one pint of water, plus another pint per Raise you make on the roll. For all intents and purposes, this water was not there before you attempted to find it, and once you have exposed it to air by digging for it, it will evaporate soon.

In order to summon a rainstorm, you must spend a Drama Die and make a Panache + Weather roll against a TN of 30. If you succeed, you create a rainstorm that will drop one quarter of an inch of water in a day, plus another quarter inch per Raise you make on the roll. This rainstorm will last for one day (24 hours). This ability may not cause existing storms to worsen, nor does it cause a shift on the Weather Table.

Once a Sulimaq'i has been to an oasis in a desert and drunk from its waters, he becomes attuned to it. At any time, you may make a Panache + Navigation roll against a TN of 20 to get an idea of the distance and direction to the nearest oasis that you have drunk from. The sense of direction is accurate to within five degrees of the compass and the sense of distance is limited to such descriptions as Near, Far, and so on (see below).

- Near: Within ten minutes' walk
- Not Far: Within two hours' walk
- Far: Within a day's walk
- Very Far: Within a week's walk
- Extremely Far: More than a week's walk away

You do not know which oasis you are detecting, you merely detect the closest one from which you have drunk in the past. This ability only

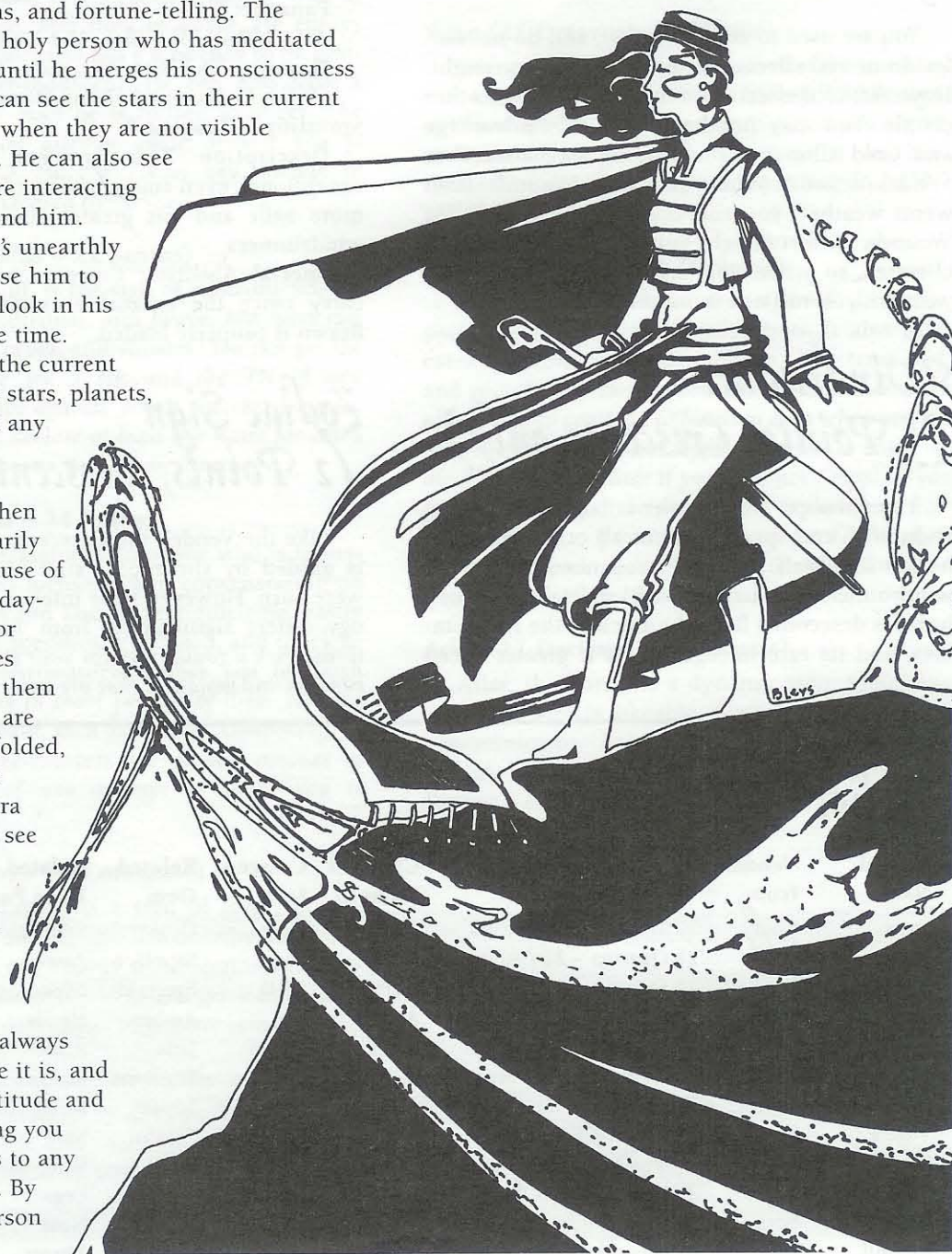
works with naturally-occurring oases such as springs, and does not include large lakes, streams, reservoirs, or wells.

Takim'aldiz (10 Points, Aldiz'ahali Only)

The *Aldiz'ahali* know the ways of the heavens far better than anyone else in the world. They use the stars to determine their calendar, their current locations, and fortune-telling. The *Takim'aldiz* is a holy person who has meditated upon the stars until he merges his consciousness with them. He can see the stars in their current positions, even when they are not visible to other people. He can also see how the stars are interacting with those around him. The *Takim'aldiz's* unearthly perceptions cause him to have a faraway look in his eyes most of the time.

You can see the current positions of the stars, planets, sun, moon, and any other celestial objects such as comets, even when these are ordinarily not visible because of factors such as daylight, weather, or having your eyes closed. You see them even when you are asleep or blindfolded, but they do not provide any extra light for you to see by. You also innately know the geometrical relationships between them at all times. Therefore, you always know what time it is, and your current latitude and longitude, giving you two Free Raises to any Navigation roll. By looking at a person for a Phase,

spending a Drama Die, and making a Contested Roll of your Wits against his Wits, you can gain a sense of what astrological sign he was born under (that constellation seems to glow brighter while you concentrate on him). If you succeed, you gain one Star Die, plus another Star Die for each Raise you make on the Contested Roll. A Star Die can be used to increase the result of a roll made against that character, as if it were a Drama Die. It can also be used to activate a Hubris or Flaw as if it were a Drama Die, as long



as the Flaw belongs to the character you have studied. Star Dice are not Drama Dice, do not become experience points at the end of a Story, and disappear at the end of a Scene if they have not been used.

Warm Climate Conditioning (2 Points, 1 for Crescents)

You are used to warm weather, and do not suffer from its effects as much as others might. However, cold affects you more than it does other people. You may not have both this Advantage and Cold Climate Conditioning (see Ussura or Vendel-Vesten.) When you take Wounds from warm weather, you roll one less die (-1k0) for Wounds. Unfortunately, you are not used to cold climates, so when you take Wounds from cold weather, you roll one more die (+1k0).

Windrunner (3 Points, Crescents only)

The Crescent windrunner is famed for having endurance and speed that put all other breeds of horses in Théah to shame. You not only have a windrunner, you have a very special one. Your horse is descended from the stock of the royal stables, and its rare lineage grants it greater speed

and stamina than other windrunners. Treat this horse as a Henchman, loyal to you, with the following stats:

Crescent Windrunner (Special Breed)

Henchman

Points: 65

TN: 15 (30 while Galloping)

Brawn: 4

Finesse: 3

Resolve: 2

Wits: 1

Panache: 1

Attack Roll: 3k2 Bite, 3k2 Kick, 3k2 Trample

Damage: 0k1 Bite, 4k2 Kick, 4k3 Trample

Skills: Footwork 2, Long Distance Running 4, Sprinting 5, Leaping 2

Description: This Crescent windrunner is exceptional, even among others of his breed. He is more agile and has greater stamina than other windrunners.

Special Abilities: Crescent windrunners can carry twice the normal encumbrance for their Brawn if properly loaded.

Zodiac Sign (2 Points, Crescent Only)

Like the Vendel, the Crescents believe that life is guided by the zodiac sign under which you were born. However, their interpretation of astrology differs significantly from Théan interpretations. *Pick a zodiac sign for your Hero, and gain the benefits and penalties that are associated with it.*

Zodiac Chart

Vendel Name	Vendel Icon	Vendel Dates	Crescent Name	Crescent Icon	Related Gem	Related Body Part (Crescent)	Key Word
Oryx	Goat	20 Tertius – 20 Quartus	Oglak	Goat	Opal	Stomach	Ambition
Ursus	Bear	21 Quartus – 21 Quintus	Bukla	Bear	Sapphire	Arms	Permanent
Lupi	Wolves	22 Quintus – 22 Sextus	Kurta	Wolf	Emerald	Eyes	Determined
Apis	Bee	23 Sextus – 24 Julius	Ari'y	Bee	Amber	Hands	Industrious
Drachen	Drachen	25 Julius – 25 Corantine	Jadur	Drago	Jade	Blood	Powerful
Columba	Dove	26 Corantine – 26 Septimus	Ruzgar	Wind	Diamond	Lungs	Unpredictable
Felis	Cat	27 Septimus – 26 Octavus	Aslan	Lion	Topaz	Heart	Leadership
Vipera	Snake	27 Octavus – 26 Nonus	Yilan	Snake	Peridot	Skin	Immortality
Nauta	Sailor	27 Nonus – 26 Decimus	Devir	Camel	Agate	Bones	Endurance
Equus	Horse	27 Decimus – 20 Primus	Altar	Horse	Garnet	Legs	Faithful
Boca	Boca	21 Priums – 20 Secundus	Cikar	Rat	Ruby	Nose	Cleverness
Anguill	Eel	21 Secundus – 19 Tertius	Balik	Whale	Pearl	Throat	Serenity

Oglak (20 Tertius – 20 Quartus)

Oglak, the goat, is a sign of ambition, determination, bad luck, instability, and good business sense. You get one less Drama Die than normal at the start of each Story. The TN of any Repartee Action that will cause you to become distracted from a goal is increased by +5, and if you use the Investment Rules from Vendel-Vesten, you get a +1 bonus to your roll.

Bukla (21-Quartus – 21 Quintus)

Bukla, the bear, is a sign of someone who is practical, reliable, and slow to anger. He enjoys living the good life, and has a tendency to be gluttonous and over-indulgent. He can also have a horrible temper once he is roused to anger. The TN of any Taunt attempt made against you is increased by +10, but the TN of any attempt to Charm you is decreased by -5.

Kurta (22 Quintus – 22 Sextus)

Kurta, the wolf, is the sign of someone who is quiet, faithful, spiritual, and brave, but who can also be violent, cruel, and sinister. You can get the Faith Advantage for 3 HP, and the TN of any Intimidate attempt against you is increased by +5. You must always declare at least one Raise for extra damage whenever you declare an Attack.

Ari'y (23 Sextus – 24 Julius)

Ari'y, the bee, signifies someone who is industrious, lively and focused when concentrating on something. Ari'y can also be unpredictable, easily distracted if not specifically focused, and quick to anger. Your industriousness allows you to finish complicated tasks in short periods of time. You can finish a lengthy task, such as writing, composing, or sculpting in three-quarters the normal amount of time. The TN of any attempt to Taunt you is decreased by -5.

Jadur (25 Julius – 25 Corantine)

Jadur, the dragon, is a sign of force, power, sensuality, and mysticism. Those who are born under this sign are usually domineering and irritated by that which is pretty. You get a Free Raise to any attempt you make to Intimidate someone else.

Ruzgar (26 Corantine – 26 Septimus)

Ruzgar, the wind, is insightful, decisive, swift and pervasive, but also intrusive, capricious and sometimes destructive. Once per Scene, you may

roll a number of your Drama Dice up to your lowest Trait. These dice do not explode. Any die that rolls an odd number is lost and goes to the Game Master's pool of Drama Dice. Any die that rolls an even number becomes two Drama Dice in your pool.

Aslan (27 Septimus – 26 Octavus)

Aslan, the lion, is the sign of a generous and organized person. He is a natural leader who sometimes has trouble remaining subordinate. You get the Commander Skill for free, and the Leadership Knack is considered a Basic Knack.

Yilan (27 Octavus – 26 Nonus)

Yilan, the snake, is the symbol of immortality and magic power. You do not become Middle-Aged until you are 33, do not become Old until you are 55, and you do not die from old age until you have reached an age of 70 plus two exploding dice (70 + 2k2).

Devir (27 Nonus – 26 Decimus)

Devir, the camel, is the sign of diligence, patience, placidity and productivity. It also indicates someone who is stubborn, bad tempered, and proud. Your sheer determination and endurance allows you to continue to function even when you are injured. When you are Crippled and roll at least one die that would explode if you were not Crippled, you may pick one of those dice, which explodes normally. For instance, if you roll 5k3 and get 10, 10, 8, 4, 2, you may pick one of the two 10s and allow it to explode. The other 10 remains a 10.

Atlar (27 Decimus – 20 Primus)

Atlar, the horse, is a dynamic sign, indicating someone who is likeable, forthright and a good communicator. Sometimes this person can be willful, blunt and unwilling to follow directions. You get a Free Raise to any attempt to Charm someone.



Cikar (21 Primus – 20 Secundus)

Cikar, the rat, is the sign of someone quick-witted, fast, good at politics, and shrewd. He also tends to be deceitful and unscrupulous. *You get one extra Experience Point and lose one Reputation Point at the end of each Story.*

Balina (21 Secundus – 19 Tertius)

Balina, the whale, is the sign of someone who is patient, emotional, sympathetic and sensitive. He also tends to be depressed, suspicious, and overly superstitious. *Your presence comforts those around you, increasing the TN of any attempt to Taunt someone in your group (including yourself) by +5. Your darker moods make it easier to Intimidate you, lowering the TN to do so by -5.*

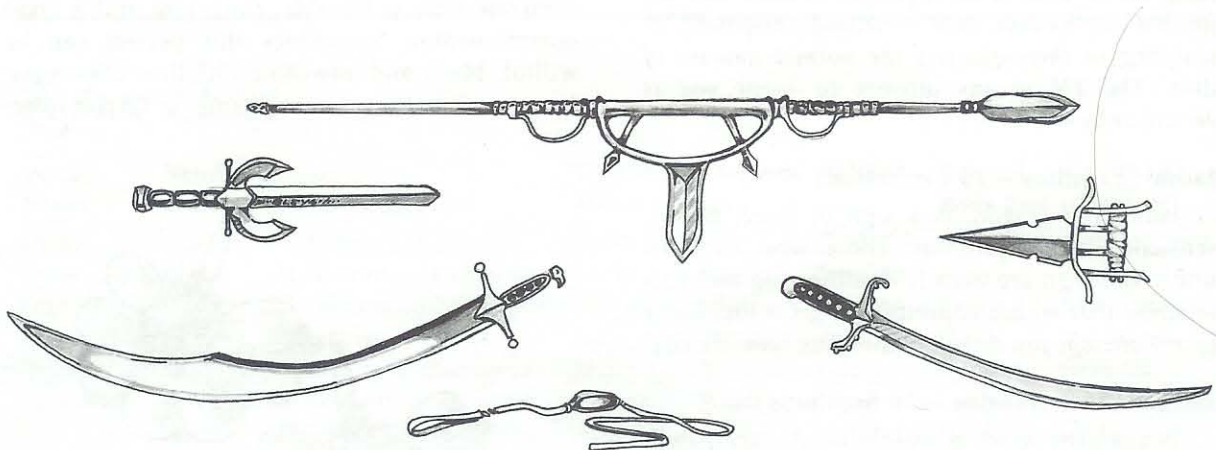


Katar

A *katar* is a heavy-bladed knife with a hilt that consists of two parallel bars connected by two crosspieces. One of these is the handle, and the other is connected to the base of the blade in such a way that the blade is perpendicular to the handle. The blades are invariably double-edged, and usually straight, although some (such as those used by Yakub al'Marikk) are curved. These knives inflict 2k2 damage, have -2 unkept dice (-2k0) when thrown and have -1 unkept die (-1k0) when used for an Active Defense.

Scimitar

A scimitar is a curved Crescent sword used almost exclusively for cutting and slashing. Because its curvature is more pronounced than that of the Théan sabers, its point is practically useless for offense, but that same curve makes it perfect for performing a drawcut. These fencing weapons inflict 2k2 damage. Anyone attempting an Active Defense against a scimitar suffers a penalty of one rolled die (-1k0) because of its slashing style, but you suffer a penalty of one Kept die (-1k1) on the roll to hit when you attempt to make a Lunge with one. This sword may be drawn from its scabbard without requiring an Action or causing a penalty to the TN to hit your opponent.



Adaga

The bizarre parrying weapon known as the *adaga* is also a powerful offensive tool. A spear runs up and down through the buckler-sized rectangular shield, four and a half feet long, with a broad blade at the top and a sharp spike on the other end. A large knife blade about one foot long protrudes from the middle of the shield. A pair of short spikes above and below the blade, set at forty-five degree angles from the shield, are used to catch opposing weapons. Most attacks made with an *adaga* are thrusts with the spear.

