

THE CYCLOPEDIA
TALISLANTA



VOLUME VI
THE DESERT KINGDOMS

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Written by the Jovialis authors:

Tony Herring (*Djaffa*),
Tom Kane (*Carantheum*)
Kevin Murphy (*Obsidian Mask Race*)
Craig Sheeley (*Rajanistan*)

Cover Art: P.D. Breeding-Black
Editing: W.G. Armintrout (Jovialis)
Creative Director: Stephan Michael Sechi

Illustrations:

Ron Spencer, Larry Dixon, Rick Emond, Richard Thomas, and Chris Sims

Cartography: Czeslaw Sornat

Cover Design and Graphics: Patty Sechi

Typesetting: SMS

Legal Department: Joel Kaye, Kaye and Effron, Greenwich, CT

The Talislanta fantasy world is a creation of Stephan Michael Sechi

Special Thanks to the Playtesters:

Randy Carson, Pat Kane, Jean Moore and Mary Anne Toothaker

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INTRODUCTION

This fantasy role-playing supplement, like everything else in the TALISLANTA system, is part of a unique world setting – not the typical "elves and dwarves" games published elsewhere. If you're looking to put more excitement into your role-playing, we think we've got the answer right here.

This book is the first to pierce the veil of secrecy around the Holy Nation of Rajanistan, revealing the societies of the five Rajan Death-tribes: the Rajanin, Shadinn, Aramuts, Virds and Zagir. In a special section for the Gamemaster only, the structure and role of the Black Mystic Cult is explained.

Experienced TALISLANTA players should enjoy the new character types, such as the Yitek Spiritsingers (whose mission is to appease Death) and the Dracartan Expositors (Priests of Jamba, dedicated to exposing fraud). We've also prepared a comprehensive explanation of Thaumaturgy and how it works, a listing of further Technomantic specialties, and – for Beasthandler characters – the complete rules for natural hybridization.

In addition to complete background on the Desert Kingdoms, this book provides the Gamemaster with further material on the hazards of the desert, dunesailing, and the use of rapid-fire siege weapons. The introduction of Rajan dragon-steeds should increase the menace of Death-mages in most campaigns.

There are also three ready-to-play adventures: "The Obsidian Mask Race," in which adventurers guard the Caliph from supernatural hazards during a desert contest; "The Hand of Urmaan," which allows players to solve a mystery concerning the original Necromancer-King; and "With Water, Life," an epic adventure concerning spies, spirits and transdimensional forces. As always, a page of ideas is provided to inspire those who would like to design their own adventures in the Desert Kingdoms.

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Black Savant
c/o Bard Games
P.O. Box 7729
Greenwich, CT 06836

OVERVIEW

The kingdoms of Talislanta's great deserts are exotic nations, each as different from the other as all are from the rest of the lands of the continent. There is an air of mystery about these sands, an atmosphere tainted by the bleached bones protruding from the dunes and the presence of disembodied spirits.

The Kingdoms

All of Talislanta knows of the wonders of **Carantheum**, the nation built out of the wastes by the discoverers of the lost art of Thaumaturgy. To the desert traveler, the towers of the City-state of Dracarta rise like a miracle out of the endless sand flats, the only variation to be seen against the eternal horizon.

The Thaumaturges, who know the secret of transforming the Essences of substances, produce the goods which drive the wheels of continental commerce. The duneships of Carantheum and the caravans on the Wilderlands Road carry the products of virtually every civilization known to geographers, and it all passes through Dracarta.

West of Carantheum lies **Djaffa**, a land of sandstorms and dust squalls. In the centuries past, the people of this land – the Djaffir – accompanied by the Kasmir and the Dracartans as nomads of the wastes. However, the Kasmir found riches in the ruins, and the Dracartans discovered the secrets of Thaumaturgy, and both races turned from their origins. Only the Djaffir remain as an example to scholars and sages of pure desert nomads.

Knowing that no one comes to Djaffa of his own free will, the Djaffir take their trade caravans wherever they can to obtain the goods their people need. Likewise, the bandits of the Djaffir raid far and wide, usually just a few miles in advance of a patrol from the Desert Scouts or an outpost of the Seven Kingdoms. They are a people of contrasts: joyous but severe, fateful yet brave, rigid in their customs though flexible in pursuit of trade.

In the south is the forbidding land of **Rajanistan**, from which uninvited visitors seldom return. This is where the Death Cult founded by the Necromancers reigns, headed by a fanatic mystic known as the Khadun. It is said that every evil in the desert can be traced to the Black Mystic Cult and its Torquar assassins. Tales of the horrific magics perpetrated by the Priests of Death have driven weak-minded listeners insane.

Heart of Darkness

The role of Rajanistan and its Black Mystic Cult in a full-fledged Talislanta campaign cannot be overstated. The presence of a continuing *nemesis* element helps to give dimension to both a good epic and a great series of adventures, and the Rajan Necromancers fit that role excellently:

First, the Rajans are centrally located on the continent, and thus able to interfere everywhere.

Second, their discipline teaches them that killing the living creates converts to their god, Death. To the Rajans, everyone who is alive is a potential convert.

Third, the Necromancers are involved in a variety of villainous endeavors, all of which eventually twist and warp the Death-mages. Given their practices and passions, the Necromancers are terrifying adversaries.

Though the adventurers may never travel to Rajanistan – and journeying there is indeed a perilous undertaking – this does not ensure that they are safe from the followers of Death. They may slay one Rajan adversary, but the Cult is large . . .

Metropolis of Riches

Dracarta of Carantheum is the opposite of the closed Rajan city of Irdan. Everyone comes to Dracarta, if for no other reason than that it lies athwart the only cross-continental road. Furthermore, many of the lost treasures of Talislanta – and solutions to a number of mysteries – lies in the ruins and wastes of the Wilderlands and the deserts close at hand, and the settlements of Carantheum make a natural base for the player characters between expeditions.

The Dracartans pose an interesting contrast to their more barbaric neighbors. They have no interest in Necromancy, but are renowned for their knowledge of Thaumaturgy, an ancient magical art which may date back to the Forgotten Age.

The special danger of the Red Desert, particularly near Carantheum, is the large number of spiritforms and similar beings wandering the sands. Some of these are Incarnators, spirits seeking to live again – and more than a few of these were once mighty sorcerers in now-fallen Quaran, the most evil land known of in the chronicles of the continent.

Displaced but not forgotten is one of the homeless races of Talislanta, the **Yassan**. Mechanics of the arcane, wizards of the gear-train and the well-adjusted automaton, they live in communities known as Teks, performing their trade in return for income and shelter. The largest community of Yassan in Talislanta is at Nadan, an outpost of Carantheum.