Because of its hybrid nature, the *adaga* is a difficult weapon to master, and requires a set of Knacks from a variety of Skills in order to use it. When you attempt to parry with it, use the Parry (Buckler) Knack. Attacks made with the knife blade use the Attack (Fencing) Knack, and inflict 1k2 damage. Attacks made with the spear use the Attack (Heavy Weapon) Knack, but do not require two hands. They inflict 2k2 damage. The relatively cumbersome length of the spear, which can limit the user's ability to maneuver his *adaga* into good positions to bind or parry a weapon, effectively negates any benefit to defense granted by the short spikes.

Dilmekiri

A *dilmekiri* is a two-handed curved sword, resembling a scimitar but with a heavier and even more extremely curved blade. As with the scimitar, it is a cutting and slashing weapon, with a point that is essentially useless for offense. This heavy weapon inflicts 3k2 damage. Anyone attempting to make an Active Defense against a *dilmekiri* suffers a penalty of one rolled die (-1k0)

because of its slashing style, but the user suffers a penalty of one rolled die (-1k0) when attempting to make a Lunge or Parry Active Defense with one.

Manople

A *manople* is a Crescent gauntlet sword, which has been out of fashion with the *Kurta'kir* and the *Atlar'vahir* for over a century. It still sees use today, however, especially among the *Jadur'rihad* and the *Aldiz'ahali* tribes. The weapon consists of a short central double-edged blade and two very short, outwardly curved side blades. The blades of the manople attach to a plate that covers the back of the wielder's hand, which is in turn attached to a bracer that both protects the wrist and keeps the weapon on the wielder's arm. This arrangement leaves the wielder's hand free, but somewhat impaired, and makes attacks with the weapon fairly awkward.

Manoples are considered fencing weapons and do 2k2 damage when they hit. You may attempt to do other things with the hand that has the *manople* in it, but doing so requires two Raises to any roll you must make to perform the action. Attacks made with a *manople* have their Target Numbers raised by 5 if the hand using them is empty, and by 10 if the hand is holding something. You get a Free Raise when you attempt to make a Parry Active Defense using a *manople*.

Sling

One of the oldest weapons but nevertheless an effective one, the sling is a strip of a flexible material (such as leather) with a pocket near its center. The missile to be slung (usually a stone) is put in the pocket, the slinger takes the two ends of the

New Equipment Table

Weapon	Damage	Range	Short Range	Long Range	Reload
Adaga (Blade)	1k2	—	—	—	—
Adaga (Spear)	2k2	—	—	—	—
Dilmekin	3k2	—	—	—	—
Katar	2k2	5+2*Brawn	-0	-5	—
Manople	2k2	—	—	—	—
Scimitar	2k2	—	—	—	—
Sling	1k2	60	-5 to hit	-10 to hit	1 Action

sling in hand, and begins whirling them around his head. When sufficient momentum has built up, one end of the sling is released, and the projectile flies forward. A sling may not have the range of a bow or a pistol, but its ammunition can be found at your feet in rocky terrain, and it hardly weighs anything at all. Stones fired from a sling inflict 1k2 damage.

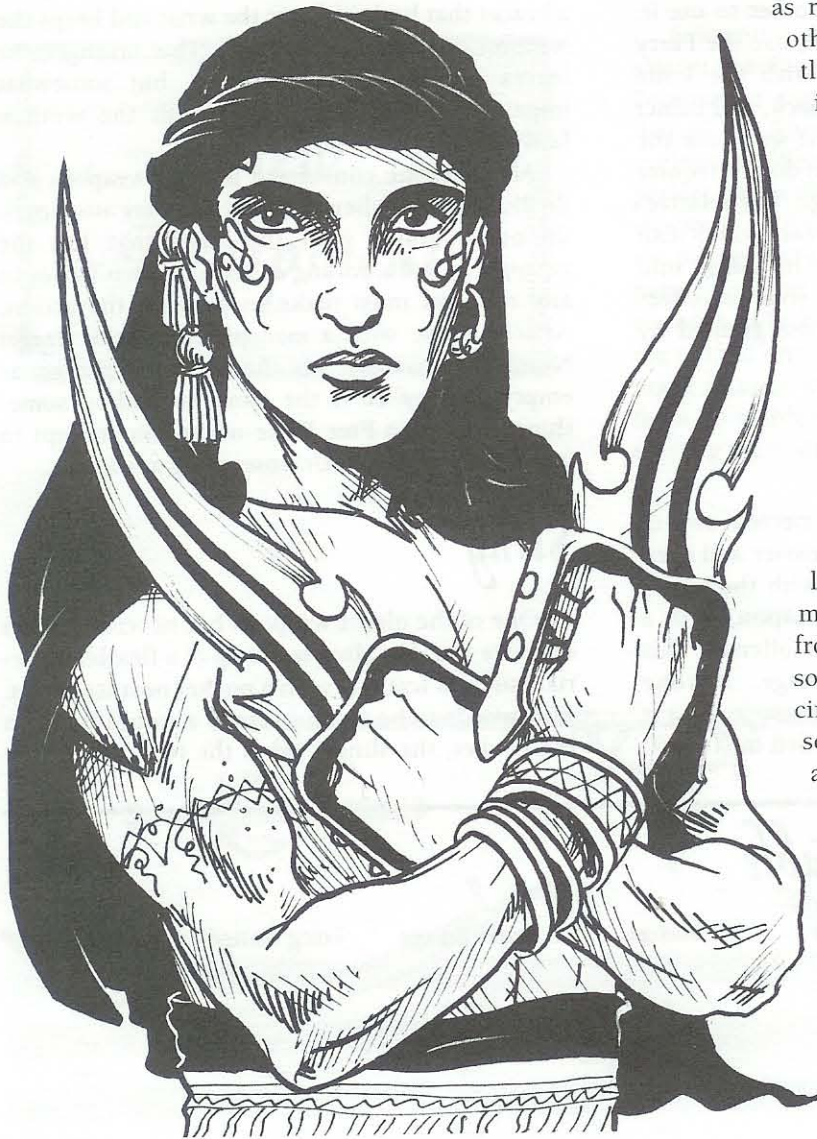
New Poisons

In a land driven by vendetta, the use of poison is inevitable, and the Empire of the Crescent Moon has some very potent venoms indeed. Rules for poison can be found in the *Game Masters' Guide*. Keep in mind that many Crescents are just as repulsed by the use of poison as other nationalities, preferring to settle their differences with political intrigue or cold steel.

Yilan Viper Venom

1 Dramatic Wound / 10 minutes / 2 hours

The poison of the Yilan viper can be heated and then mixed with ordinary salt. A gray-green solid will form in the bottom of the flask which, when filtered out, leaves a liquid hemotoxin even more powerful than the raw venom from which it was derived. This poison causes rapid degeneration of the circulatory system, but its effects are so rapid that it does not remain active in its victim's system as long as the raw toxin does.



Slivered Tiger Whiskers

3k2 damage / 1 hour / 1 day

The whiskers of an ordinary tiger may be chopped finely and introduced by vigorous inhalation or ingestion into a victim's body. These slivers behave like tiny needles in the soft tissue of the victim's respiratory or digestive systems. Given enough time, they can even penetrate the bloodstream and damage the tissue of the heart.



The following Reputation rules reflect the difference between the ideals of the Empire and the rest of Théah. While both societies value courage, the Crescent concept differs from the western version. Crescents value courage in battle, the bravery to stand firm and do one's job under terrifying and deadly circumstances, but have less regard for the humble, self-sacrificing sort of courage that Théans praise in a martyr. Another thing to bear in mind is that Crescents regard poisoning as a valuable skill. It is not dishonorable to poison one's enemy, especially if performed with panache and style. In addition, Crescents do not place a high value on humility.

A poisoner who demonstrates great skill in his craft gains 1 Reputation Point.

Doing something that improves your family's standing in a vendetta will gain you a number of Reputation Points equal to the highest Reputation Rank in your family. On the other hand, doing something that weakens your family's standing in a vendetta will cause you to lose a number of Reputation Points equal to your current Reputation Rank.

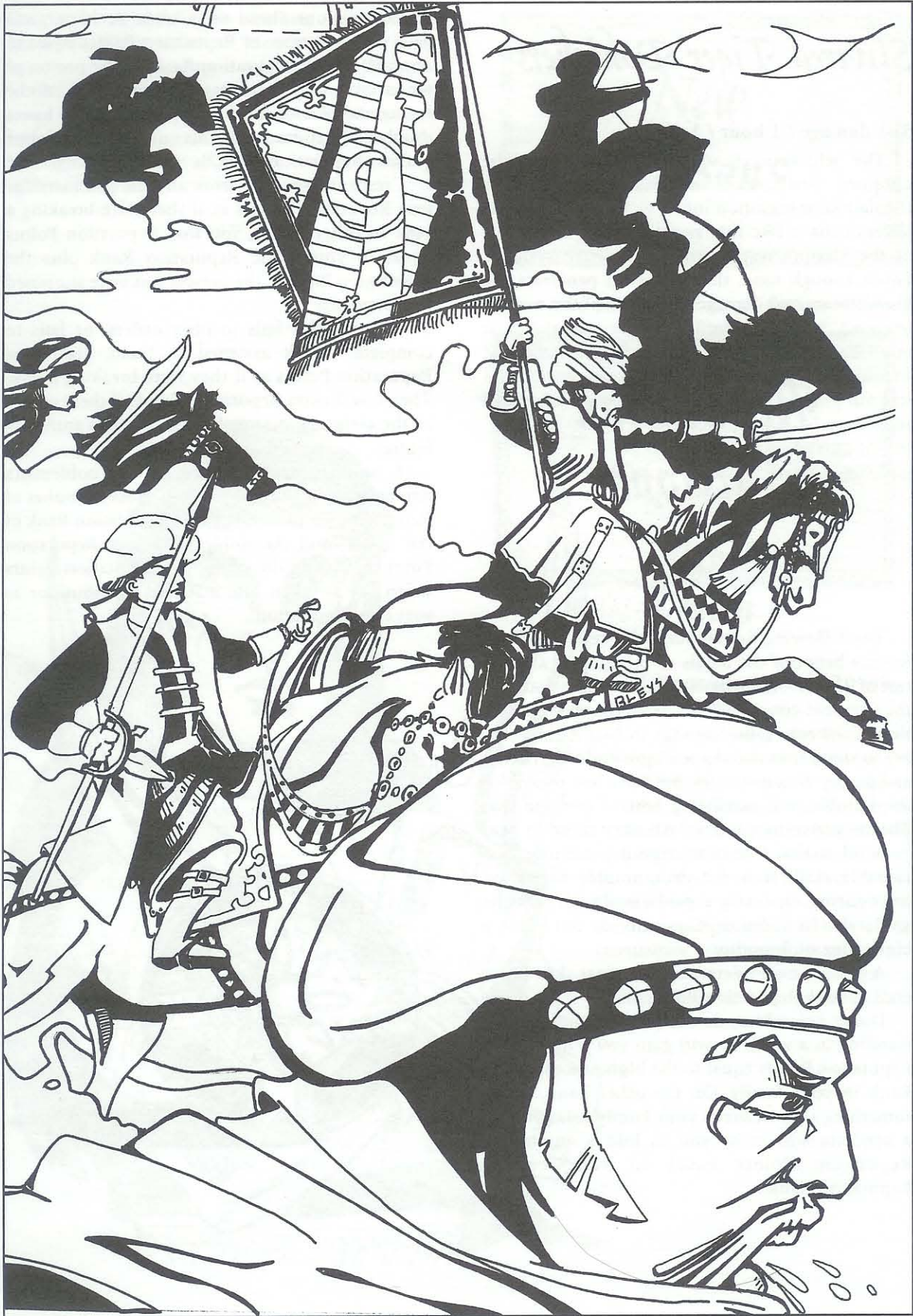
Coming out ahead on a trade or barter will gain you a number of Reputation Points equal to one-half of the Reputation Rank of the person of whom you took advantage. Coming out on the losing end of a lopsided trade causes you to lose a number of Reputation Points equal to half of your current Reputation Rank.

Crescents who run from an arranged marriage lose Reputation Points as if they were breaking a vow. In other words, you lose Reputation Points equal to your basic Reputation Rank plus the Reputation Rank of the person you were supposed to marry.

Anyone who fails to obey orders, or fails to complete a task assigned to them, also loses Reputation Points as if they were breaking a vow. They lose 2 extra Reputation Points if these orders or the assignment came from a religious authority figure.

A woman who is taken into a nobleman's harem because she delights him gains a number of Reputation Points equal to the Reputation Rank of the noble, and the noble gains one Reputation Point. A woman does not gain Reputation Points when she is taken into a harem as tribute or as part of a negotiation.





The Fourth Scroll

Veils and Whispers

In the quiet time of early dawn, when the light has but begun to shift, from softest silver to palest gold, and some trace of mist still lingers. Leaving diamonds like a maiden's tears, I see the spirits of those who live now in Paradise, come down to see if I am ready yet to leave my little garden. I tell them no, but perhaps soon.



— from *Contemplations By a Fountain* by Celik al'Bahri

Life in the Crescent Empire: Understanding “Western” vs. “Eastern” Cultures

Whether you are playing an adventurer from western or northern Théah, or a Crescent tribesman native to the region, adventuring in the Empire presents challenges you may not have encountered previously in *7th Sea*. You may be familiar with the concept of family honor in Castille or vendetta in Vodacce or court intrigue in Montaigne, but these are pale shadows compared to life under the Crescent Moon.

The value system in the Crescent Empire differs dramatically from the rest of Théah. Crescents do not follow Théah's code of chivalry, which values humility, mercy and forgiveness. They do share respect for courage, especially the kind demonstrated by a warrior who, despite overwhelming odds in battle, refuses to yield without the fight of his life. But a Crescent values his tribe and his family before all else; obedience and respect for tradition are paramount. He strives at all times to obey his superiors, at least publicly, because failure to do so is a disgrace to his tribe. No Crescent suffers any slight against himself, his family, his tribe, or his nation to go unpunished and the strictures of *davasi* and *dogru* are cornerstones of Crescent society, as discussed below.

Education is revered in the Crescent Empire and the *kiymet*, or teacher, holds a revered position, whether he be a tribal shaman or professor at a university. Crescents also value cleverness, a trait they claim comes from learning to endure and thrive in the vagaries of the natural world. A person who can outwit his enemies shows the lineage of his tribe's survival. This can refer to an *Atlar-vahir* who has never left his nomadic life on the plains or a *Kadin* who avoids the traps set by ambitious concubines in the harem.

Rarely will a Crescent strike out on his own as a rogue pirate or sword for hire. Wherever a Crescent goes, her actions must always preserve the tribe's honor. Does this mean that there are no thieves or villains in the Crescent Empire? Of course not. The Darkness is a powerful force in the Empire. This is not some Synchron legend or Sidhe gone astray or spawn of Legion. This is the elemental force of evil, present when the world began and always ready to slither like little black snakes across the silvery path of Light.

Faith in the Crescent Empire is not something separate from daily life. Firmly rooted in an offshoot of Cathayan *sud'ya*, the mythology-rich religion of *patika* teaches reverence for nature, devotion to the family and respect for authority. By following the path of righteousness and honoring the tribe, a Crescent will find the gates of Paradise opening for them when they pass from this life to the next.



Using Syrneith Artifacts

While the Syrneith have a strong presence in the lands of the Crescent Empire, artifacts from their civilization are hidden in places that are extremely dangerous for adventurers. This is intentional so that Game Masters can limit access and availability if they wish. One of the reasons the Syrneith were introduced into the world of *7th Sea* was to provide a source for quest objects, which should rightly be the focus of long arduous adventures. The object must be worthy of such quests. If every ghost, demon and cardinal has a Syrneith trinket in his treasure hold, the artifact is devalued and threatens the balance of the game. It also begins to devalue the Hero who wields such an item. How much heroism is involved in defeating a pirate crew if they have cutlasses and you're carrying the equivalent of a laser gun?

Give careful thought to the artifacts you include in your Crescent adventures. The Syrneith invented wonderful machines of which only a few were devoted to wholesale slaughter. A condenser unit that pulls water out of the air could mean a whole new life for an entire desert community, while a portable fish-finder could save a coastal village that has exhausted its traditional fishing grounds. Not only will these types of items raise the standard of living for a tribe or village, they also present the players with the opportunity to explore how such "improvements" will affect their traditions and faith.

Try to present your players with a new experience. If the Crescent Empire of your game is simply Montaigne with tents and *kaffe*, you're marginalizing the wonders it has to offer. Concentrate on what makes the Empire unique from the places they have previously visited. If the players are not Crescents, they should continually be reminded of their status as strangers in a strange land, and that the assumptions that they hold do not apply here.

Start with the easy stuff. When Heroes from western Théah first arrive in the Crescent Empire, stress how different the sights, sounds and smells are from those they know. Talk about how different the buildings look, with their carved screens and domed roofs. The peoples who crowd the Crescent cities are far more heterogeneous than those found in western cities. Here perhaps, your players will encounter their first Ussurans or, even more importantly, catch a glimpse of their first Cathayan.

Make the players aware of the vast array of goods available in these markets. Some of them will be familiar, but many have never been seen before. If you are not familiar with Middle Eastern or Turkish cuisine, do yourself a favor and become so, then describe the taste treats awaiting your Heroes when they sit down to a meal.

Nothing helps give the players a sense of the exotic like the use of foreign words. Copy the glossary and keep it in front of you during the game, so you can throw in a few Crescent terms in your description. Make sure the players learn the important ones, such as the words for "honor" and "vengeance," and make sure that your Crescent NPCs use them when speaking to the Heroes. But this is just the window-dressing. The truly exotic nature of the Empire comes not in its physical form, but in the differences between the minds and hearts of the two lands.

The average male citizen of a large Crescent city is simply better educated than his counterpart in western Théah. He will most certainly be literate (by no means the norm elsewhere) and will know the major written works for his culture. He will be aware of political and scientific developments in his city and very likely in the rest of the Empire. Because of this preponderance of education, the people of the Empire tend to be a bit condescending when dealing with *yavanci* from the west. Despite a general distrust of outsiders, Crescents can be the warmest and most gracious hosts in the world. Once you share *ekmek ve sakla* (bread and salt) with a Crescent,

you have established the sacred relationship of *davetli ve kalaba*, guest and host. Crescents can be warm and welcoming, providing lavish hospitality to strangers when honor and custom require, but they often feel that everything must be explained slowly and carefully to the poor white-skinned heathens. Heroes from western Théah will have to get used to this.

Perhaps the most difficult thing for western Heroes to understand is the difference in philosophies between the two lands. The issue of alcohol often trips up adventurers who first come to the Empire. Heroes who roar into a tavern and call out for wine and ale are going to be regarded with horror and disgust. Except in a few of the largest trading cities, where some merchants have found it worthwhile to import the vile stuff for consumption by visiting infidels, alcohol is simply not available in the Empire. This may require some adjustments for more... festive Heroes. However, they should learn to appreciate the ritual of *kaffe* in no time, and in fact may discover that it presents a lucrative export opportunity for them.

The Crescent philosophy concerning slavery, long banned by the Vaticine Church, may prove more difficult to overcome. It is very hard for western Heroes to comprehend how an intelligent, sophisticated and charming Crescent nobleman can carelessly order an *esir* to be whipped severely because he spilled wine on a visitor. The Crescents see no contradiction in this

disposal of property because that is what *esiri* are, but it can be a great source of tension between western Heroes and their Crescent hosts.

The status of women in the Crescent Empire is a complicated issue. The closest one comes to the polygamous/polygynous society elsewhere in Théah is in Vodacce, which is not surprising, although Crescents who know about the situation there consider it abhorrent. Unlike Vodacce, many Crescent women are at the very least literate and usually well-educated, whether it is book learning in the city or lore learning in the tribe.

Most Western Théan Heroes treat women with respect and deference, and are used to women in roles more or less equal to theirs. The men of the Crescent Empire feel somewhat differently. However, with the exception of the *Safadim* who hide in the mountains far to the East, Crescent men are not universally abusive to women. Some Crescent women may rise to a position of prominence, perhaps in education or the healing arts, but there is no absolute tradition of the "courtly love" type of reverence or respect for women here. Nor is there a movement amongst Crescent women to alter their situation, the way there might be in a nation like Eisen if such a thing were forced upon them.

A warrior in the Crescent Empire does not spend his time rescuing damsels in distress, unless the damsel in question belongs to his tribe or his harem. Myths abound about great female warriors who rode alongside their husbands and



brothers in battle, but players will find that women who ask for their help do so because they are mistreated by an individual, not because they yearn to be free of the system. This dichotomy could easily cause conflicts between western and Crescent Heroes.

The last major philosophical difference concerns magic. It may give western Heroes (particularly the religiously-inclined ones) heart failure to see monks and shaman practicing their magic openly, but it is and something they must learn to ignore. Despite the natural aversion to *yavanci*, Theán students of arcane lore receive great respect in the Empire. It may well happen that a group of western Heroes must overcome their prejudices in order to deal with a shaman whose help is vital to their cause.

The Crescent Empire is a vast, exotic land full of mystery and excitement. Your players are going to want to adventure in it for the same reason that heroes from all over Théah visit: to experience a new and different world, completely unlike anywhere they've ever been before. Don't disappoint them.

Dogru ve Davasi: (Honor and Vendetta)

"My brother and I will stand against our uncle; my uncle and I will stand against our enemy."

— ancient Crescent saying

No self-respecting Vodacce or Castillian likes to admit it, but the rituals of revenge and vendetta so cherished in both of these nations have their roots in the Crescent Empire. Here, more than anywhere else in Théah, the convoluted nature of relationships among family members (and by extension, tribes, villages and cities) dictates how one conducts oneself both in public and in private. The honor of the family and the tribe must be preserved, and no slight can go unpunished.

To carry out *davasi* is to do more than duel in the streets like a Castillian or poison an enemy's wine like a Vodacce. The responsibility for revenge falls upon the entire family. This action is not codified or commemorated in writing, but it becomes part of the family's heritage and children learn it as part of the family's lore.

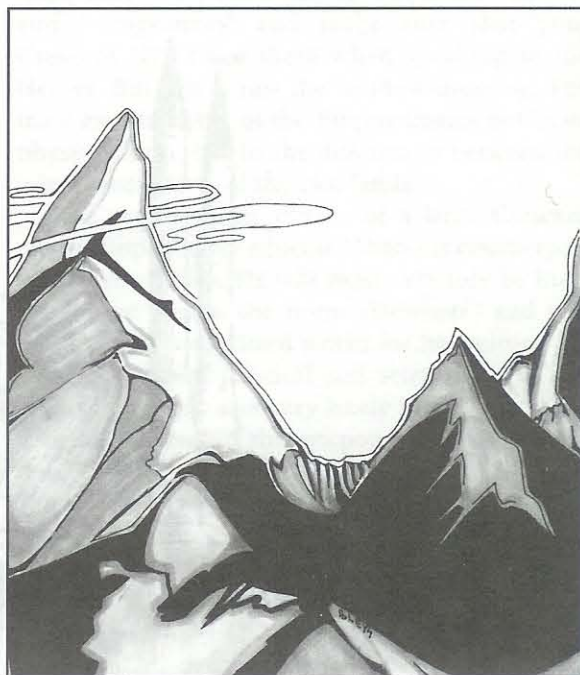
Although the great Sultán Timur has worked hard to make his empire more "civilized," he has

never lost sight of his responsibilities to *dogru ve davasi*. While his methods do not involve calling out one's enemy in the public streets, he nonetheless pays close attention to those who act dishonorably towards his family and his nation. One of the tasks of the Eyes of the Peacock is to keep track of *davasi* which must be carried out against the Empire's enemies.

The Qatihl'i

The *Qatihl'i* are a reclusive cult who live on Mt. Ozayrat, a small mountain adjacent to Mt. Karada. The *Qatihl'i* do not openly interact with outsiders, and do not tolerate trespassers upon their mountain. Very few outsiders have ever set foot on Mt. Ozayrat and survived. Those that have lived never reached the stronghold *Qatihl'i*. They never saw a single person on the mountain or any overt entrance to a fortress; they were simply unable to continue their journey. Or, more accurately, they found themselves beset by a solid wall of writhing, venomous snakes, blocking them from going any direction but hastily back down the mountain.

The *Qatihl'i* descend from a few families of *Yilan-bazlik* nomads who first came to the *Kutsal-dag* over a thousand years ago. There, they met a strange little man with amazing magical powers including dominion over snakes. Calling himself *Ebedi Yilan Al'Kadeem*, he used their superstitious reverence of serpents to his own



advantage. He declared that he was a snake god, and that they were his chosen people; those who followed him would become powerful and feared by other men, and live in an earthly paradise near Mt. Karada. Those who did not would be slain for their impudence.

Ebedi quickly taught his people that the snakes of Mt. Ozayrat would stop individuals who came to the mountain, but a strong, organized force such as an army could bring about their downfall. Consequently, he trained the *Qatihl'i* to eliminate such a threat in the quickest, most efficient way possible. The *Qatihl'i* aren't numerous enough to take on an entire army, but they can prevent such a force from ever being sent to attack them. They do this by systematically assassinating anyone who becomes too curious about them, any commander who starts to bring a unit of armed men within sight of Mt. Ozayrat, and any politician or clergyman who seems to have an agenda that involves the *Qatihl'i* or their secret mountain stronghold. While most non-*Qatihl'i* believe that Ebedi Yilan Al'Kadeem is not a deity, it seems that he is still alive today. He never leaves Mt. Ozayrat, preferring to send his followers into the world to do his bidding.

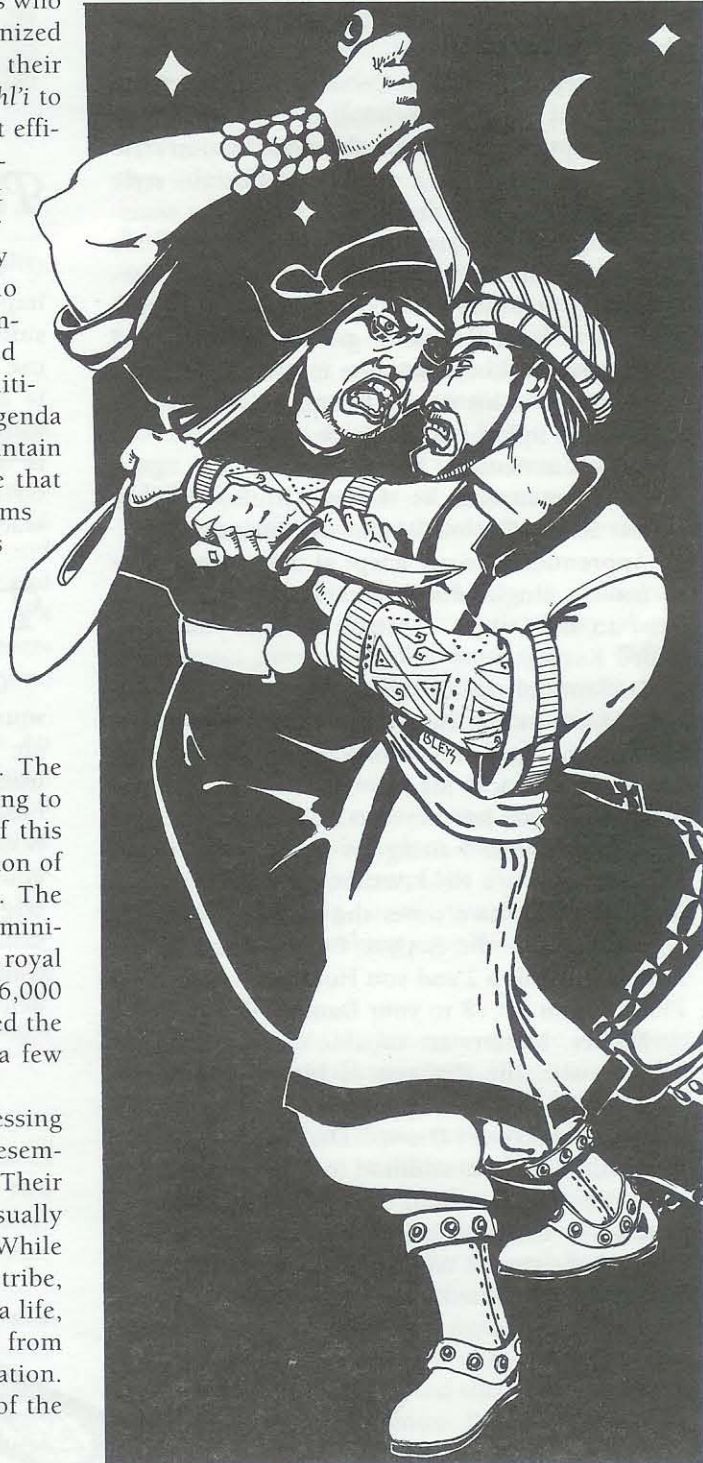
There is a small shrine at the base of Mt. Ozayrat on the north side of the mountain, with graven images of snakes all over it. Here individuals wishing to hire an assassin may contact agents of the *Qatihl'i*. The fees for a *Qatihl'i* assassination vary according to the social status of the victim. The price of this service starts at 30 *arjanti* for the assassination of a commoner and goes upwards from there. The assassination of a nobleman commands a minimum fee of 120 *altyni*. No member of the royal family will be eliminated for less than 6,000 *altyni*. People from all walks of life have hired the *Qatihl'i* to kill for them; in the past, even a few Sultáns have done so.

The *Qatihl'i* are usually described as dressing in gray cloth covered with dark patterns, resembling the coloration of the *yilan* viper. Their weapon of choice is a simple dagger, usually slightly curved to resemble a snake's fang. While most *Qatihl'i* come from the *Yilan-bazlik* tribe, they sometimes accept payment of a life for a life, meaning that they will take a live infant from another tribe as payment for an assassination. These children are then raised as members of the *Qatihl'i*.

Ssassiss Venom

Euphoric Hallucination / 1 Round / 1 hour

The venom of a Ssassiss is a powerful hallucinogen that causes the victim to see beautiful glowing colored shapes gently moving all around him, and a rainbow aura around every living thing. While under the influence of this



drug, all rolls the victim makes have their TNs raised by +10.

Fighting Style of the Qatihl'i

Qor'qunq Knife School

Country of Origin: Crescent Empire. Only Qatihl'i may learn this School.

Description: *Qor'qunq* is the assassination style of the Qatihl'i. It is a vicious, deliberate style focusing on striking deeply and fatally. An assassin using the *Qor'qunq* style will take his time looking for the right strike, and then spring forward with a lethal blow. The sect's calculating patience is both *Qor'qunq's* greatest strength and its greatest weakness, because it allows the assassin to conserve his energy but also gives his prey a chance to fight back or escape.

Basic Curriculum: Knife, Spy

Swordsman Knacks: Lunge (Knife), Poison, Throat Strike, Exploit Weakness (*Qor'qunq*)

Apprentice: You are adept at using your knife to make a single, deadly attack. You get a Free Raise to any Lunge or Attack attempt you make with a Knife.

Students of the *Qor'qunq* School do not gain free Membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, they get one extra Rank of one of their Swordsman Knacks for free

Journeyman: Journeymen have learned to hold their strike while waiting for an opening. When you strike using a Held Action, your Damage Roll is increased by two times the number of Phases you have Held the Action. For instance, if the Action Die rolls a 2 and you Hold the Action until Phase 6, you get +8 to your Damage Roll.

Master: Masters are capable of harming their victims with the slightest of blows. When you successfully strike an opponent with a knife, you may expend one Drama Die to inflict one Dramatic Wound in addition to any other damage that the attack would inflict. This Dramatic Wound is inflicted before the Damage Roll is made, and then the Wound Check is made against the Wounds inflicted by the attack.

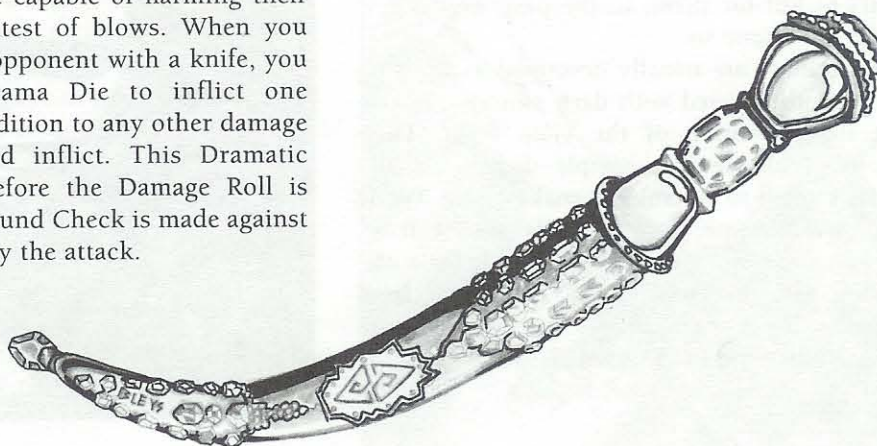
New Swordsman Knacks

Poison

When diplomacy fails and a military victory is impossible, an ounce of arsenic will sometimes suffice. This Knack lets you know what poison to use and how much to administer, as well as how to handle it safely. Your GM will have rules for using this Knack in the *Game Masters' Guide*. This is the same as the Poison Knack in the *Players' Guide*, but it is considered to be a Basic Knack for students of the Qor'qunq School.

Throat Strike

Using this Knack, you strike your opponent squarely across the throat. You declare that you are making a Throat Strike, and roll to attack using this Knack. The TN to hit your opponent is raised by 15 when using this Knack, but if it's successful (and not avoided with an Active Defense) you inflict an automatic Dramatic Wound to your target, rather than rolling for Damage. This is the same as the Throat Strike Knack in the *Players' Guide*, but is considered to a Basic Knack for students of the Qor'qunq School.