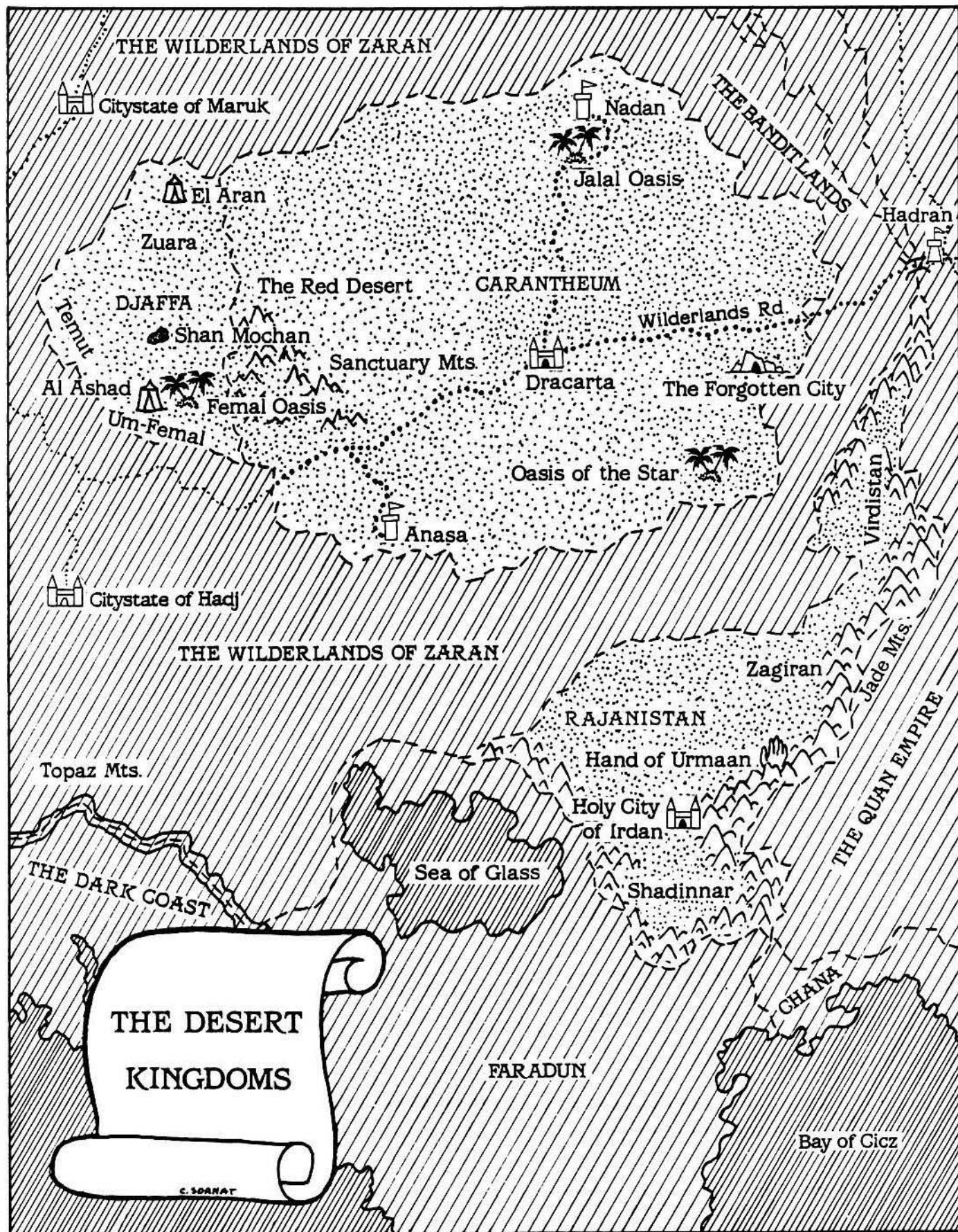
Of Princes, Bandits and Merchants

The Djaffir are another people who are hard to miss, since their caravans are seen in so many lands. They are movers and shakers, not on the grand political scale, but in the day-to-day deals of commerce. Every campaign should feature at least one Djaffir caravan master as a non-player character, one who has the scent of many secrets and – for a price – can be of great aid to those who aid him.

Then again, knowing a Djaffir is also a liability. The distinction between merchants and thieves is a narrow one with them, and an acquaintanceship with one of the desert nomads also risks becoming more familiar with the risks associated with bandits and their "friends."

For players desiring a grand political campaign, Djaffa is a convenient setting. The kingdom is small, the current Caliph is approachable and free of most affectations, and the problems of the nation are those which adventurers may find interesting to solve: lost caravans, Rajan infiltrators, and mysteries of the desert sands. Certainly, it is easier to meet and serve the Caliph of Djaffa than the Emperor of Quan, or even the Sorcerer-King of Cymril.

The Desert Kingdoms offer many avenues of campaigning to the Talislanta Gamemaster, and provide fascinating opportunities for player characters.



THE LANDS OF TALISLANTA

The following contains material supplemental to the geographical and cultural listings in the first edition of *THE CYCLOPEDIA TALISLANTA*, Volume I, and *THE TALISLANTA HANDBOOK*, third edition.

CARANTHEUM

"This is the riddle of Carantheum," declares the *Book of Mysteries*, the fount of Paradoxist wisdom and the holy writ of western Zandu. "Imagine the greatest desert known to living memories, a bowl of sand so deep that no man knows the depth of it. Within this cauldron of heavy red sand cruise all manner of malefic creatures – great desert kra, murderous sand demons, and an affluence of poisonous vermin. And yet at the heart of the most remote and inhospitable region of Talislanta lies the fabulous City of Dracarta, and all the nations of the continent go there to trade. Puzzle on this, acolytes of Paradox!"

Surprisingly, the often-trivial *Book of Mysteries* has hit the spike on the head with this analysis – Carantheum is indeed a mystery, a nation composed of outposts in an otherwise hostile environment, a rich kingdom surrounded by endless waste.

The Deep Desert

In the Red Desert of Carantheum, all living things must gravitate to the sources of water. Without life-giving fluid, there would be only endless uninhabited dunes. Away from the cities, oases and wells, Carantheum is so foreign as to almost be another dimension. Everywhere is the coarse iron-laden sand of the aptly-named Red Desert, resting heavily in its shallow dunes.

Dracartans say that Carantheum sand is crueller than red-iron swords. The winds carry deceptively little of it, but even a single grain leaves a reddened welt if it strikes exposed skin. The metallic sands reach searing temperatures shortly after the suns rise. Crossing the Red Desert at high noon is like walking within a kiln.

Because the sand is too heavy to be easily blown about, portions of the desert sometimes remain undisturbed for centuries. Desert Scouts tell of following seemingly fresh footsteps, only to find a heat-mummified body at the end of the trail. Parallel grooves left in the sand by a duneship sailing off the beaten path may tarry for decades, and the shallow "worm-trails" left by the great desert kra erode only slowly, remaining to crisscross and interconnect the shallow natural dunes for decades.

Signs of life in the deep desert are deceptive. Except for a sporadic duneship, the wastes are typically as barren as if Dracarta had never been built. Only the sand demons can dwell here year-round— even the desert kra must go to the oases to bear their young, and if they are to find the prey they need to survive, they must also come to the fringes of the cities, oases and trails.