Af'a (Qatihl'i Only)

Knacks: Charming, Constriction, Flexibility, Hiding, Slither

Apprentice Degree: Snake-Friend

Adept Degree: Leap of Faith

Master Degree: Venom-Drinker

Ebedi Yilan al'Kadeem has selected the most loyal families of the *Qatihl'i* — those bloodlines that have best served him for centuries — and given them the Sorcery called *Af'a*. Those who practice *Af'a* are called *Af'ai* (singular *Af'ai*) and have magical powers that allow them to enter and exit from nearly any location without a trace. *Af'a* affects the body of the sorcerer, giving him several powers of flexibility, immunity to snake venom, and dominion over snakes.

This power does not come without a price. An *Af'ai* has no hair anywhere on the body, including eyebrows and eyelashes. Many of them use cosmetics and false eyelashes to disguise this distinguishing feature. Another bit of unpleasantness that the *Af'ai* must endure is the annual shedding of skin. This process takes anywhere from one day to a whole week, during which the *Af'ai* cannot do anything except struggle out of the itchy epidermis by rubbing against objects such as rocks or rough walls.

Apprentice Degree

As you begin your journey down this path of power, your abilities manifest themselves in two simple but effective ways. First, you are completely immune to any venom from any kind of snake, even in concentrated form.

Second, you are able to completely dislocate every joint in your body, allowing you to squeeze through holes and tunnels that are too small for human beings. You must spend a Drama Die to activate this ability. Performing this feat requires thirteen Actions, minus your Rank in the Finesse

Trait, minus your Rank in the Flexibility Knack. For instance, if your Finesse Rank is 4 and your Flexibility Rank is 2, you can squeeze into a hole in seven Actions. The minimum size into which you can squeeze yourself is based on your own size. If you have neither the Large nor Small Advantages, you can fit into a hole that has the same cross-sectional area as a circle with a 9-inch diameter (roughly equivalent to an 8 inch by 8 inch square). If you are Large, this diameter increases to 12 inches (roughly a square 10.5 inches to a side). If you are Small, this diameter decreases to 6 inches (roughly a square 5 inches to a side).

Adept Degree

By now, you have learned how to use your flexible body to perform greater feats. First, the minimum-diameter hole into which you can squeeze yourself decreases as your body becomes more flexible. You may now squeeze yourself into a hole that is 6 inches in diameter if you are neither Large nor Small. If you are Large, you can fit into a hole that is 8 inches in diameter. If you are Small, you can fit into a hole that is 4 inches in diameter.

Second, you have learned how to relax your body to let your supernatural flexibility absorb the impact from a fall. You must spend a Drama Die to activate this ability, either to prevent damage when you fall or to absorb extra damage when something falls onto you. Make a Wits + Flexibility Roll against a TN of 20 when you are falling. If you succeed, you treat the fall as if you had landed on a soft surface, negating all damage from the fall (regardless of the distance fallen). If something is falling on you, you may roll Brawn + Flexibility when making your Wound Check.

Master Degree

As a Master *Af'ai*, you can squeeze your body into incredibly small apertures. If you are neither Large nor Small, you may fit yourself into a hole 4 inches in diameter. If you are Large, you may fit into a hole 6 inches in diameter. If you are Small, you may fit into a hole 3 inches in diameter.

You are now able to temporarily become more powerful by drinking snake venom. Every time you drink snake venom, determine the number of Dramatic Wounds that you would take from one Interval of the poison if you were not immune to it. For each Dramatic Wound that you would have taken, you gain one Venom Die, which may be used like a Drama Die to increase the result of a

die roll, to prevent the Activation of your Hubris, or to activate your Wile or Virtue. Each Venom Die goes away when half of the Duration of the venom you drank that gave you the Venom Die has passed, or until one Interval of the venom has passed, whichever comes later. Venom Dice are not Drama Dice and never become Experience Points.

The Knacks

Charming

Being immune to snake venom does not mean that serpents will not try to attack you. By rolling Resolve + Charming against a TN of 10, you can get one snake plus one extra snake per Raise you make on the roll to not react to your presence. Not only will the snake not attack you, it will completely ignore you, meaning that it will not coil itself into a striking position nor put on any other display (such as making loud hissing noises or spreading of hoods) associated with threatening behavior.

By spending a Drama Die, you may attempt to control a number of snakes up to your Mastery Level. You may never have more snakes under your control at any one time than your Mastery Level. To control a snake, make a Resolve + Charming roll against a TN of 20, plus one Raise for every snake you are trying to control after the first. This will allow you to give the snake one command, plus one other command per extra Raise that you made on your roll. Each command must be something simple such as "attack that man," or "attack that man until he flees or is incapacitated," but not something involving more than one kind of action on the part of the snake. "Climb the wall, find Feyid ben Ahmad in the castle, and attack him," are three commands because it involves three distinct kinds of activity for the snake. "Attack everyone in the room," is also a valid single command, regardless of how many people are currently in the room.

Constriction

When you grapple with someone, you can actually bend your arms and legs slightly in between the joints and apply extra pressure along the entire length. You may add twice your Rank in this Knack to any attempt to use the Grapple Knack, and you may add your Rank in this Knack multiplied by your Mastery Level to the Damage Roll for any Bear Hug you make. For instance, a Master gets +10 to any attempt to use the Grapple Knack, and his Bear Hugs get a bonus of +15 to the damage.

You may make a Contested Roll of your Brawn + Constriction against your opponent's choice of Brawn + Escape or Finesse + Escape. If you are successful, you do not break your current Grapple hold after you successfully use the Break Knack.

Flexibility

You are double-jointed, not just in your fingers, but in every joint of your body. You can dislocate any joint in your body voluntarily and without significant discomfort. You may add your Rank in this Knack multiplied by your Mastery Level to any attempt to Escape from a Grapple hold, and to attempts to escape from things such as manacles or shackles.

Hiding

A supernatural aura of mystery surrounds you. You may add your Rank in this Knack to any Stealth, Shadowing, Ambush and Unobtrusive rolls you make. If you have at least one Rank of Hiding, you are completely invisible to almost any form of magic that could be used to spy upon you. You are immune to the clairvoyance of Scrying sorcerers (see Sophia's Daughters); they simply cannot scry upon you. Sorte Strega who attempt to see your Arcana will see a Yilan viper instead of a card image. Those attempting to see your Fate Strands must make a Contested Roll of their Wits plus the appropriate Knack (Cups, Swords, etc.) against your Resolve + Hiding in order to see them; if they fail, all they see are snakes where your strands should be. You cannot be seen by the Ghost Wind of the Ruzgar'hala tribe. You may not be seen by means of the Fornuft ("Gateway") rune used by Lærdom sorcerers. Glamour Sorcerers with the Thomas Knack can detect the use of sorcery when you come near them.

Slither

You may use this Knack to move along a tunnel when you have squeezed your way into it by wriggling the muscles of your torso. You may also use Slither instead of the Climbing Knack to scale a tree or a wall with a rough edge. You may use this in place of Sprinting to propel yourself along the ground or a floor. You may move as quickly along the ground by slithering as you would by using your legs to walk or run.

NPC Secrets

When you walk through your house at night, let a torch light your way, and thrust it boldly into every corner, lest a minion of Darkness lie coiled like black silk snake waiting for you to sleep.

— from the *Ilahi'Tomar*

The following passages contain secretive information concerning the NPCs in Chapter 2, which is considered too sensitive to give to the players.



Ebedi Yilan al'Kadeem: Villain
 Brawn: 3
 Finesse: 5
 Wits: 8
 Resolve: 8
 Panache: 8
 Reputation: -128
 Background: Fear (Sidehe) 3
 Arcana: Charismatic

Advantages: *Tikat-baraji* (R/W), *Yilan-baraji* (R/W), Evil Reputation, Indomitable Will, Keen Senses, Membership (*Qatih'i*), Small

Af'a (Master): Charming 5, Constriction 5, Flexibility 5, Hiding 5, Slither 5

Courtier: Dancing 1, Diplomacy 4, Etiquette 5, Fashion 3, Oratory 5, Politics 5, Scheming 5, Sincerity 4

Knife: Attack (Knife) 5, Parry (Knife) 5, Throw (Knife) 2

Qor'qunq (Master): Lunge (Knife) 5, Poison 5, Throat Strike 5, Exploit Weakness (*Qor'qunq*) 5

Scholar: History 5, Mathematics 4, Natural Philosophy 4, Occult 5, Philosophy 3, Research 1, Theology 5

Spy: Bribery 2, Conceal 2, Cryptography 5, Forgery 3, Hand Signs 5, Interrogation 5, Poison 5, Shadowing 3, Sincerity 4, Stealth 5

Wrestling: Bear Hug 5, Break 3, Escape 5, Grapple 5

"Ebedi Yilan al'Kadeem" is an alias, but no human being could ever pronounce his real name. He is the last of the Ssassiss, a minor Syrneth race that never had significant numbers but possessed a special rapport with serpents. The rest of his race fell to the Sidhe millennia ago, and Ebedi Yilan lives in constant fear that they will find him and finish the job. Mount Ozayrat has a very high cold iron content, which keeps it free from any Sidhe magic or spying. As long as he remains on the mountain, the Sidhe cannot see him and thus cannot destroy him.

Unlike others with the power of *Af'a*, al'Kadeem can control any number of snakes without requiring Raises, and he can fit into a 1 inch diameter hole. His Mastery Level in *Af'a* is considered 5. Because he is a Ssassiss, Ebedi is venomous. He can bite someone (5k5 Attack, 0k1 damage plus poison) to inject a dose of hallucinogenic poison into their system. This same poison, diluted into a vat of various juices, makes up the sacred drink that he provides to his followers. The diluted form has the same statistics as the injected venom. More information on his cult can be found on pages 100-104.



Rahib Farat Al'Agizlik : Hero
 Brawn: 3
 Finesse: 3
 Wits: 5
 Resolve: 4
 Panache: 2
 Reputation: 34
 Background: Obligation 2
 Arcana: Righteous

Advantages: *Tikat-baraji* (R/W), *Yilan-baraji* (R/W), *Tirala-baraji* (R/W), *Jadur-baraji* (R/W), *Tikaret-baraji* (R/W), *Théan* (R/W), *Aldiz-baraji* (R/W), *Vodacce* (R/W), *Teodoran* (R/W), *Ruzgar-baraji* (R/W), *Kurta-baraji* (R/W), *Atlar-baraji* (R/W), Appearance (Above Average), Debater, Faith, Linguist, Ordained

Courtier: Dancing 1, Diplomacy 3, Etiquette 4, Fashion 3, Gaming 2, Oratory 5, Politics 2, Scheming 1, Sincerity 3

Doctor: Diagnosis 4, First Aid 4


Priest: Diplomacy 3, Oratory 5, Philosophy 4, Theology 5, Writing 4

Scholar: Astronomy 5, History 3, Law 4, Mathematics 2, Occult 5, Philosophy 4, Research 5, Theology 5

Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 2

Rider: Ride 3

Farat Al'Agazlik has only made one mistake in his life and it continues to haunt him. He was groomed for the position he now occupies, but Tuqo Al'Ramar lingered for nearly four years after Farat learned that he would become the next High Priest. During this period, the Priest's decrees became more and more restrictive and demanding. Farat was sure that this would drive many people from the faith, endangering their souls. To save them, he hired the *Qatihl'i* to poison Tuqo Al'Ramar. Ever since then, the *Qatihl'i* have had a means to blackmail him. On four separate occasions, they have come to him, demanding that he advise the Sultán to make a particular political appointment or risk having his secret revealed.



Sultán Timur Aslan Cihangir: Hero
 Brawn: 3
 Finesse: 3
 Wits: 4
 Resolve: 4
 Panache: 3
 Reputation: 82
 Background: None
 Arcana: Commanding

Advantages: Aldiz-baraji, Atlar-baraji (R/W), Castille (ACQ), Eisen (ACQ), Kurta-baraji (R/W), Ruzgar-baraji (R/W), Teodoran (R/W), Théan (R/W), Tikaret-baraji (R/W), Tikat-baraji (R/W), Tirala-baraji (R/W), Ussura (ACQ), Vodacce (ACQ), Yilan-baraji, Ajedrez Master, Linguist, Membership (Eyes of the Peacock), Noble, Odd Sleeping Habits, Pattern-Welded Steel Weapon (Scimitar), Windrunner, Zodiac Sign (Aslan)

Courtier: Dancing 4, Diplomacy 5, Etiquette 5, Fashion 5, Gaming 4, Gossip 4, Oratory 5, Politics 5, Scheming 5, Sincerity 5

Falconer: Animal Training 4, Bird Handling 4

Hunter: Stealth 4, Survival 3, Tracking 5

Scholar: Astronomy 3, History 5, Law 5, Mathematics 3, Occult 1, Philosophy 4, Research 5, Theology 2

Archer: Attack (Bow) 3, Fletcher 1, Horse Archery 3

Commander: Cartography 4, Diplomacy 5, Incitation 5, Leadership 5, Logistics 5, Strategy 4, Tactics 3

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 4, Cavalry Attack 3, Parry (Fencing) 4


Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3

Rider: Animal Training 4, Mounting 2, Ride 5, Trick Riding 3

Duman'kir (Apprentice): Fangs 2, Mist 3, Pack 1, Senses 1, Silence 2

Unbeknownst to any save his most trusted advisor in the Eyes of the Peacock*, Sultán Timur has recently opened secret negotiations with the Objectionist Church in Vendel and the Church of Avalon in Carleon in hopes of circumventing the Vaticine Church and the hated Inquisition. He truly believes that these actions serve the best interests of his nation. He does not regard either religious faction as a viable system of faith, but rather sees them as sources of power to counter-balance the stranglehold the Church of the Prophets has on western Théah.

*Note to the Game Master: The head of the Eyes of the Peacock is the only person who knows both the Sultán and *Ilka-Kadin's* secrets, which gives him (or her) a tremendous amount of power. This character has intentionally been left in the shadows and should be used *extremely rarely* so that players are never certain exactly who it is.



"Kalem the Believer": Villain
 Brawn: 3
 Finesse: 3
 Wits: 4
 Resolve: 6
 Panache: 3
 Reputation: -36
 Background: Fear 3
 Arcana: Fanatical

Advantages: Aldiz-baraji (R/W), Atlar-baraji (R/W), Jadur-baraji (R/W), Kurta-baraji (R/W), Ruzgar-baraji (R/W), Teodoran (R/W), Théan (R/W), Tikaret-baraji (R/W), Tikat-baraji (R/W), Tirala-baraji (R/W), Yilan-baraji (R/W), Accurate Slinger, Ajedrez Master, Legendary Trait (Resolve), Indomitable Will, Linguist, Noble, Specialty: Artifact Evaluation, Specialty: Syrneth Lore, Zodiac Sign (Oglak)

Athlete: Break Fall 3, Climbing 2, Footwork 2, Long Distance Running 3, Sprinting 2, Throwing 1

Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 3, Fashion 3, Gaming 4, Oratory 4, Politics 3, Scheming 5, Sincerity 4

Doctor: Diagnosis 4, First Aid 3, Surgery 2

Rahib: Chanting 2, History 3, Menial Tasks 2, Occult 5, Philosophy 3, Theology 4, Unobtrusive 1, Writing 4

Scholar: Astronomy 2, History 3, Mathematics 1, Occult 5, Philosophy 3, Research 4, Theology 4
Sling: Attack (Sling) 3

Specialty: Artifact Evaluation 5, Synchrony Lore 5
 Hadir Omar al'Kalem has been obsessed with the legend of Cabora ever since he was a young boy, when a wandering *rahib* told him stories about the Island of the Sunken Eye. He knew it was his destiny to cause it to rise again — but he knew that he could never go there because of his intense fear of being at sea.

When he was a teenager, his research led him to a maze in the desert. Through years of tireless study, he carefully discovered many of the deadly maze's secrets, including its ability to trap a man's soul within an object he kept close to his heart, rendering him effectively immortal as long as the object remained intact. Omar used his money to form a company of guardians to keep unwelcome strangers away. He called this small band "Coruscites." The name comes from an old Teodoran word meaning "flash;" it referred to the signaling lights they use to communicate across the desert.

From time to time, strangers wander into the maze. Only two have ever returned. The first, Staver Siev Aryov v'Viladimirovich, managed to find his way out after months of search, but the effort drove him mad. Kalem keeps tabs on the Ussuran by periodically sending a guard to him with "important" information about the Maze. Thus far, he doesn't believe that Staver constitutes a threat. More information on Staver can be found in the *Ussura* sourcebook.

The second survivor proved much more interesting. Many years ago, Kalem showed a man named Kheired-Din the maze, and allowed him to go into the labyrinth with a small group of followers. As Kalem expected, only Kheired-Din survived, and he was marked by the maze, granted the powers necessary to bring about the raising of Cabora. When he felt the time was right, he revealed himself to the pirate, reinforcing the directives of the voices in Kheired-Din's head and ensuring that he knew what Cabora represented. Yilan also volunteered to guard the maze and the Prophet's Cross that contained Kheired-Din's soul. In practice, he usually leaves that duty to his Coruscites, but he makes sure to check up on things himself very frequently.

In the course of his studies, Kalem has found many hidden Synchrony sites in the desert. His Coruscites sell the artifacts from these sites, and the money finances the activities of the Corsairs.

He also makes shrewd but secretive investments, which almost always produce excellent profits.



Advantages: Altar-baraji (R/W), Kurta-baraji (R/W), Tikaret-baraji, Tirala-baraji (R/W), Ruzgar-baraji, Yilan-baraji, Able Drinker, Academy, Citation, Combat Reflexes, Commission (*Yenecer'i*), Toughness, Windrunner

Courtier: Dancing 5, Diplomacy 3, Etiquette 4, Fashion 4, Oratory 4

Hunter: Ambush 5, Stealth 5, Survival 4, Tracking 5

Archer: Attack (Bow) 3, Fletcher 2, Horse Archery 5, Snapshot 3, Trick Shooting 2

Athlete: Climbing 1, Footwork 4, Leaping 5, Rolling 5, Side-step 4, Sprinting 4, Throwing 2

Buckler: Attack (Buckler) 3, Parry (Buckler) 4
Commander: Ambush 5, Artillery 2,

Cartography 2, Diplomacy 3, Gunnery 2, Incitation 4, Leadership 5, Logistics 4, Strategy 5, Tactics 5

Crossbow: Attack (Crossbow) 2, Fletcher 2, Reload (Crossbow) 3

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 3, Kick 4, Throat Strike 3

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 4, Cavalry Attack 4, Parry (Fencing) 4

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3, Reload (Firearms) 2

Hand Axe: Attack (Hand Axe) 3, Parry (Hand Axe) 3

Heavy Weapon: Attack (Heavy Weapon) 2, Parry (Heavy Weapon) 1

Knife: Attack (Knife) 5, Parry (Knife) 5

Marikk (Master): Double-attack (Katar) 5, Exploit Weakness (Marikk) 5, Lunge (Katar) 5, Whirl 5

Polearm: Attack (Polearm) 3, Parry (Polearm) 2, Set Defense 2

Rider: Animal Training 3, Mounting 4, Ride 5, Trick Riding 5

Vahiy (Master): Horse Archery 5, Orders (Envelop) 5, Orders (Flank) 5, Orders (Envelop) 5

In addition to the investigation into Kursi al'Marikk's disappearance and apparent murder, Yakub has enlisted the help of several high-ranking members of the Eyes of the Peacock. The prime suspect on the *kumandan's* list is Khan Atagun Bahadar, a prominent member of the Atlar-vahir who had his eye on the chieftain's tent. For now, Yakub is having the Khan watched but it is only a matter of time before he meets the obligation of *davasi*.



Bayana Roxelana Balika: Villain
 Brawn: 3
 Finesse: 4
 Wits: 5
 Resolve: 5
 Panache: 4
 Reputation: 73
 Background: None
 Arcana: Beguiling

Advantages: Vodacce (R/W), *Ruzgar-baraji*, *Kurta-baraji* (R/W), *Tikaret-baraji* (R/W), *Tikat-baraji* (R/W), *Tirala-baraji* (R/W), *Théan* (R/W), *Yilan-baraji*, Appearance (Intimidating), Dangerous Beauty, Poison Immunity (*Yilan Viper Venom*), Zodiac Sign (Atlar)

Courtesan: Acting 4, Cold Read 5, Conceal 5, Dancing 5, Etiquette 5, Fashion 5, Gossip 4, Jenny 5, Masseur 4, Poison 5, Politics 5, Seduction 5, Sincerity 5

Courtier: Dancing 5, Diplomacy 5, Etiquette 5, Fashion 5, Gaming 3, Gossip 4, Lip Reading 5, Oratory 4, Politics 5, Scheming 5, Seduction 5, Sincerity 5

Herbalist: Compounds 5, Cooking 2, Diagnosis 5, First Aid 3, Flora 5, Poison 5

Scholar: Astronomy 3, History 3, Law 2, Mathematics 2, Natural Philosophy 2, Occult 3, Philosophy 2, Research 5, Theology 1


Spy: Bribery 3, Conceal 5, Forgery 3, Lip Reading 5, Poison 5, Shadowing 3, Sincerity 5, Stealth 4

Athlete: Climbing 2, Footwork 5, Leaping 2, Rolling 4, Side-step 4, Sprinting 3, Swimming 3, Throwing 1

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 4, Eye-gouge 3, Kick 3, Throat Strike 3

Knife: Attack (Knife) 4, Parry (Knife) 3, Throw (Knife) 4

A significant amount of custom and culture spread west from the Crescent Empire, most of it improving the lives of the people in Castille and Vodacce. But there were some who used the knowledge to further their dark purposes, like the Bianco and Serrano families. Roxelana's heritage is not pure Crescent; she actually sprang from a liaison between a poor *Jadur-rihad* whore and a renegade Serrano. Her father's blood runs true in her veins and she has a passion for "useful" horticulture. Her skill as a poisoner is almost without equal except among the *Qatihl'i* adepts. She herself adheres to the theory that the best antidote to poison is to ingest a tiny amount every day.



Bayana Meryam binte Saliha: Hero
 Brawn: 2
 Finesse: 2
 Wits: 5
 Resolve: 4
 Panache: 2
 Reputation: 14
 Background: None
 Arcana: Creative

He who dabbles in bad blood will die with a demon's claw around his throat.

— ancient Crescent saying

Advantages: *Aldiz-baraji* (R/W), *Kurta-baraji* (R/W), *Ruzgar-baraji* (ACQ), *Teodoran* (R/W), *Théan* (R/W), *Tikaret-baraji* (R/W), *Tirala-baraji*, *Vendel* (R/W), Brilliant, Spark of Genius (Mathematics), Specialty (Navigation)

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 2, Fashion 1, Oratory 1

Doctor: Diagnosis 3, First Aid 2

Scholar: Astronomy 5, Calculus 5, History 1, Mathematics 5, Natural Philosophy 4, Philosophy 4, Research 4

Specialty: Navigation 5

Bayana Meryam has a wide range of colleagues in the scientific community, extending outside of the Crescent Empire. She knows that the Eyes of the Peacock scrutinize her correspondence from time to time, which is why she is especially careful about letters she exchanges as "Tahmina" with a man who calls himself "Zeevaarder." In their carefully-coded letters, Meryam has shared secrets about celestial navigation and has just begun to divulge the results of her study in a new form of mathematics called "calculus." Zeevaarder, otherwise known as Mus Borwin, is

about to undertake a sea voyage to the far north where he can observe the movement of the planet Re to confirm his method for calculating longitude, so her information is most helpful.



Sigrun Masthof: Hero
 Brawn: 2
 Finesse: 2
 Wits: 4
 Resolve: 4
 Panache: 2
 Reputation: 68
 Background: True Identity 2
 Arcana: Aktruistic

Advantages: Aldiz-baraji, Eisen (R/W), Tikaret-baraji, Tirala-baraji, Faith, Membership (*die Kreuzritter*), Miracle Worker (3 dice)

Doctor: Diagnosis 5, Dentist 2, Examiner 4, First Aid 5, Surgery 5, Veterinarian 2

Priest: Diplomacy 4, Oratory 4, Philosophy 3, Theology 3, Writing 2

Streetwise: Shopping 3, Socializing 2, Street Navigation 3

Commander: Cartography 3, Diplomacy 4, Leadership 3, Logistics 3, Strategy 1, Tactics 2

Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 3

Rider: Ride 3

Sigrun carries more in her heart than the truth of her own origins. She also knows the location of all *die Kreuzritter* Vigilants currently assigned to guard Syrneath ruins in the *Muglak'kum*. Furthermore, she knows that Kursis al'Marikk is very much alive and a member of the Order. Thanks to *die Kreuzritter's* watchful eyes, Sigrun moves freely about the city. Should her enemies ever realize just how much the elderly woman knows, she would instantly find herself in great peril.



Ilka-Kadin Hasna: Hero
 Brawn: 2
 Finesse: 3
 Wits: 5
 Resolve: 4
 Panache: 3
 Reputation: 42
 Background: None
 Arcana: Perceptive

Advantages: Aldiz-baraji (R/W), Kurta-baraji (R/W), Ruzgar-baraji, Tikaret-baraji, Tikat-baraji (ACQ), Tirala-baraji (R/W), Yilan-baraji (ACQ), Appearance (Stunning), Membership (Eyes of the Peacock)

Artist: Musician (*Shibaba*) 3, Musician (Finger Cymbals) 2, Musician (Pipes) 2, Painting 3, Singing 3, Writing 2

Courtier: Dancing 4, Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 5, Fashion 4, Gaming 2, Gossip 4, Oratory 3, Politics 2, Scheming 4, Seduction 5, Sincerity 5

Courtesan: Cold Read 5, Conceal 5, Dancing 4, Etiquette 5, Fashion 4, Jenny 3, Masseur 5, Seduction 5, Sincerity 5, Unobtrusive 2

Doctor: Diagnosis 3, First Aid 3


Merchant: Accounting 4, Masseur 5

Spy: Conceal 5, Cryptography 4, Disguise 4, Shadowing 4, Sincerity 5, Stealth 4

Athlete: Break Fall 2, Climbing 3, Footwork 3, Leaping 2, Sprinting 2, Swimming 2, Throwing 1

Knife: Attack (Knife) 5, Parry (Knife) 3, Throw (Knife) 2

Ilka-Kadin Hasna is actually an agent of the Eyes of the Peacock, supplying information about all the activities of the harem so that she can protect the Sultán and insure the succession for her sons. She knows it is a dangerous role, but she masks her activities brilliantly and so far no one suspects.



Khan Atagun Bahadar: Scoundrel
 Brawn: 4
 Finesse: 4
 Wits: 4
 Resolve: 5
 Panache: 4
 Reputation: 59
 Background: None
 Arcana: Victorious

Advantages: Atlar-baraji (R/W), Tikaret-baraji, Tirala-baraji, *Khêl-kalb*, Accurate Archer, Combat Reflexes, Dangerous Beauty, Keen Senses, Noble, Pattern-Welded Steel Weapon (Scimitar), Scoundrel, Windrunner

Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 1, Fashion 3, Gaming 3, Oratory 3

Falconer: Animal Training 4, Bird Handling 3

Hunter: Ambush 4, Animal Training 4, Stealth 3, Survival 3, Tracking 4

Streetwise: Socializing 4, Street Navigation 1

Archer: Attack (Bow) 5, Fletcher 5, Horse Archery 5, Snapshot 5, Trick Shooting 5

Athlete: Break Fall 3, Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Leaping 3, Sprinting 4, Throwing 3

Commander: Ambush 4, Cartography 3, Incitation 5, Leadership 4, Logistics 3, Strategy 5, Tactics 5


Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 4, Kick 4

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Cavalry Attack 5, Parry (Fencing) 5

Rider: Animal Training 4, Mounting 5, Ride 5, Trick Riding 5

Vahiy (Master): Horse Archery 5, Orders (Charge) 5, Orders (Flank) 6, Orders (Envelop) 6, Orders (Scout) 5, Orders (Regroup) 3, Orders (Withdraw) 2

If questioned about the fostering and marriage arrangements with the *Kurta-kir*, Khan Atagun Bahadar will say that these are necessary steps to reinforce the frontier against possible invasion. In reality, he is laying the groundwork for what he calls *eski-usul*, a movement devoted to returning the Crescent Empire to the "old ways" to prevent any increased contact with the other nations of Théah.



Sey'r Celik al'Bahri: Hero
Brawn: 4
Finesse: 2
Wits: 5
Resolve: 3
Panache: 2
Reputation: 36
Background: None
Arcana: Creative

Advantages: Aldiz-baraji (R/W), Kurta-baraji (R/W), Tikaret-baraji (R/W), Tikat-baraji (R/W), Tirala-baraji (R/W), Age and Wisdom (Old)

Artist: Writing 5

Engineer: Accounting 2, Architecture 2, Cannonsmithing 1, Drafting 4, Mathematics 4, Natural Philosophy 2

Merchant: Architecture 2, Calligrapher 4

Performer: Acting 2, Cold Read 2, Dancing 2, Oratory 5, Singing 3, Storytelling 5

Scholar: Astronomy 4, Calculus 3, History 3, Mathematics 4, Natural Philosophy 2, Occult 2, Philosophy 3, Research 3


Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 2, Parry (Fencing) 2

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 2

As a young scholar, Sey'r Celik wrote *A Treatise on Geometric Construction*, a 13-chapter work that explored design and drafting tools, construction

of various objects (including parabolas and polygons,) and the division of spherical surfaces. He used simple draftsman tools in his calculations — a rule and a fixed compass — and his writing style is so clear that even a layman can understand his concepts. Recently Kumandun al'Marikk approached him in confidence regarding the design of a secret weapon for use in a campaign to secure control of the Mirror. The poet-scholar is uncertain as to the value of such an action but he does not wish to be responsible for the death of young Crescent sailors through his failure to act.

Previously Published NPCs



Kheired-Din: Villain
Brawn: 4
Finesse: 4
Wits: 3
Resolve: 4
Panache: 3
Reputation: -44
Background: None
Arcana: Focused

Advantages: Aldiz'ahali, Castille, Montaigne, Tikat-baraji, Vodacce, Commission (Corsairs), Faith

Sailor: Balance 4, Cartography 3, Climbing 3, Knotwork 2, Navigation 4, Pilot 4, Rigging 2

Scholar: History, 2, Mathematics 2, Occult 5, Philosophy 4, Research 3, Theology 3

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Leaping 3, Lifting 4, Sprinting 3, Swimming 3, Swinging 3, Throwing 3

Captain: Ambush 4, Gunnery 4, Incitation 4, Leadership 4, Logistics 3, Strategy 5, Tactics 4

Daphan (Master): Beat (Fencing) 5, Lunge (Fencing) 5, Pommel Strike (Fencing) 5, Exploit Weakness (Daphan) 5


Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 5, Kick 4, Throat Strike 4

Wrestling: Break 5, Grapple 4, Head Butt 4

Kheired-din was much worse after his encounter in the Syrneth ruins. No matter what happens to him or how many credible witnesses swear that they saw him die, he always manages to turn up alive. The Aldiz'ahali say it is because the Corsair leader is under the curse of *tekrala-*

gun, the Repeated Day, as a punishment for using magic to take lives. To Khereid-Din's thinking, his "immortality" is a sign that he has been chosen by to fulfill a great destiny. Even those initially skeptical of his rants have reluctantly concluded that he is indeed an agent of higher powers.

The only way Kheired-Din can be killed is for someone to smash the magical Cross of the Prophet containing his soul, but this item is ferociously guarded by Kalem the Believer in the center of the great Syrneht Puzzle Maze, located somewhere deep in the desert of Muglak'kum.



Jazhani binte Noura: Hero
 Brawn: 2
 Finesse: 4
 Wits: 3
 Resolve: 3
 Panache: 3
 Reputation: 26
 Background: None
 Arcana: Insightful

Advantages: Théan, Jadur-baraji (R/W), Ruzgar-baraji (R/W), Tikaret-baraji (R/W), Tirala-baraji (R/W), Tikat-baraji (R/W), Appearance (Stunning), Dangerous Beauty, Membership (Sophia's Daughters), Small

Courtier: Dancing 4, Etiquette 3, Fashion (Crescent) 3, Gossip (2) Oratory 1, Politics 1, Seduction 5

Criminal: Cheating 2, Gambling 2, Lockpicking 3, Pickpocket 2, Quack 2, Shadowing 3, Stealth 4

Knife: Attack (Knife) 3, Parry (Knife) 3

Performer: Acting 2, Dancing 4, Disguise 2, Oratory 1, Singing 3, Storytelling 5

Scholar: Astronomy 3, Calculus 1, History 2, Mathematics 3, Occult 3, Philosophy 1

Spy: Shadowing 3, Stealth 3, Underworld Lore 2

It was, in fact, Erivan's proximity to Cathay that inspired the Order to charge Jazhani with the responsibility of making contact with the Handmaiden in that distant land. The presence of the *Safadim*, a fanatical sect of religious "purists" committed to the subjugation and enslavement of women and children, has hampered her ability to achieve her mission. Claiming divine inspiration, their doctrine includes stringent codes of behavior for women that treats them as little more than mindless creatures whose sole purpose is to serve men.

The Sophia has recently learned that the *Safadim* have non-human inspiration, stemming from their discovery and use of numerous Syrneht artifacts. If this is indeed the case, the challenge of preventing the advent of the Fourth Prophet may have taken on new importance.



Camel

Henchman

Points: 45

TN: 10

Brawn: 4

Finesse: 1

Resolve: 3

Wits: 1

Panache: 1

Attack Roll: 4k2 Bite, 2k2 Kick, 3k2 Trample, 4k2 Spit

Damage: 0k1 Bite, 3k2 Kick, 3k3 Trample, 0k0 Spit (see below)

Skills: Footwork 1, Long Distance Running 3

Description: Camels are herbivorous desert animals that can go for up to two weeks without food or water, surviving off the fats stored in the characteristic humps on their backs. They are mainly used as mounts or pack animals. Despite their domestication, they remain ill tempered, and will frequently spit at people attempting to mount or load them. They prefer to bite instead of kicking or trampling. There are two varieties of camel, the single-humped dromedary and the double-humped bactrian. The only significant difference between the two is the number of humps, so both use the stats provided here.