Roads and Routes. Only three travelled tracks span Carantheum's deep desert, and the duneships prefer to follow these paths rather than undertake the slower sailing involved in cruising virgin sand.

The oldest route is the *Wilderlands Road*, a roadway which runs through the kingdom from east to west. Its hexagonal cobblestones are carefully cared for by the Desert Scouts, since this



highway is essential for trade. Dracartan duneships must parallel this road, and can cross it only where special drawbridges can be raised to expose a sand channel. Two other trails have been worn in the sands by the passage of duneships over the centuries. The *Anasa Trail* leads from this Carantheum outpost to the Wilderlands Road, while the *Nadan Trail* links Dracarta with Jalal Oasis and Nadan.

Within 20 miles of the border with Rajanistan or Quan, there is an eight-in-ten chance per day of sighting a patrol of Desert Scouts. On the other frontiers, the chance is only four-in-ten. A typical patrol consists of 2 x d10 Desert Scouts riding ontras. A Dune Escort (a type of military duneship) is probably within 50 miles, with another 4 x d20 warriors (plus ontra). The pride of the Scouts is that an Escort should be able to subdue anything short of a full invasion.

Cities, Outposts and Oases

The inhabited portions of Carantheum are only pinpricks in the expanse of the Red Desert. Greatest of all these is **Dracarta**, the three-walled city which sits bestride the Wilderlands Road and is the master of Talislanta's cross-continental trade.

Next in importance come the twin outposts of Nadan and Anasa. Both are primarily of military significance. **Nadan** guards the northern frontier, thwarting Wilderlands bandits who would otherwise prey upon the caravans. It is the site of Carantheum's shipyards, and host to the largest community of Yassan anywhere in Talislanta. **Anasa** is purely a citadel, and its residents are charged with scouting the southern frontier and protecting against the incursions of the fanatical Rajans.

The **Oasis of the Star** lies in the extreme southeastern desert. Dracartan legend claims that the falling star which led their forefathers into the Red Desert struck the ground here, creating a bubbling fountain of fresh water. Every other decade or so, treasure seekers outfit an expedition to discover the buried star and claim its miraculous powers, but no one has ever found it. The spring lies at the bottom of a shallow basin. There is no soil except for the red sand, so only the hardiest of desert plants can survive here— a few habara trees, some scraggly bushes, and a score of wandering Arborvoirs. The oasis is garrisoned by 50 Desert Scouts who protect the pure waters from being contaminated by Rajan agents.

Jalal Oasis is located on the trail between Dracarta and Nadan, and consists of a series of small springs spreading for a mile in all directions around a central pool. The Great Pool of Jalal glitters in a rainbow of metallic hues, which scholars think are due to metallic particles suspended in the water. Fortunately for visitors, the cool water has proven safe to drink. A permanent detachment of 50 Desert Scouts patrols the extensive network of ponds, chiefly to prevent bandits from stealing water. Unlike the Oasis of the Star, the ground here consists of fertile earth, allowing the soldiers to grow small gardens.

Desert predators flourish wherever water can be found. Mangonel and land lizards fight over the Jalal ponds, while Satada have been known to tunnel far underground in order to tap the main spring.

The Sanctuary Mountains

Rising unexpectedly out of the desert in a series of crags, peaks and mesas, the Sanctuary Mountains are formed of a porous dark-brown stone streaked with minute veins of silver and gold. The ancient rocks are heavily fractured and crumble or slide with the least provocation. Nevertheless, the eroded formations of this range – the lowest reaches of which are smothered in sand – are an inspiration to the artists of Talislanta.

The mountains were once habitable. Following the Great Disaster, a people known as the Yassan recovered from the catastrophe and built a series of walled villages on these heights. In these early years – before the rise of Phaendra in the west, or the Mazdak Empire in the east– the six-fingered Technomancers reclaimed much of the knowledge of their ancestors and expected to pioneer a wealthy kingdom.

The displaced nomads of the region – the Djaffir, the Dracartans and the Kasmir – came to serve in return for sustenance. Dracartan labor built the stone forts which still cap many of the peaks, and the Kasmir labored in the gold and silver mines.

Unfortunately for the Yassan, the drought which seized central Talislanta following the Great Disaster eventually reached their mountain springs. When the water supply failed, the Sanctuary Mountains were no longer a sanctuary at all. The Technomancers, displaced once again, were eventually forced to beg for aid from their former subjects.

The deserted mountain villages of the Yassan were ransacked long ago. Today, the only inhabitants of the mountains are the Desert Scouts sent by Carantheum to man look-out posts. The abandoned mines are unproductive by modern standards, although the King of Carantheum has considered licensing the Arimites to exploit the mineral resources. The heat and the abrasive winds of the desert are pleasantly moderated by the mountains, but the curse of the land remains the lack of dependable springs.

Origin of a Nation

In the wake of the Great Disaster, the Dracartans were like many other peoples – wanderers in the wastes. They lost all knowledge of their past, and today have no idea where or what pre-Disaster "Dracarta" might have been.

The hiring of the Dracartans by the ancient Yassan was almost an act of charity. The nomads had to be trained in the arts of masonry and engineering before they could even be put to use, and the nearly starved Dracartans devoured the stores of food and drink faster than the Yassan could deliver them. The Technomancers accepted the brightest of the young Dracartans as pupils, intending to train them as foremen.

Among the most eager students was a shy youth named Astramir, who studied under a witty Yassan named Gartu. While studying in the Technomancer's library, Astramir found an inscribed plate of light, strong iron which glinted ruby-red. His attention was caught by the Symbol of the Closed Lips, which was the sign of the Dracartans' enigmatic god. To Gartu's surprise, Astramir read the inscription, which was in a language unknown to the Yassan: "Here is a home, and here are riches. Here both Essence and Quintessence will be expounded unto you." When asked where the plate came from, Gartu said that it had been found in the Red Desert by an Orgovian trader, who bartered it for a few supplies.

Astramir believed that the plate, inscribed with the holy symbol of Jamba, was a sign that the Dracartans should leave the Sanctuary Mountains and go into the Red Desert. Skeptics reminded him that Jamba had not communicated with his people since the Great Disaster, and might well no longer exist. The boy prophet was undeterred. "Better the fiery sands of the desert than the cold depths of slavery," Astramir declared. At that very moment, according to legend, a star fell from the skies and plunged into the east. The Dracartans were convinced.

The Ruby Tablets. Astramir led his people into the desert until the peaks of the Sanctuary Mountains could no longer be seen. There he felt the presence of the Divine. Calling for silence, the youth told his people to listen for the words of Jamba. In the hush came a breathless whisper, heard by many of the tribe: "This is your country. And here is my gift, to hallow your home."

A mighty wind suddenly arose, disturbing the ancient dunes (the site of modern Dracarta) to reveal a collection of red-iron monoliths – known in Dracartan legend as "The Ruby Tablets." Astramir knelt and reverently scooped away more of the heavy sand. Each *Tablet* was nearly six feet high, five feet wide and three inches thick, and engraved with a minute script that filled all of the available space, even on the sides.

The language was again the unknown tongue, and out of the entire tribe, only Astramir could translate it. The Tablets explained the lost art of Thaumaturgy, which is the magical manipulation of essences. The first lines revealed the secret of creating a new form of iron – red iron – from the sands of the Red Desert. The monoliths were made of this unique metal, which was twice as strong as black iron but only half as heavy.

Within a year, Astramir completed his first tome of magic, based on the principles revealed by the Tablets. *The Thaumaturge's Opus* gave the Dracartans enough wealth to be able to plate the walls of their new capital city with red iron, and to fill it with luxuries. Astramir named the new nation "Carantheum," which he said meant "in gratitude" in the unknown tongue.

Modern Carantheum

Astramir's death in the year 110 left the Dracartans in ferment. They had depended on their prophet to govern them and otherwise had no formal government. All land in the kingdom had belonged personally to Astramir, and he had arranged all of the business dealings with merchants and foreign powers.

The Council of Nine Elders made an attempt to run the nation for a time, but failed miserably. The wise men who had advised Astramir had never acted as rulers before, and without firm controls, every Thaumaturge in the city was soon selling red iron at a cut-rate price in an effort to underbid their Dracartan competitors.

Factional war was prevented by a wise proposition from the Priests of Jamba. They proposed that a king reign as sovereign of Carantheum and manager of its wealth. The Council of Nine would select three candidates, and devise a *Test of the Ancients* to determine the one favored by Jamba. The priests said that such a contest should be set within the "Mountain of Glass," the slick-sided, honeycombed rock-outcropping south of the city which Astramir had said was consecrated to Jamba. The trial would be designed to gauge a candidate's courage, intelligence, initiative and strength.

The priests said that few men would be worthy to rule for their whole lives, as Astramir had. Therefore, a new Test of the Ancients would be held every twelve years. The Council agreed, reserving only the power to dethrone a king by a unanimous vote if he proved unsuitable.

The Kings of Carantheum have ruled wisely, establishing the Dracartan Pyramid as a major Talislantan currency, and enforcing a ten-percent tithing rate for all citizens. They made the creation of red iron a monopoly controlled by the King for the welfare of all Dracartans, and introduced popular free "entertainment" in Dracarta's amphitheater. Carantheum has few laws, since the King's will is considered more important than tradition or written law.

The Council of Elders remains an advisory body, but its two-dozen council seats are now filled through election. A complex system ensures that every class and faction in the society has the right to a representative: the priests, sentinels, soldiers, Thaumaturges, merchants, and the major families.

Besides their role as councilors, the Elders also administer low justice, though their decisions can be overruled by the King's high justice. Each Elder is responsible to equip a small number of *sentinels*, who maintain order in the capital. By tradition, only veteran Desert Scouts may serve as sentinels.

The Compact. Officially, Dracartan trade is administered through the Ministry of Customs and Commerce. All cargo arriving in Dracarta is inspected, and foreign merchants are charged a stiff 20% tariff for every import. Like the agents of the tithing office, the commerce inspectors report directly to the King. However, it is well known that the ministry is only a front for a much more effective body – the Compact.

This organization, made up of Dracarta's leading merchants and presided over by the King, meets secretly so that a united trade policy can be decided. The King determines who may join the Compact. Its members receive discounts when they purchase red iron from the state, and the Desert Scouts keep an especially watchful eye over Compact members' duneships. It is also said that the King's men perform covert errands on behalf of the secret trade society.

The Compact also has control of the lucrative trade with Astar for water from Lake Zephyr. Merchants provide Thaecian nectar, sweet powders and, occasionally, Thaumaturgical services to Muses who approach the Dracartan outpost in Astar. In return, the Dracartan Thaumaturges are allowed to operate the *Aquafae*, a large essence accumulator which draws water from the lake and solidifies it at the rate of 20,000 gallons per day. The water is cut into 5,000-gallon blocks, each of which weighs 45,000 pounds, and is carried by caravan and land barge back to the Red Desert. "Zephyr Water" sells for 1 S.P. per gallon in Dracarta, and without it, there would soon be a water shortage in the desert metropolis.

Speculation about which merchants are part of the Compact is a favorite subject for Dracartans, and every merchant dreams of the day when he will be invited by the King to take a seat with the prestigious conspiracy. Meanwhile, the Farad monopolists publicly fume about "unfair competition."

The Caduceus Mutada. Carantheum's Thaumaturges established the Caduceus Mutada, the guild of Dracartan mages, in order to maintain their independence from the King. All wizards in Carantheum are required to register their experiments with the guild or face the displeasure of the Lord Proctor – who has the legal right to convict and sentence those guilty of violating the Caduceus' Laws of Magic. Punishments range from fines and public floggings to banishment or execution. Caras-tra, the current Lord Proctor, is said to have informers throughout the kingdom.

The Caduceus Mutada also operates Dracarta's **Academy of Thaumaturgy**, one of the foremost institutes of magic in Talislanta. Only professors of the Academy may legally teach Thaumaturgy. The school exists to restrict knowledge as well as to instruct, as it is charged to withhold the secrets of Thaumaturgy – the creation of quintessence, the arts of the distillation of elemental essences, the transmutation of substance – from the irresponsible or the traitorous. Only those approved by the guild may enter the seven-year study program. Foreigners are strictly prohibited from even entering the building, except during certain public lectures and symposiums.

The Desert Scouts

Jamba has not seen fit to give his people peace – the Rajans and the Quan, Farad and Araq, sand demons and Kharakhan Giants have all invaded Carantheum at some time or another. It should therefore not come as a surprise that no Talislantan ruler spends more per soldier on his army than the King of Carantheum. Every footsoldier wears mail of red iron. Every missile for every hurlant on every duneship costs the Crown at least 125 G.L. There is also a high price to build and maintain the war fleet which carries the Desert Scouts throughout the desert.

By royal decree, all male Dracartans are required to register for military service at the age of 20, sparing only adepts of Thaumaturgy. Those who are conscripted – generally, the sons of un-influential families – must serve the King for five years.

Those who serve for ten years or more achieve the rank of *Guides*, commanders of small detachments of men. Valorous Guides are promoted by the King to the rank of *Courser* and given command of a military duneship. The highest rank is that of *Ranger*, commanding one of Carantheum's armies (which are known as "Dunes").

A grizzled Ranger named Aben Arat commands the **South Dune** from Anasa, with primary responsibility to defend against Raja-

nistan. He has 2,000 soldiers and 800 ontra mounts, plus a fleet of 10 Hurlant Barges, 8 Scout Sloops and 20 Dune Escorts. Aben considers himself a great strategist, and in the event of war might well disregard orders from Dracarta and act on his own – perhaps striking for Irdan itself.