Special Abilities: Camels can carry twice the normal encumbrance for their Brawn if properly loaded. If a camel hits with its spitting attack, the victim's eyes are covered with frothy saliva, blinding him until he can wipe his face. He is considered to be fighting in total darkness (in

most cases, this gives a penalty of four Kept Dice (-4k4) to any roll involving movement) until he cleans it. Camels are considered to have the Warm Climate Conditioning Advantage.

Crescent Windrunner (Standard Breed)

Henchman
Points: 50
TN: 10 (30 while Galloping)
Brawn: 4
Finesse: 2
Resolve: 2
Wits: 1
Panache: 1
Attack Roll: 3k2 Bite, 3k2 Kick, 3k2 Trample
Damage: 0k1 Bite, 4k2 Kick, 4k3 Trample
Skills: Footwork 1, Leaping 1, Long Distance Running 3, Sprinting 5

Description: Théan horses are somewhat stronger than windrunners, and the breeds can vary somewhat from nation to nation. The Crescent windrunners have speed and endurance that put all other breeds to shame. Ordinary horses are also available in the Empire of the Crescent Moon (see the *Game Masters' Guide* for their stats), but windrunners can only be found there, and they cost twice as much as an ordinary horse.

Special Abilities: Crescent windrunners can carry twice the normal encumbrance for their Brawn if properly loaded.

Yilan Viper

Henchman
Points: 35
TN: 15
Brawn: 1
Finesse: 3
Resolve: 1
Wits: 1
Panache: 2
Attack Roll: 4k3 Bite
Damage: 0k1 Bite
Skills: Ambush 3, Climbing 1, Footwork 2, Stealth 2

Description: The *yilan* viper is a venomous serpent, colored gray to pale brown with large dark brown spots on the top of the back and a

mark on top of the head. This viper is large, averaging one yard in length. Its venom is hemotoxic, which means that it affects the circulatory system, destroying blood cells and causing internal hemorrhaging. The viper is unusually strong, with an irritable disposition. It hisses loudly when preparing to strike.

Yilan vipers can be found throughout the mainland of the Empire, especially in the mountains and the farmlands. Those found in the desert tend more toward the pale brown coloration.

Special Abilities: The *yilan* viper's bite Attack injects a dose of its venom into its victim. By making two Raises to its bite, the viper can inject two doses of venom at once.

Yilan Viper Venom

3k3 damage / 10 minutes / 3 days

Qan'avar

Villain
Points: 150
TN: 15
Brawn: 7
Finesse: 2
Resolve: 7
Wits: 2
Panache: 2
Attack Roll: 4k2 Bash, 3k2 Stomp
Damage: 7k2 Bash, 4k3 Stomp
Skills: None

Description: The *Qan'avar* is a monster found only in the deserts of the Empire. It looks like an eight-foot tall collection of rocks and sand in the shape of a man, with a pair of glowing emeralds for eyes. The *Yilan-bazlik* say that the desert sends this monstrosity to destroy any mere mortals who think too highly of themselves, but no one knows for certain where they come from or what causes them to attack people.

Special Abilities: The *Qan'avar* does not breathe, has no nervous system, and does not require sustenance. It is immune to all poisons but can be damaged by acid. If both of its emeralds are plucked out (a Called Shot requiring 6 Raises will remove one eye if it inflicts a Dramatic Wound) the *Qan'avar* will disintegrate into sand and merge into the desert. The emeralds are worth the equivalent of 1,500G each.

Quicksand

Quicksand is a shifting mass composed of a mixture of sand and water. This substance yields easily to pressure, and has a tendency to suck down and engulf any objects resting on its surface. It is most often found on flat shores and in silt-choked rivers. Once someone gets trapped in quicksand, he will begin to sink. Any attempt to swim or struggle in the quicksand will cause the victim to sink more quickly.

When your Hero enters a patch of quicksand, make a Wits + Survival roll with a TN of 20. If you succeed, you remain calm and relax, preventing yourself from sinking. If you fail the roll, you begin to sink, and suffer from the drowning rules in the *GMs' Guide*. Every time you make an Action that involves any kind of significant motion, such as attempting to swim or reach for a rope, you must make this roll. Any time you fail this roll, you sink under the surface and begin to drown. On your next action, you may attempt the roll again, but your TN to succeed is Raised for every such roll you have failed since you last succeeded at this roll.

For example, if you enter the quicksand and fail the roll against TN 20, you begin to drown. On your next Action, you try to relax and stop drowning, and the TN is now 25. If you fail again, the TN becomes 30. You make this number, and your TN drops back to 20 until the next time you fail it.

Characters employing a flotation device of some sort (inflated air bladders, for example) may gain one or two Free Raises to the roll, at the GM's discretion. Similarly, if there is a rope or some other object spanning the quicksand and secured on both ends, then the TN for the roll is reduced to 10 while the character is able to hold onto this object.



Scenario: The Emerald Scimitar

"Who ventures across the desert sets his sail upon a sea of shifting sand."

— ancient Crescent saying

Setup

This is a scenario for Heroes from the Crescent Empire, to be augmented with allied NPCs as needed. (Notes to the Game Master: Non-Crescent Heroes will need to be fluent in at least *Tikaret-baraji*. Members of the Bernoulli family will generally fare better in the Crescent Empire than other western Théans. *Aldiz'ahali* Heroes should be encouraged to undertake the adventure for the *dogru* of the tribe. It should be made clear to Crescent Heroes from other tribes that the tribal leader will compensate them for their efforts.)

The *Shehir'kum* is a small region located north of the larger *Muglak'kum*. While it is definitely desert, it is much milder than the dreaded area to the south and contains a beautiful oasis, which, over time, has become a sacred shrine and neutral meeting place for tribal negotiations. It serves as an excellent waystation, marketplace and source of information about tribal activities, especially in the northern half of the Crescent Empire.

Background

The leader of the *Aldiz'ahali* tribe that inhabits the *Dakalan'ya* Islands west of the *Zafara* has spent the last year in lengthy and complicated trade negotiations with the leader of the *Kurta-kir* tribe in *Razgrad* far to the north. Once the treaty is completed, an extremely lucrative two-way trade route will be established. And what better to seal the bargain than with a magnificent scimitar glittering with emeralds that were once eyes of a dreaded *qan'avar*?

The scimitar left the Islands under the watchful care of *Aldiz'ahali* swordsmen who headed north to deliver the valuable item to the *Kurta-kir* delegation waiting for them at the sacred oasis of *Shehir'kum*.

Imagine the confusion in the Great Tent of the *Dakalan'ya* when a very angry message arrives from the *Kurta-kir*, reporting that the scimitar never arrived at its destination. The *Kurta-kir* are bitterly insulted! The honor of the *Aldiz'ahali* is at stake and a vicious tribal war was imminent.

After consulting the tribal elders and shaman, the elderly *Aldiz'ahali* leader Yusuf ben Elmali calls the Heroes to him and explains the dire situation. They should not plan to return to the tribe until they have found the stolen scimitar and delivered it safely to the Oasis.

The Adventure

Fully provisioned, the party departs the next morning at dawn and sails northeast without hazard to the mainland, where they disembark and make their way to Basra, the last place the scimitar was seen. There they discover that the *Aldiz'ahali* swordsmen bearing the scimitar did indeed pass through Basra and headed northeast without incident.

From Basra, the Heroes head northeast again, skirting the dreaded *Muglak'kum*, the vast and deadly desert of the Crescent Empire. Several days out of Basra, they stop at a nameless village belonging to a tribe of the mysterious *Yilan-bazlik*, the snake people, which is really just an extended encampment on the edge of the desert. After presenting the appropriate credentials, the Heroes can question members of the tribe. Yes, the *Yilan-bazlik* tribesmen remember the Star People with the beautiful weapon, but they departed almost one moon ago.

That night the Heroes are sitting around the campfire when a disturbance at the outskirts of the camp interrupts the evening meal. The *Yilan-bazlik* guards half-drag, half-carry a man who is moaning incoherently. His body is covered with cuts and slashes, and his face is bruised and battered.

Presumably, the Heroes dispatch the poor man's captors and rescue him. After his wounds are bandaged and he has recovered sufficiently, he tells a horrific story. His name is Haroun and he was hired as a guide to lead a group of Star People who were headed for the Oasis of *Shehir'kum*

with a precious scimitar. They were jumped by vicious bandits who took the scimitar and Haroun's younger sister, and left the rest of them, including the *Aldiz'ahali* swordsmen, for dead. By now, Haroun says bitterly, they are probably at the slave market of Edirne and his sister (and the scimitar) is lost forever.

Despite his weakened condition, Haroun offers to accompany the Heroes on their quest to overtake the bandits and retrieve the valuable weapon. He can avenge his sister's honor, he says, by helping them avenge the wrong against their tribe. He insists that they leave the next morning before the trail gets any colder.

The next day and night pass without event; in fact, the weather is mild, giving the Heroes a chance to enjoy the beauty of the desert. Beware, Haroun warns; the *Muglak'kum* is as fickle as a petulant concubine who lures you one day with warm, perfumed breezes, then rages in unabated fury the next.

The second (or third) morning, one of the Heroes awakens to the terrifying sight of a pale brown *Yilan* viper curled up next to the bedroll. (Note to the Game Master: any reasonable or even semi-intelligent action on the part of the Hero will be rewarded by avoidance of a potentially fatal snakebite. If all else fails, Haroun will be able to save the Hero from the venom.) Haroun believes it is a bad omen, though he is impressed if the Hero manages to dispatch the viper without being bit.

Later that day, the party comes across a belt and discarded waterskin half-buried in the sand. From the markings, they identify it as belonging to one of the ill-fated *Aldiz'ahali* swordsmen. Now they know that they are on the right track. Haroun is eager to press on.

That night, he tells them about the desert they are traveling across, focusing on some of the eerie aspects, including the strange sounds and odd sandstorms that can appear out of nowhere and leave no trace of life behind in its wake.

The Game Master is free to add any encounters he wishes into this section, from a trading overture from local tribesmen to the discovery of a new source of water within the shifting sands.

Three or four days later, in the late afternoon, the Heroes come across remnants of the caravan itself. It lies in ruins, the vultures and snakes picking over the rotting corpses. To their horror, the Heroes see the partially decomposed bodies of their fellow tribesmen. Based on the positions of the corpses, which are shot full of crossbow bolts,

the *Aldiz'ahali* swordsmen were apparently attacked from the north and east simultaneously. It is a quiet night as the party buries the dead and commemorates their comrades' Passing. (Note to the Game Master: see The First Scroll – The Passing.) The Heroes then set the watch, as they have presumably done every night of their journey.

During the night a freak sandstorm comes up. If Haroun is on duty, it will occur during his watch. If not, it will occur during the middle watch. The roaring sound of the storm and frenzied cries of the camels awaken the rest of the Heroes and confusion reigns as they try to get control of their animals. Play up the storm for all it is worth, allowing the Heroes to learn first-hand just how unpleasant it can be. Just as suddenly as it came up, however, the storm dies away. Unfortunately, there is little time to celebrate because the air is now full of hissing crossbow bolts coming at the Heroes from both the south and the west.

The party is quickly set upon by a group of bandits, directed by a slender sword-wielding leader swathed in black. The glow from the campfire tinges the sand blood-red and the green gems in the leader's sword glitter brightly. It is the missing *Aldiz'ahali* Scimitar!

During combat, the leader of the bandits displays the unmistakable moves of the Yael swordsman school. As the fighter twists and turns in the intricate combat moves, the burnoose comes loose and reveals the face of a beautiful girl who looks remarkably like Haroun.

Observant Heroes may notice that the previously-loquacious guide has not drawn a weapon during the combat but has been moving his hands and muttering, causing sand to swirl about as he works *rimal* magic. For some reason the magic seems to be helping the bandits rather than the Heroes.

(Note to the Game Master: two brute squads, each commanded by a henchman, have been included with this scenario, but the actual make-up of the bandit troupe is of course dependent on the number and experience of the Heroes.)

The bandit leader is brave, but not foolhardy. If and when the battle begins to go against her, she will abandon her men and will attempt to slip away into the desert with Haroun. If they succeed they will continue to harry the Heroes for many adventures to come.

In the unlikely event that the Heroes manage to capture the pair, they will have an opportunity

to question Haroun and the woman he identifies as his sister Esmera. Orphaned in Urfa at a young age, the two *Yilan-bazlik* were forced to survive on the streets of the small town. Haroun has some skill with *rimal* (sand) magic, while Esmera learned that her dancing abilities could be put to better – and more deadly – use by learning the ways of the Yael school. Together they have preyed upon caravans between Urfa and the Oasis at Shehir'kum. When they learned about the Emerald Scimitar, Haroun decided that Esmera must have the expensive weapon and thus successfully masterminded the attack on the *Aldiz'ahali* party. Haroun was almost captured by his enemies but for the fortuitous intervention of the Heroes. When he learned what they were after, he decided to offer his services as a “guide” in order to dispatch them at an appropriate time. “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer,” he says with a sneer.

The Heroes must now get themselves together and make their way to the Oasis. It is possible that both pack and riding camels may have run off during the sandstorm and subsequent attack, which may leave certain Heroes walking and the entire party on short rations.

The next day the Hero who is the farthest from the rest of the party (or who is in the lead if they are sticking together) will suddenly feel the earth shift under his or her feet, and then begin rapidly sinking into a pit of quicksand. (Note to the Game Master: see page 113 for rules about quicksand.)

Conclusion

Somewhat worse for wear, the Heroes manage to make it to the Oasis where the Kurta-kir delegates have begun serious discussions about their *davasi* against the *Aldiz'ahali* for reneging on the treaty. The party explains what happened and gives detailed descriptions of Esmera and Haroun, who now become hunted enemies of the Kurta-kir as well as the *Aldiz'ahali*. The Emerald Scimitar transfers hands and the treaty is completed. A feast — somewhat less elaborate than had been originally planned — is held and the Heroes make plans to return home. They have time to recover from any wounds before heading back to the Islands.

(Note to the Game Master: If the party contemplates traveling southeast along the shore, or trying to catch a ship heading south, the leader of the Kurta-kir delegation warns them that there

is an inordinate amount of *yavanci* activity in the Mirror Sea and that they would probably get home faster by traveling with the delegation due west and then south along the west coast.)

When they arrive back at the *Dakalan'ya*, they are treated with great honor by Yusuf ben Elmali. All of the Heroes receive a new suit of clothes and each is rewarded with a magnificent pearl. Those in the party who are not *Aldiz'ahali* are given a permanent douma to pass safely through the *Dakalan'ya* in addition to any other rewards.

Non-Player Characters

Harun (Villain)

Brawn: 3
Finesse: 3
Wits: 4
Resolve: 4
Panache: 3
Reputation: -24
Background: Hunted (1)
Arcana: Beguiling
Advantages: *Yilan-baraji*, *Tikaret-baraji*, *Tirala-baraji*, *Rimal*
Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Leaping 2, Long Distance Running 2, Sprinting 3, Throwing 2
Criminal: Ambush 3, Gambling 2, Scrounging 4, Shadowing 3, Stealth 3
Doctor: Diagnosis 3, First Aid 3
Hunter: Ambush 3, Animal Training 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4, Tracking 4, Trail Signs 4
Knife: Attack (Knife) 4, Parry (Knife) 2, Throw (Knife) 1
Rider: Animal Training 3, Mounting 3, Ride 4, Trick Riding 2
Streetwise: Scrounging 4, Socializing 3, Street Navigation 3

Haroun is a handsome, fast-talking con man who has mastered the art of appearing totally sincere. He sees everyone as a potential mark and has an amazing ability to size up the opposition quickly and find a weakness. He is an excellent traveling companion and really does a more than passable job as a guide. If he tries to use any close-up magic to entertain the Heroes, it is all very clearly for social purposes and in fact, he may actually fumble a trick to protect his cover. He may also try to flirt with any female members of the party.

Esmera (Villain)

Brawn: 3
Finesse: 4
Wits: 3
Resolve: 2
Panache: 3
Reputation: -31
Background: Hunted (2)
Arcana: Envious
Advantages: *Yilan-baraji*, *Tikaret-baraji*, *Tirala-baraji*, Appearance (Above Average)
Criminal: Ambush 4, Gambling 1, Shadowing 2, Stealth 4
Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 3, Kick 3
Fencing (Scimitar): Attack (Fencing) 4, Cavalry Attack 2, Parry (Fencing) 4
Performer: Acting 2, Animal Training 2, Dancing 4, Oratory 1, Singing 2
Rider: Animal Training 2, Ride 3, Trick Riding 2
Yael (Journeyman): Disarm (Fencing) 4, Double-Parry (Fencing/Fencing) 4, Feint (Fencing) 4, Exploit Weakness (Yael) 4

Although at Journeyman level in *Yael*, Esmera is very close to achieving Mastery. Her dancing abilities are exceptional, although the Heroes do not get to enjoy the pleasure of seeing her dance for entertainment. Esmera is a streetwise, cold-hearted con woman/fighter who long ago gave up any pretensions to finding good in people. She is deeply devoted to her brother but really does not have much use for anyone else, beyond what she can take from them.