Darbis is the Ranger of the **East Dune**, which patrols the border from the Oasis of the Star to the fringes of the Zaran Mountains. His small force – 1,500 men and 600 ontra, with 2 Scout Sloops and 15 Dune Escorts for transport– is based in Dracarta, but spends half of its time in the field. The threat they guard against is the Kang legion quartered at Hadran, just a few miles beyond Carantheum's border. Darbis is looking for glory, and believes that Jamba favors him as a future King of Carantheum (and, in truth, the Elders have picked worse men for the Test of the Ancients). The Ranger's keen intuition has often saved him from ambushes and Rajan assassins.

The Ranger of the **North Dune**, Bereda, dislikes this post and wishes to be transferred. He sees no chance for victory in the continual battles against Za bandits and Araq, and no glory for a commander. His army consists of 1,000 men, with a fleet of 3 Hurlant Barges, 6 Scout Sloops and 8 Dune Escorts, based out of Nadan. Bereda is famous for brooding in his cabin. Without more men and mounts, he cannot pursue his foes across the frontier – duneships can only sail where there is sand.

Tabira's **West Dune** surveys the Djaffir border, paying a courtesy call at Al Ashad twice a year. The 1,500 men and 600 ontra are officially quartered in Dracarta, and have 3 Scout Sloops and 20 Dune Escorts assigned to them. Tabira drives his men beyond all expectations, and has been paranoid about his safety since a Rajan assassin almost killed him three years ago. He is haunted by undeserved guilt and a fear of demotion.

The **Reserve Dune** is stationed at Dracarta, ready to sail under the command of the King should war be declared. The 6,000 men of this army are backed by the Red Desert Fleet: 2 Great War Duneships, 10 Hurlant Barges, 4 Scout Sloops and 40 Dune Escorts.

Mercenaries are not a regular part of the Dracartan military, though the King has been known to hire foreign troops during times of great crisis. Danuvian hireswords have distinguished themselves in previous service to the King, and are looked on with great favor by Dracartans in need of private guards.

Religion

Jamba, the traditional god of the Dracartans, must trust his people – he has given them few doctrines, and signs of his power have been rare. Nevertheless, the Dracartans love their god devoutly, and if Jamba ever speaks again, they will be willing to do whatever he says.

Priests of Jamba spend most of their time in the temples quietly listening for the voice of their god, refraining from making the slightest sound lest they miss Jamba's words. Lay worshipers also spend a few hours each week listening, donating their coins as priests circulate a linen bag (padded to muffle the clinking sound).

Many priests are strict conservatives, suspicious of any policy not endorsed by the Prophet Astramir. The stodgiest claim that the Thaumaturges should be prohibited from doing research, since Jamba has already told his people what he wanted them to know.

Other clerics have a special mission. The *Expositors* began as an informal alliance of clerics who investigated the claims of

individuals said to have received communications from Jamba. In many cases, the "revelations" turned out to be the work of false prophets or charlatans – in other cases, the recipients were deranged, or tricked by extradimensional entities. Today, the Expositors devote themselves to exposing religious fraud wherever it occurs, and travel the breadth and length of Talislanta on their quests.

Dracartan Society

Tradition sharply delineates social classes among the Dracartans. Members of the same stratum of society are allowed to deal with each other on a friendly basis, calling each other by personal names and calling on one another at home. However, members of a higher class must always be addressed by their full name and title, and no familiarity with them is allowed. Likewise, a Dracartan is not to become friendly with someone of a lower class, but is to address that person as an inanimate object.

The six social classes of Carantheum, in order from highest to lowest, are: *the Ruling Class*, consisting of the King, the Elders, senior bureaucrats in their service, and Desert Scouts of the rank of Courser or above; *the Magi Class*, which includes all Thaumaturges and, by courtesy, foreign mages; *the Merchant Class*, which includes all those involved in the mercantile business of Dracarta, as well as other skilled professions (such as healers and scholars); *the Fighting Class*, consisting of soldiers, sentinels and dunesailors; *the Artisan Class*, to which the vast majority of Dracartans belong; and lastly, *the Despised Class*, which includes criminals, Embalmers, and all others engaged in defiling work.

Foreigners are not treated with disrespect, but receive honor in accord with their profession. Visiting thralls, for instance, are accepted as members of the Fighting Class; Kasmir moneylenders, as of the Merchant Class; and Maruk dung merchants, as of the Despised Class. Note that rank in society has nothing to do with ancestry. Even an Embalmer's child could enter the Magi Class, if he could qualify to study at the Academy of Thaumaturgy. Status can also be temporary – a merchant who became King of Carantheum would return to his former rank in society when his term of office was complete.

Children. The men of Dracarta believe that their manhood depends on fathering as many children as possible, and their women are conditioned by custom to comply. The danger is the local abundance of wandering spirits, eager to take possession of the bodies of unborn children. The Priests of Jamba maintain a constant vigil over an expectant mother from the moment she is known to have conceived, burning incense and practicing spirit-warding rituals.

The parents of Dracarta watch their children constantly, fearing to see some sign that "their" offspring are actually inhabited by reincarnated spirits. If detected at any age, these children are seized by the priests and expelled beyond the borders of the kingdom.

Death. The citizens of Carantheum feel a particular horror of Death, and this is only heightened by the fact that their worst enemies – the Rajans – have a fearsome reputation for necromancy. Even touching a corpse is enough to require a week of penitential cleansing in a temple (unless the Dracartan is a member of that lowest of professions, the Embalmers).

In order to protect their bodies from becoming tools of the Rajans, the Dracartans invest fabulous sums for special sarcophagi and trained Embalmers. The pyramidal tombs, buried in the

depths of the Red Desert, also contain expensive possessions and other artifacts which are said to ease the spirits' journey to their next home. However, the Dracartans do not fear dying itself, considering it a natural part of existence. They merely dread what might become of their corpse or spirit afterward, and find decay and rot extremely distasteful.

Families. In the view of the Dracartans, the true family consists solely of a husband and his mate. Children are temporary intrusions, to be brought up correctly and then expelled into the world. Sons are expected to leave home and pursue their vocations by the age of 13. Daughters hopefully marry by the age of 17, although their removal from the household is ultimately in the hands of the Priests of Jamba.

While parents manifest great pride in their children, it is considered inappropriate for them to have much to do with their grown offspring. It is permissible in Carantheum to embrace one's friends in public, but only rarely is affection for loved ones expressed, publicly or privately.

Marriage. Most marriages are arranged by the Priests of Jamba, who keep records on all unmarried Dracartans. Every male has the duty to Jamba to marry before the age of 35, and to remarry within five years of losing a mate.

Marriage outside of one's class is prohibited, and relationships with foreigners are discouraged. A special portion of every temple is set aside for singles, where they can silently meet and hold hands while listening for Jamba. The Desert Scouts are an exception to the rule mentioned above. The soldiers have a tradition of marrying foreign maidens, a custom which dates back to their invitation to Danuvia's first Conjugal Feast.

Until marriage, Dracartan women remain part of their parents' household. A father with several older, unmarried daughters at home is the butt of jokes from his peers, so Dracartans become anxiously engaged while their daughters are still young in making sure that the Priests of Jamba are aware of and promoting matches for their female children.

Solidarity. Dracartans believe that it was their unity which allowed them to survive the post-Disaster centuries of wandering. The principle of solidarity is deeply ingrained in their customs: no Desert Scout can honorably abandon a wounded comrade, a husband cannot betray a wife without publicly shaming himself, children may only quarrel with their parents within the privacy of their home, and apprentice merchants are so loyal to their masters that they decline to speak to those who work for other mercantilists.

Spirits. The people of Carantheum have developed a hypersensitivity to spirits, due to the unusual preponderance of wandering spiritforms in the Red Desert. This does not mean that they can actually sense extradimensional entities – rather, they are apt to note every sudden breeze or unexpected noise, and attribute them to ectoplasmic beings.

Musical items which claim to ward away spirits sell briskly in Dracarta, and the most paranoid citizens carry fertilized eggs in warming trays as a protection against Incarnators (see the "Naturalist's Compendium" section of this book).

The Technomancers of Carantheum

In the time before the Great Disaster, the Yassan legends claim that the Technomancers were the servants of Sorcerer Kings, and Talislanta's only masters of the arcane art of Technomancy. After that cataclysm, they took refuge in the Sanctuary

Mountains, but were forced to abandon their stronghold when the mountain springs dried up. Today, the Yassan are scattered into *teks* or clans, surviving as best they can.

The largest clan of Technomancers dwells among the Dracartans at Nadan. Here they work with the Thaumaturges, creating useful devices for the duneships and building defenses to be placed within Dracartan sarcophagi. Carantheum feels a debt to the people who sheltered its forefathers, and the King's agents actively seek work for the Yassan.

Yassan Tekes and Kings. Each Yassan tek consists of an accomplished Master Technomancer, his wives, their children, and their apprentices. The clan at Nadan is 2,000 strong. The most brilliant of the male apprentices are eventually cast out – several each year – to recruit Yassan wives and apprentices, and journey elsewhere to start their own teks. Since by tradition there can never be more than one tek in the same place, the Yassan have slowly spread across the central continent. Migrating Technomancers are not uncommon on the trails and roads of Talislanta.

In the time of Astramir, the Master Technomancers elected a King of the Yassan, but factionalism destroyed this process centuries ago. Nikhili, the Master Technomancer of Nadan, considers himself the King of the Yassan, and tries to act as an arbitrator among all the teks.

However, his rival – Chadree, the Tek-Master of Farad – also claims the kingship, and has followers throughout the clans of the west and south. It is Chadree who has been negotiating with Cymril to take possession of the uninhabited Jaspur Mountains. Nikhili opposes the plan, and has put forward a competing plan to buy Zephyr-Water from Carantheum and revitalize the Yassan homeland in the Sanctuary Mountains.



DJAFFA

This is a land of heat lightning and sudden, deadly sandstorms, where only the most hardy forms of life can survive. This is the place the Djaffir call home – where azoryls glide on sweltering thermals, and enormous desert kra burrow through scarlet sands.

Djaffa encompasses one-sixth of the Red Desert, bordered to the west by the Wilderlands of Zaran – where the blood-red sands grudgingly give way to common plains-grass and scrub bushes – and Carantheum to the east. The towering dunes of Djaffa are the land's most striking feature. Shimmering waves of heat dance above the mountains of sand, hinting at the inherent danger of the Red Desert – dehydration and a slow agonizing death.

Although all of Djaffa is covered by sand, it has three distinct regions: the Zuara, the Um-Femal, and the Temut.

The Zuara

By far the largest region of the Djaffan desert, the Zuara is a place of shifting dunes. The red grains are light, and a single pile of sand may extend for miles and reach a height of several hundred feet. After a windstorm, the grains sometimes hang in the air for hours, stinging travelers' eyes and clogging their lungs.

Traversing the Zuara is an arduous task, not only because of the terrain, but also due to the numerous predators. With the ability to create intricate mirages – complete with swaying trees and glistening water – sand demons pose the most malignant threat. Death comes swiftly to those whose thirst outweighs their sense of caution.

Desert kra also thrive beneath the steaming dunes. Their dorsal spines allow them to sense the movement of creatures up to a half mile away. Swimming through the sand toward its victims, a desert kra's favorite tactic is to steeply dive, then burst from the depths beneath its victim and swallow it whole. Experienced travelers recognize the kra's "worm trail" in the sand, and know to run when the slight bulge in the sand ceases to approach – this means the kra has begun its dive.

Winged reptilians known as azoryl glide majestically in the hot winds above Djaffa. Scavengers, the avians will follow desert travelers but seldom attack them. During times of famine, however, flocks of azoryl have been known to assault entire caravans. Their presence also alerts other predators to the availability of prey.

The word "Zuara" comes from the Nomadic tongue, and means "laughing sand." The name refers to the mysterious reverberations – like rumbling laughter – sometimes heard by travelers in this region. Djaffir believe it to be the mocking laughter of Destiny, tormenting disoriented wayfarers. Desert kra are drawn by these intonations, and experienced travelers know its best to move on when such sounds are heard.

The Lost City of El Hasa. At the very center of the Zuara is an eternal sandstorm, which during Median (Talisanta's warmest season) is three miles in diameter and reaches 15,000 feet into the air. Smaller storms break away from it, hurtling across the desert in the form of deadly cylinders of sand.

As fall progresses to spring, the storm shrinks. At its smallest, the tempest has a diameter of only one mile and a height of 10,000 feet. At this time, the vague outlines of ruined pyramids and other structures may be seen by any travelers who pass by.

The Djaffir have named this abandoned metropolis "El Hasa," which means "Place of Doom" in their tongue.

According to Djaffir legend, the people of the city angered Destiny, causing the god to swear to destroy them and every trace of their existence. The deity tore the pages belonging to the citizens of El Hasa from his iron-bound tome, and summoned a tempest of sand to annihilate them. Faithful to his command, the sandstorm continues to blast the stones of the doomed city, slowly eroding them into dust. The Djaffir claim that this cyclone is also the force which, through the millennia, has created the Red Desert.

Scholars have other theories. According to the accepted belief, the Red Desert was once a fertile plain, and El Hasa was its thriving capital. In his masterful work, *Korag's Theory of Magic and Anti-Magic*, the legendary wizard theorizes that the ancient Hasans created an opening into the Elemental Plane. When they could not control what they had wrought, the rift grew, allowing elementals of wind and sand to enter the ill-fated city. Korag attests that a transdimensional opening is the source of the sandstorm, and that if it were closed, the tempest would immediately subside.

Marix Phylum, a Cymrilian windpilot of some renown, counters Korag in his treatise, *Air Currents of the Central Continent*. He claims that the lost city lies at the nexus of several trade winds, and that the storm is the natural result of this tumultuous meeting. What Marix hasn't ventured to explain is why someone would build a city at such a spot, although his current absence may be due to an expedition to gather this evidence.