(Note to the Game Master: As mentioned above, if Esmera and Haroun escape, they will not only be hunted by both tribes, but they also have the potential to become thorns in the side of the Heroes in future adventures.)

Mahir (Henchman #1)

Brawn: 3
Finesse: 3
Wits: 3
Resolve: 2
Panache: 3
Reputation: -9
Background: None
Arcana: None
Advantages: *Yilan-baraji*, *Tikaret-baraji*, Combat Reflexes
Athlete: Climbing 1, Footwork 3, Side-Step 2, Sprinting 3, Throwing 1
Crossbow: Attack (Crossbow) 3, Fletcher 3

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 2, Kick 2
Fencing (Scimitar): Attack (Fencing) 2, Parry (Fencing) 2, Cavalry Attack 1
Rider: Ride 2

Urji (Henchman #2)

Brawn: 4
Finesse: 2
Wits: 2
Resolve: 3
Panache: 2
Reputation: -12
Background: None
Arcana: None
Advantages: Large
Athlete: Climbing 2, Footwork 2, Lifting 3, Sprinting 2, Throwing 3
Crossbow: Attack (Crossbow) 3, Fletcher 1
Heavy Weapon (Dilmekiri): Attack (Heavy Weapon) 2, Parry (Heavy Weapon)
Rider: Ride 2
Wrestling: Bear Hug 2, Escape 1, Grapple 3

**Brute Squads
(one squad with each Henchman)**

Threat Rating 2 Brute Squads
Crossbows
Light Weapons

Threat Rating 3 Brute Squads
Heavy Weapons



Ideas for Easy Stories

Dolasan

In the summer, water sources can sometimes be scarce. Most tribes have a prescribed route that they have followed for years as they move from area to area to locate grazing land for their animals. Tribal boundaries are usually respected and a *dhima* is shown when those boundaries must be traversed. There are, of course, some renegade clans that find boundaries inconvenient and annoying. They take what they please when they please, even if what they want belongs to the tribe across the river. The head of a local clan has seen some white sheep that he covets and he asks the Heroes to take a raiding party across the tribal boundary to fetch them for him. This is the time of the month when the moon looks away from her mirror, so if the Heroes are very quiet, it should be a simple task.

A Hero has been appointed by the chieftain to conduct his youngest daughter to another tribe to be married. Although she is a dutiful girl, she is not particularly eager to take this journey. She is also incredibly beautiful and the route the Heroes must use takes them perilously close to suspected slaver camps. Losing her to them or failing in any way to deliver her to her prospective husband will result in a tribal war.

Tukar

The merchant trade is a lucrative one, but also incredibly stressful. Unless you have an easy route (and these days, who does?), there is a litany of misfortunes that can befall the Heroes. This looks like it is going to be one of those trips where whatever can go wrong does. They took a commission for a rush delivery job, but have trouble getting their cargo off the docks, thanks to the master of the dock hands who doesn't think

that his palms have been greased quite enough. Then they find out that the *dhima* they had requested won't be available for days. Now they have to take the long way to their destination, which means going through extremely hostile territory with an expired *dhima* from the previous trip. So far, so bad and the Heroes have not even left town yet.

For Any Mix of Characters

The royal heralds appear in town and announce that the young son of Sultán's favorite concubine has fallen ill with a mysterious fever. The High Priest investigates the omens and has learned that a mystical blue gem high deep in the Adaz'uk holds the cure. The proclamation states that the Sultán will provide a princely reward and elevation to *bey* or *bayana* to the person who brings him the gem. (Note to the Game Master: this story can be made as easy or difficult as your group can handle.)

Ideas for Hard Stories

Rahib

During a gathering in the chieftain's great tent (or in the mosque, if the Heroes are in a town or city), the shaman (or *rahib*) relates a dream in which he saw the party standing by a lake with their faces turned to the East. He tells them that their time has come to make the long and dangerous pilgrimage to Mt. Karada. This is a great honor but he warns them that it will be physically and spiritually challenging. *Yavanci* and *duz-mari* (enemies) are only two of the potential dangers. The Darkness does not like it when the faithful make the pilgrimage and will do everything in its power to stop you. Note to the Game Master: The farther away the players are from Mt. Karada, the better this Story will work, so it is probably not a good one for *Aldiz'ahali*.

The *rahib* of the Heroes' local mosque has been asked to provide a band of warriors to deal with a spirit haunting a nearby monastery. Apparently the normally peaceful and devout monks began to exhibit signs of madness and may have slaughtered each other but no one wants to go inside to find out. The Heroes are elected.

K'vrimah

The Heroes belong to a *k'vrimah* dance troupe that the local nobleman (or wealthy merchant) has hired to entertain at an after-Festival party he

is hosting. Judging by the jewels the guests are wearing, they are a wealthy lot. During the party, a necklace (or other significant piece of jewelry) is stolen and the party finds itself under suspicion. They need to find a way to elude the town guards long enough to prove their innocence and discover the real culprit.

As members of a traveling troupe, they have seen most of the territory and met a lot of different people. One night after a performance in the central market, they are approached by a mysterious man who wants them to deliver an important message for him. This can be a diplomatic mission, a commission from the *Qatihl'i*, or perhaps the initial scenario in a story involving the party joining the Eyes of the Peacock. It could also be a secret love letter between a boy and girl in different tribes, or perhaps a secret negotiation within a large tribe.

For die Kreuzritter Vigilants

The great *Muglak'kum* is dotted with Syrneth ruins. Special members of *die Kreuzritter* called "Vigilants" are charged with protecting these ruins. However, their assignments are very secret, known only to the Society's highest-ranking members (including Sigrun Masthof.) The Hero(s) and his or her friends have been assigned to find a Syrneth artifact that has been stolen from one of the numerous ruins in the *Muglak'kum*. The adventure should start in Iskandar, Urfa or Basra.

One night in a tavern in Zafara, an adventurer regales the other patrons with stories of a fabulous map she has that leads to the site of an ancient treasure. (Or the Heroes are approached by an old man offering to sell them a secret map...) Unbeknownst to the adventurers, a Vigilant (or maybe its Sigrun herself) is in the tavern at the same time and overhears them planning to search for the treasure. This would be the standard sort of "why is everyone trying to keep us from getting this treasure?" adventure.

Other Adventure Ideas

- You are being followed but you are not sure why. Perhaps you look like someone...? (Hunted by Eyes of the Peacock or *Qatihl'i*)
- You are an *Atlar-vahir* and your father (or maybe the chieftain) has sent you to Edirne to buy/sell horses at the Edirne Festival. Despite your youth, you make a spectacularly profitable negotiation — which is not under

your pillow when you awaken in the morning. You can hunt for the perpetrator, but it is the day of the great *vurmak* tournament. You are the tribe's best rider and the betting is very heavy.

- You live on the east coast of the Empire, either in Kulkadir or perhaps on the Cinada Islands. You are used to pirates docking in your city/town/island but recently you have seen a lot of *yavanci*. They have not done anything wrong yet, but no one in your tribe trusts them. This influx of outsiders heading for Cabora is very disturbing. There are many directions you can go with this, including perhaps the player(s) joining the crew of one of the ships.
- You serve as bodyguard to a caravan from Rahajeel or Jesalute to Iskandar. With the exception of no alcohol-type bars, Iskandar is a standard capital city with all the usual suspects. It can be used as a starting place, an ending place or the central checkpoint of your players' adventures.

Military Opportunities

- You and your group take part in a raid in the Adaz'uk to flush the *Safadiim* out of their mountain stronghold.
- A squad of young Vodacce noblemen, working for the Vaticine Church, ride from Rahajeel or Jesalute into the territory of the *Atlar-vahir* and they are not interested in horse trading.
- One of the minor clans in the Kurta-kir decides that it should rule the tribe and launches a coup against the chieftain. As loyal warrior, you know what you must do.

Palace Intrigue

- The Royal Palace and the Harem offer quite an array of opportunities for adventurers who like a traditional dungeon crawl. There are some extremely large gems down in the treasury, as well as other secret rooms that even the Sultán may not be aware of.
- Issues of succession, balance of power among the wives, poisoning, alliances including whether to side with the *Ilka-Kadin* or the *Valide-Sultán* can influence anyone who spends time in the Palace.



The History

No one knows the actual origins of *ajedrez-oyún*, "The Game of Power," but stories and legends date as far back as written record, and even some cave paintings near Mt. Karada in the *Kutsal-dag* look remarkably like two people playing the game. It remains a staple of Crescent entertainment, and some scholars believe it forms the inspiration for the western game of Squares.

The Game

Ajedrez is played on a board of eight by eight squares of alternating colors. Each player has a set of pieces representing his capital city and various elements of an army, including the Sultán, his Caliphs and his infantry. The goal is to capture your opponent's Sultán and execute him in your capital.

The Pieces

Each player's army consists of a City and seven pieces. These are typically represented by disks with identical markings on either side, but differently colored, so that one army might have its pieces blue on one side and green on the other, while the opponent's army might be red on one side and yellow on the other. Usually these disks are made from carved wood, but nobles often compete for the grandeur of their sets, using gold, silver, ivory, ebony and all sorts of jewels, while peasants often use flat stones which they mark with chalk or plant dyes.

The pieces and their moves are as follows:

Sultán (1)

The most powerful and important piece in the game, the Sultán can move as far as it wants in a line, either straight or diagonally.

Kadirah (City) (1)

The *Sehir* cannot move at all. Once placed on the board it remains in that square for the remainder of the game.

Caliphs (2)

The trickiest pieces in the game, the Caliphs can move three squares in any direction or combination of directions, as long as they neither pass through nor land on the same square twice.

Askari (Soldiers) (4-6)

Usually the game is played with four askari, but if a longer, more complex game is desired sometimes each player receives six. This is called *Buyuk-ogún* or "The Grand Game." In this variant, askari can move one square in any direction. Normally, they can move two squares.

Setting Up

The players decide between themselves who will be the *saldiran* (attacker) and who will be the *mudafan* (defender), usually by one player trying to choose the hand in which his opponent has hidden the *kadirah*. The *mudafan* places his *kadirah* anywhere on his half of the board, then the *saldiran* does the same. The *saldiran* then places the rest of his pieces anywhere on his half of the board, with all of the pieces showing the same color. When he is finished, the *mudafan* then sets up his pieces anywhere on his side of the board, with all of the pieces showing the same color.

Playing The Game

The *saldiran* moves first. In his turn he may move some, all or none of his pieces (except for his *kadirah*, of course.) As each piece is moved it is turned over, showing its alternative color.

Once a piece has been turned over it cannot be moved again during that turn. Pieces may pass



through squares occupied by friendly pieces (although not through squares occupied by enemy pieces) but may not end their turn in a square occupied by another piece, unless they are capturing it (departing the *kadirah* is an exception to this rule, as described later.) A piece that ends its move in an enemy-occupied square captures that piece and removes it from the board (to the captor's *kadirah*). The turn is complete when all of the pieces are turned over.

The players may now do any negotiating they wish, after which the *mudafan* takes his turn. Play continues back and forth between the two players until one side has taken the other's Sultán captive in his *kadirah* at the beginning of his turn. He may then, if he chooses, execute the enemy Sultán and thereby win the game.

Rescuing the Prisoners

Captured pieces are assumed to be taken to the captor's *kadirah*. If a piece moves onto the square occupied by an enemy's *kadirah* (a capture move) that *kadirah* remains in place, but any pieces held prisoner therein (including the rescuing piece) are immediately handed over to their owner. Pieces returned to their original owner, either through rescue or through negotiation (see below) are assumed to have returned to their *kadirah*. Any enemy piece in a player's city at the beginning of his turn may be executed. Executed pieces are put in a separate pile; they are out of the game and may not be traded for other pieces or rescued.

Pieces returned to their own *kadirah* are assumed to have moved for that turn. On their following turn, they may leave the *kadirah* as if they had begun their turn on the square containing their home. The only exception to this is if all of the spaces around the *kadirah* are occupied by enemy pieces, in which case the *city* is considered under siege (*muhasar*) and pieces cannot move out of it. A piece can remain inside a *kadirah* for as many turns as it wishes, but if an enemy piece moves onto a square occupied by a *city* then all of the pieces still in the *kadirah* are captured and taken to the enemy's *city*.

Negotiating

Between their turns, players can negotiate deals and prisoner exchanges. Any deal is acceptable as long as it does not permit either player to break the rules. For example, a deal which gives a particular Caliph three moves free of capture (as long as it does not capture any of its opponent's pieces) in exchange for three captured soldiers is fine; a deal that allows the Caliph to move through enemy-occupied squares is not. According to the rules, all agreements must be within the context of the game. However, this game is taken so seriously that there are stories of elaborate offers, like the one about the pasha who offered his beautiful daughter and four companies of soldiers in exchange for his opponents' Caliphs, which won him the game and lost him his beloved child.

Note that agreements are binding and have the same force as the rest of the rules of the game. One cannot go back on a deal without breaking the rules, forfeiting the game, and acting with great dishonor. For this reason, great care needs to be taken to ensure that both sides are clear on exactly what the deal is before it is accepted. Historically it is not unknown for these negotiations to go on for weeks, with groups of counselors for both sides making offers and counter-offers until both sides sign a document which lays out the terms of the agreement in exact detail. There is also report of at least one known war instigated by a failure to lay out the terms of a negotiation properly.

Typical offerings during negotiations include:

- Prisoners
- Freedom for the next X number of pieces from being captured
- A certain number of turns of free passage for a specific piece
- A promise that if the opponent's Sultán is captured, he will be kept alive for X number of turns before he is executed (this is a popular way to handicap a superior player)
- Agreeing to never execute an opponent's pieces (except for the Sultán)
- "Hobbling" the Sultán by agreeing that it will only move a certain number of squares in a turn (on the surface, this is considered a less honorable negotiation, but is used by clever players to lull their opponent's into a false sense of superiority)

R'vrimah "Twirler"

Traits

Brawn 2
 Finesse 2
 Wits 2
 Resolve 2
 Panache 3

Advantages

Appearance (Stunning) (10)
 Dangerous Beauty (3)
 Languages: Jadur-baraji (0)
 Kurta-baraji (2)
 Tikaret-baraji (0)
 Scoundrel (3)

Civil Skills

Courtier

Dancing 3, Etiquette 1, Fashion 1, Oratory 2,
 Seduction 3

Performer

Acting 1, Dancing 3, Oratory 2,
 Storytelling 1

Streetwise

Socializing 2, Street Navigation 1

Martial Skills

Athlete

Climbing 1, Footwork 3, Sidestep 2, Sprinting 2,
 Throwing 1

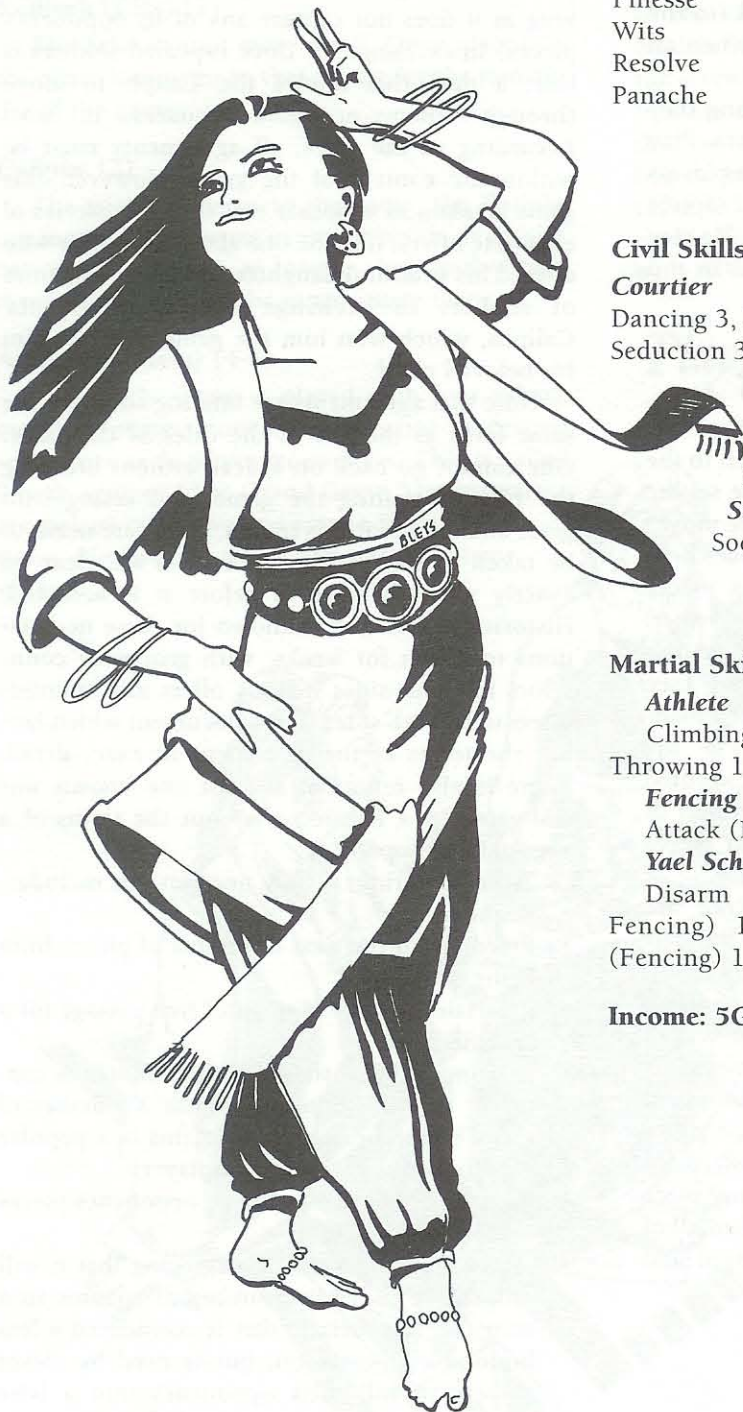
Fencing

Attack (Fencing) 3, Parry (Fencing) 2

Yael School (Apprentice)

Disarm (Fencing) 2, Double-Parry (Fencing/
 Fencing) 1, Exploit Weakness (Yael) 1, Feint
 (Fencing) 1

Income: 5G starting, 0G per month.