Shan Mochan. A dry lake bed only two square miles in area surrounded by a ridge of grey stone, Shan Mochan is nevertheless one of the most important places in the desert to the Djaffir. Sprouting from cracks in the flat, clay bottom of the lakebed are mochan plants. Djaffir dry the beans of these plants and use them to brew mochan tea, the traditional beverage of the Desert Kingdoms. The thick, dark beverage is served hot in small metal cups. It is very stimulating, and perhaps mildly addictive. All attempts to cultivate the bushes elsewhere have met with failure.

During the month of Ardan, when rainfall is heaviest, Shan Mochan is flooded. For seven days, the mochan bushes bud, bloom and seed in the shallow waters, shriveling and dropping their valuable seeds when the waters recede.

The gathering of mochan beans is a time of great celebration among the Djaffir. The Caliph himself leads the magnificent caravan from El Aran to the lakebed, where merchants and bandits unite to harvest the seeds. Under the *Peace of Mochan*, all quarrels are put aside, and rich and poor are equal.

When the harvest is complete, the Caliph and the tribes journey to Al Ashad. Their arrival signals the start of the Caliph's Feast, a festival which lasts three days and nights. The Caliph remains in Al Ashad until the end of Median, when he must return to El Aran by custom.

El Aran. The only water source in the dusty plain of the Zuara, the Oasis of Aran – around which the tent city of El Aran sprawls – is a mystery unsolved by modern scholars. Pure water gushes out of a gash on the top of a charred boulder, which stands roughly forty feet in height and is cubical in shape. The Djaffir have built troughs to catch the water before it drains away into the sands, and refuse to let anyone investigate the great stone (for fear of somehow losing a precious source of potable water).



Whether the Great Aran ("Aran" means "stone" in the Nomadic tongue) has a dark secret is unknown. Sand demons proliferate in the nearby desert, and at least one Djaffir legend tells of the demons dancing on the rock under the moonlight of Zar.

Habara Trees. Found chiefly in the Zuara, the cone-shaped habara tree reaches a height of six feet and has no branches. Its black, chitinous bark absorbs the intense desert heat. When the temperature drops in the evening, long white fibers protrude from the tree. Having been warmed by the hot bark all day, the steaming tendrils cause the moisture in the air to condense on them and drip to the ground. Thus, the habara tree produces its own rainfall.

Djaffir tribes collect water from the trees (up to a quart per night per tree). The white fibers, known to them as "tree whiskers," are used to make Djaffir linen. Habara resin is burned in braziers as incense, and is also mixed with water to make restorative tonics and soothing lotions.

The Temut

In far-western Djaffa, the monstrous dunes of the Zuara give way to the deep gorges of the Temut. In this shallow portion of the desert, jagged arches of weathered stone rise out of the sand, and the wind roars through ravines. Chasm vipers and crag spiders prowl among the rocks, seeking prey.

The Djaffir construct family tombs in low cliffs throughout the Temut. Some of the sepulchers possess elaborate frontpieces with engraved pillars and arches. The graves of the less fortunate are simply sealed with large stones. Yitek tomb-robbers protect these vaults, fulfilling an ancient agreement between the two peoples.

Considering the Temut to be the place of the dead, Djaffir avoid coming here except for the funerary rites of the dead. However, criminals attempting to escape the justice of the Caliph often flee to the broken tombs and caves in the rocks,

where they hide their loot until they can safely take it to market. It is said that many unclaimed caches lie waiting in the Temut, the robbers having fallen prey to crag spiders, the Caliph's men, or the hazards of the desert.

Waddia. Common in the Temut, these dried brooks and riverbeds flood after sudden downpours, and large boulders crash along in the raging waters. Experienced desert travelers never camp in a waddia, though novices may be attracted to them by the sponge-bristle plants which flourish here.

The Um-Femal

To the south, the Zuara again gives way to sands, and hillocks covered with scrub bushes and boulders rise among the dunes. The oddest features of the landscape, however, are the twisted spires of rock which sometimes protrude vertically from the hills or dunes, and sometimes lie horizontal in the sand. This region is known as the Um-Femal, meaning "Land of Falling Stars."

The Djaffir have numerous legends concerning the strange rock spires of Um-Femal. The most popular relates the story of a star which burst asunder, raining its fragments upon the Red Desert. This was a blessing, say the storytellers, for the music of the fallen star drove the sand demons out of this part of the desert.

Karfin, a noted collector from Sindar, has another theory. By comparing rock samples, the scholar has come to the conclusion that the spires are fragments of Dragonrock, an immense volcano located in the Volcanic Hills. During one of Dragonrock's eruptions, Karfin postulates, the mountain showered the Um-Femal with shards of rock.

The jagged spears of black stone are seldom greater than 20 feet in length. They are pierced with holes of various sizes and shapes, and produce a shrill whistling sound when the hot desert winds blow against them. Due to the scarcity of sand demons and desert kra, the Um-Femal is the safest region in Djaffa, though ravengers sometimes stalk the area.

Femal Oasis. The only unsettled oasis in Djaffa, Femal is named after the Djaffir legends of the star which died – its name translates as "The Fallen." Djaffir tribes once gathered here, but imprudent merchants planted prism vines. Native to the Tamaranth Valley, the yellow vines produce egg-shaped melons covered with a thick white rind. Within each fruit is a solid mass of translucent crystals which sparkle in sunlight with all the colors of the rainbow. The crystalline meat of a prism melon literally melts in the mouth, leaving an unforgettably sweet aftertaste.

At Femal, the plants flourished to an uncommon degree, rooting themselves deep beneath the sands. What the Djaffir who stole the original plants did not understand – although the Ariane would have told them, if asked – was that the vines also produce a mildly addictive fragrance which puts the man-like races to sleep. The prism vines, which the Djaffir found they could not uproot, eventually forced the Djaffir to tear down their tent city here.

From the artesian springs and abundant wild vineyards of Femal, travelers may take refreshment all year-round. The only danger is in lingering, for the night blossoms of the prism vines can ensnare those who breathe their scent (resist vs. CON) and charm them into sleeping both day and night (2 x d20 hours of sleep). The victims are magically invigorated while they sleep – the Djaffir who come to reap the melons have rescued travelers who have slept in the melon fields of Femal for years.

Al Ashad. Thanks to the efforts of the Djaffir, this oasis has been greatly expanded. With the aid of supplementary wells, simple mechanisms which pump water, and a network of clay trenches, the desert nomads grow gardens of fruiting plants and desert palms in this island of fertile soil surrounded by sand. (See the entry in the "Cities of Talislanta" section of this book for further details about the tent city of Al Ashad.)

Wells. The Um-Femal is the only portion of Djaffa where wells can be found. Located on the scrub-covered hillocks, the wells consist of clay embankments around narrow shafts, with a flat boulder to cap the opening. Visitors must supply their own cord and bucket to draw water.