Tukara (Female)

Traits	Advantages
Brawn 2	Inheritance (3)
Finesse 2	Linguist (2)
Wits 2	Languages: Ruzagar-baraji (R/W) (0)
Resolve 2	Kurta-baraji (R/W) (2)
Panche 2	Tikaret-baraji (R/W) (0)
	Vodacce (1)

Arcana: Self-Controlled

Background: True Identity (2)

Civil Skills

Merchant

Blacksmith 2, Hagglng 2

Spy

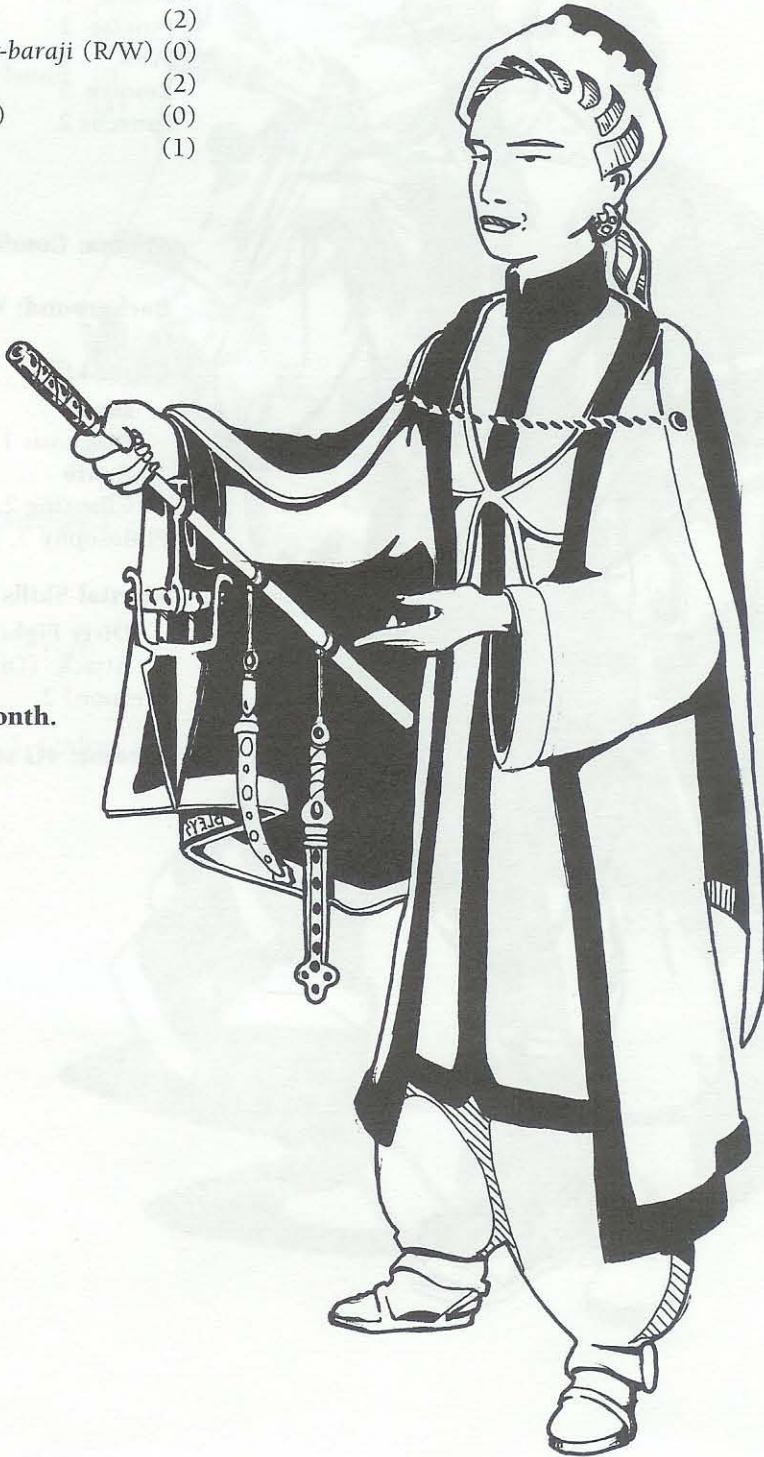
Bribery 2, Conceal 2, Disguise 2,
Shadowing 1, Stealth 1

Martial Skills

Knife

Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 2

Income: 1,500G starting, 0G per month.



Rahib (monk)



Traits

Brawn 2
Finesse 2
Wits 4
Resolve 3
Panache 2

Advantages

Warm Climate Conditioning (1)
Faith (5)
Languages: Aldiz-baraji (2)
Tikat-baraji (2)
Tikaret-baraji (0)
Yilan-baraji (0)
Sulimaq (10)

Arcana: Comforting

Background: Vow (1)

Civil Skills

Doctor

Diagnosis 1, First Aid 2

Rahib

Chanting 2, History 2, Menial Tasks 1, Occult 1,
Philosophy 3, Theology 1, Unobtrusive 2, Writing 1

Martial Skills

Dirty Fighting

Attack (Dirty Fighting) 1, Parry (Improvised
Weapon) 2

Income: 4G starting, 0G per month.

Dolasa (nomad)

Traits	Advantages
Brawn 2	Khêl-kalb (10)
Finesse 3	Windrunner (3)
Wits 2	Languages: Atlar baraji (0)
Resolve 3	Kurta-Baraji (1)
Panache 3 (0)	Tikaret-Baraji

Arcana: Overconfident

Civil Skills

Hunter

Ambush 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1,
Tracking 1

Martial Skills

Archer

Attack (Bow) 1, Fletcher 1, Horse Archery 3

Commander

Ambush 1, Strategy 1, Tactics 1

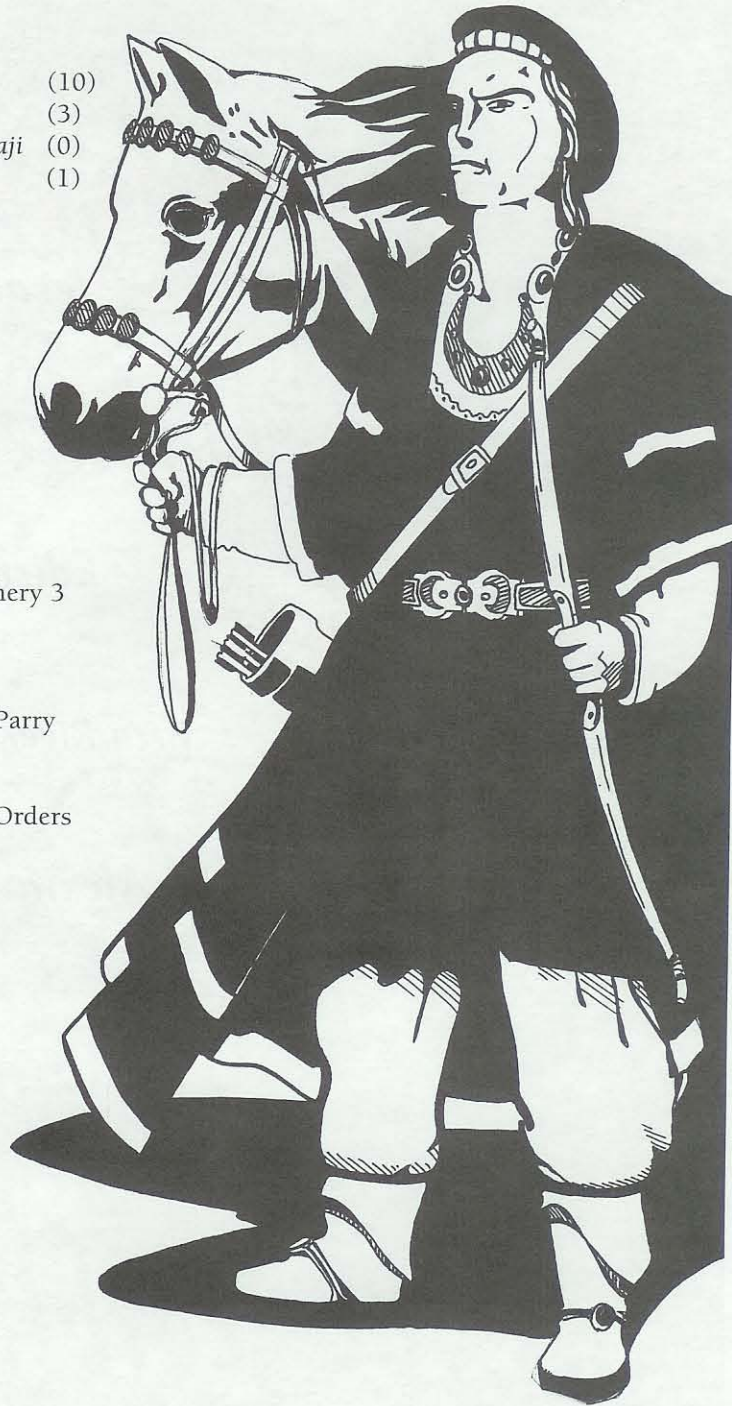
Fencing

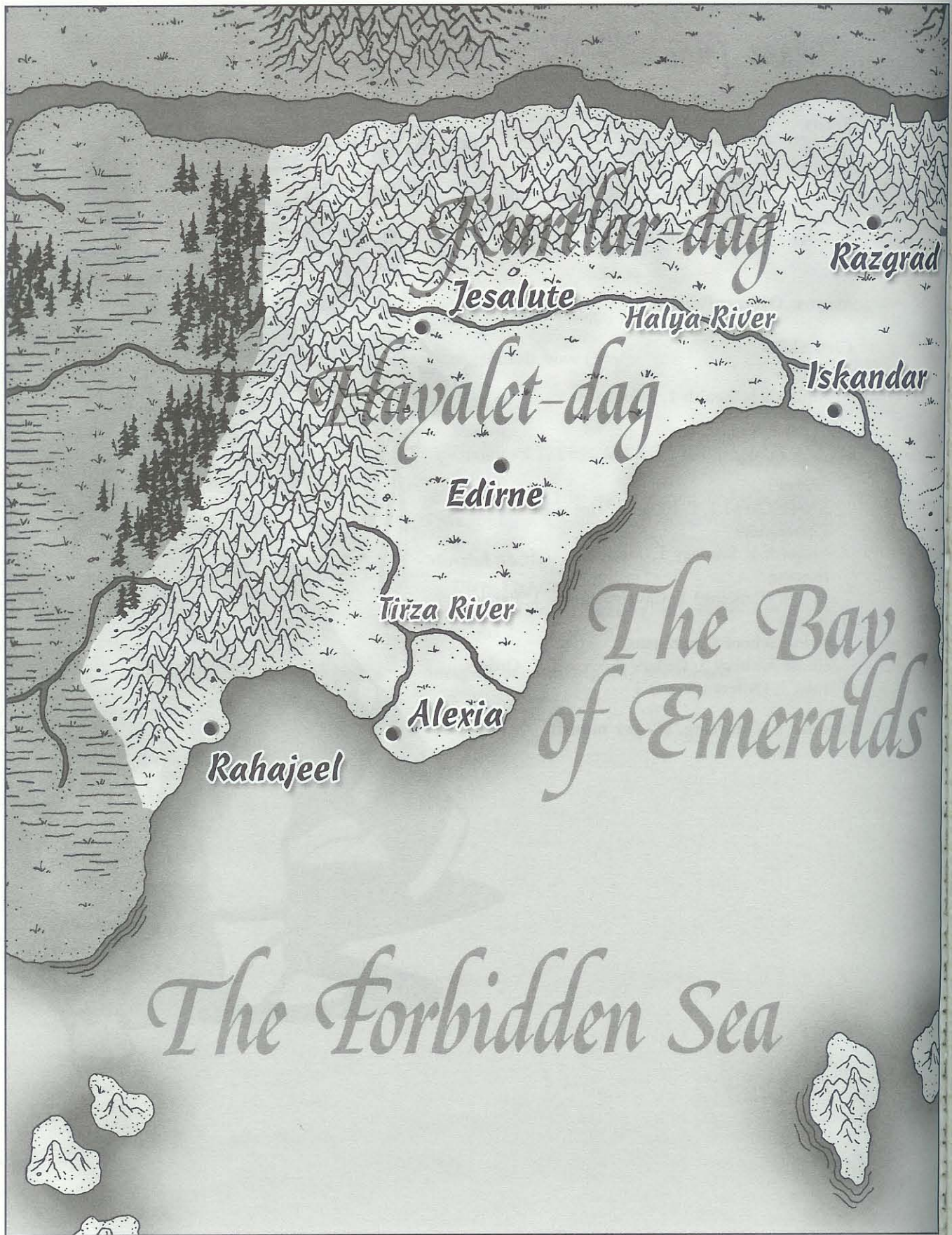
Attack (Fencing) 1, Cavalry Attack 1, Parry
(Fencing) 2

Vahiy School (Apprentice)

Horse Archery 3, Orders (Envelop) 1, Orders
(Flank) 1, Orders (Scout) 1

Income: 6G starting, 0G per month.





The Mirror



Glossary

Crescent

adak
ahali
ajedrez-oyun

akhi
akilli
akinji
altni
amcah
anah
annesi
arjanti
askari, askarim
askar'tyn
aslan
atlar
babah
bahshe
bakir
baston

bayana
bekci, -cim
bey

biber
caliph
dag
davasi
davetli
devir
dhima

diwan
dogru
dolasan
doubbec
dunya
duzmar,
efsan'eski
ekmek
esir, esiri
eski
eski-maluma

gercek
ghazi
girish
gokuzi

gokyuzu
hakim
ilahi-tomar
ilka
jizya
kabilah
kadin
kadir
kadirah
kaffe

kaffehan

Avalon (English)

oath, vow
people
"the game of power";
ancient game resembling chess
sword-brother or sister
wisdom
cavalry
gold
uncle
mother
sister
silver
soldier(s)
military tax
lion
horse
father
garden
copper
the crop used when riding a
camel
Lady
harem guard(s)
honorific
(used after the first name)
pepper
successor
mountain
vendetta
guest
camel
permit for safe passage
between tribal lands
religious tax
honor
nomad
a goatskin drum
earth
enemy
ancient tales, myths
bread
slave(s)
old, ancient
Wise Woman, a position of
great respect in the tribe
true, actual
warrior
gate
azure; used as derogatory
reference to having blue eyes
Firmament, heavens, skies
master, judge
"divine scroll" scriptures
first
poll tax
tribe
wife
home, house, tent
city
coffee, the national beverage
of the Crescent Empire
coffeehouse

kalaba
kapi
karada
karanlik
kardesh
karinya
kervan
kharaj
kilik parlak
kilim
kirmiz
kiymet
kum
kumandan
kuzah
k'vrimah

mahrem
malamad
meklis kabal'e
melik
meyzin
mizafir
mudur
nesheli
ogun
okuz
patika

Qatihl'i
Qor'qung
rahib
rusvet
sakhal
sakla
savasi-bahche

selamlik

sennet
seref
sey'r
shaitan
shirbaz
ssassiss

sultan
tanri
teyzah
timsa
tuhaf
tukar, tukara
tukar'tyn
ugursuz
ulema
vurmak
yalniz
yaratik-ustun
yasham
yavanci
yemek

host
gate
high
darkness
brother
belly-dancing
caravan
land tax
soldiers of light
woven carpet
red
teacher, instructor
sand
high commander
cousin
"twirling girl," an entertainer;
could be a "pleasure girl"
secret
learning, knowledge
Tribal Council
angel
prayer-caller
guest
major-domo of a harem
bright
game
ox
belief; the religion of the
Crescent Empire
the Order of Assassins
fighting skill of the Qatihl'i
monk
bribe, hand-out, small gift
beard
salt
Garden of Warriors (like
Valhalla)
public area in front of the
Sultan's palace
paradise
glory
Lord
demon
magician
an ancient race of snake-
people
ruler, sovereign
goddess
aunt
crocodile
bizarre, odd, strange
merchant
merchant (cargo) tax
ill-omened
religious scholar
polo
lonely
Supreme Creator
life
stranger
meal

7th Sea
Game Year:
1669

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