Nomads of the Desert

Before the Great Disaster, the Djaffir were slaves of the Quaran Empire. When that nation collapsed, the freed servants fled south, eventually finding shelter as slaves in the Sanctuary Mountains with the post-Disaster Kingdom of the Yassan.

When lack of water brought down that state, however, the Djaffir and another tribe – the Kasmir – were sent wandering into the wastes once more. The tribes then found a cache of treasure (at the present site of the City of Kasmir), but the Kasmir refused to share the wealth, and the Djaffir left them in disgust. To this day, the Djaffir proclaim the Kasmir "Tu-Beshal" (meaning "Suckers of Blood"), and avoid having anything to do with them.

At last, a new leader arose among the desert nomads. Ab-dehb Thamud returned to his people after decades spent exploring the continent, and led them to the oasis he had discovered at Al Ashad. He converted them to the worship of Destiny, and arranged for young Djaffir to journey to the east where they learned to craft charms that could locate water and ward against the predators of the desert.

Lastly, it was Ab-dehb who crafted and wore the first Djaffir fetish mask. nomad legend does not name the advanced eastern

civilization which Ab-dehb had contact with – scholars variously identify it as ancient Mandala, Isalia of the Sunra, or the mystical land of Asturtia.

The Djaffir prospered, and their population swelled until many of the nomads desired to go their separate ways, branching off from the single tribe of the people. Ab-dehb's son, Ibn-dehb, was then the Sheik of the Djaffir, and he felt an urgent need to preserve the unity of his people. On his deathbed, the nomad leader proclaimed his oldest son to be the "Caliph" or prince of the people, and his four younger sons as sheiks of the new tribes he formed by dividing the people. From that day to this, all Djaffir consider themselves to be members of two tribes – the immediate tribe of their sheik, and the all-encompassing tribe of their Caliph.

The Caliph

With full religious and political authority, the Caliph is the undisputed ruler of the Djaffir. It is his sovereign right to summon any and all tribes to do his bidding, and each sheik sends tribute to him annually.

With all of his power, however, the Caliph actually has little influence within Djaffa. The sheiks govern their tribes well enough, leaving their master idle. He is expected to entertain ambassadors from nations seeking trade with the Djaffir, and uses this as a pretext for extravagant feasts and celebrations – supposedly all in an attempt to foster trade. Foreign emissaries enjoy their service,, and are often reluctant to return home.

The fecundity of the Caliph is a matter of great pride to the Djaffir. By tradition, the ruler's harem consists of 77 wives, and the household is blessed with as many children as Destiny deems fit. The chief wife – who is the victor in a competition known as the *Race for the Obsidian Mask* – is granted the title of *Caliphesse*, and wears a fabulous mask to denote her rank. All of the women in the harem covet the Obsidian Mask, for the Caliph's heir must be a son born of one who has been Caliphesse.

Advisor to the Caliph. Centuries after Ab-Dehb Thamud died, a second figure made an impact on Djaffir history. His arrival is related in "Avatari," the classic tale of Ahk-Trehd the Maimed:

"Wrapped in a tattered shroud, he came from the Zuara in the company of blistering winds, on a night when the Crimson Moon shone full. Though he wore no mask, his face was covered by a flowing cowl, from which his eyes glittered blackly. Many ran from him in terror, proclaiming him a devil, while others thought him to be a lost prophet. He said, 'My name is Izmaeil the Avatar.'"

According to the tale, the stranger spun a story concerning Ab-Dehb and his afterlife in the Gray Sphere. Izmaeil told how the Djaffir found Destiny among dunes of silver sand and heard the words of his god: "Ab-Dehb Thamud, you have served my chosen people well. Behold the world beyond the veil, where you shall live in bliss!"

Izmaeil claimed that he was sent from Destiny to watch over the Caliph's people, just as Ab-Dehb had guarded them in the past. As proof, he drew from his robes the fetish mask of Ab-Dehb Thamud. "I am wise to the ways of Destiny, and my fate is entwined with yours," the legend says he said. "As evidence, when the twin suns next rise above the dunes, the Caliph shall be presented with twin sons from his pregnant wife's womb." With the birth of two beautiful boys the first prophecy of Izmaeil the Avatar was proven, and he was accepted into the Caliph's household as the Guardian of the Djaffir.

Although some believe him to be a reincarnation of Ab-Dehb Thamud (or a Shaitan in man-like form . . .), Izmaeil is indeed an Avatar of Destiny. He remains a valued advisor to the current Caliph of Djaffa, and is apparently immortal. Through meditation, Izmaeil has the ability to receive knowledge from Destiny concerning fate, and his prophecies have never been wrong. He reveals this knowledge sparingly, only to the Caliph, and always for the good of the people. It is customary for the Avatar to warn the Caliph when his doom draws near, in order for the sovereign to declare his heir.

The Sheiks

Each Djaffir tribe is ruled by a sheik, who is in turn subordinate to the Caliph. The rule of government is simple – all members of the tribe must do the sheik's bidding.

Sheiks serve for life, and are appointed by the Caliph. Tradition dictates a simple procedure by which the supreme ruler of the Djaffir must select his sheiks – they must be the richest member of their tribes. This wealth is not measured in coins, but is determined by the number of beasts in one's herd and the number of wives in one's tent. By acquiring the most animals and concubines, a Djaffir demonstrates his standing as either the shrewdest merchant or the most cunning thief in the tribe – the two requisites for status among the nomads.

Merchant Tribes. The majority of Djaffir belong to merchant tribes, and the sale of livestock is the main source of their wealth. They also export such native products as mochan, linen, leather goods, incense and jewelry, and sometimes Djaffir short bows and arrows. Of course, a large part of any caravan's wares consist of goods and curiosities from other lands.

The desert merchants are unsurpassed in their ability to determine the value of various types of burden beasts, thanks to the advice of the tribe's beasthandlers. However, Djaffir trade skills are not limited to animals. The merchants come into contact with an incredible variety of merchandise, and their knack for quoting an accurate price for *anything* is uncanny.

Merchant tribes often band together to form great caravans which travel to some of the furthest reaches of the continent. They return to Djaffa with an amazing diversity of wares – most are mundane, and some are illegal, but many are fascinating and often magical in nature. Collectors and merchants from all over Talislanta come to the markets of El Aran and Al Ashad, where many rare and unusual curiosities can be found.

The merchant tribes have an ancient agreement with the bandit tribes of Djaffa – the bandits steal goods, and the merchants sell them. Even so, merchants are not above posing as bandits themselves, and especially enjoy plundering Farad caravans.

Bandit Tribes. Few in number, the Djaffir bandit tribes seldom engage in trade, believing instead that taking what one desires is more the measure of a man. Their favorite prey are the heavily laden caravans of foreign merchants, and they take anything portable – especially burden beasts and prospective slaves. Much of the booty is traded to Djaffir merchant tribes, where it becomes part of a caravan or is taken to market.

Djaffir bandits consider successful raids to be honorable endeavors, and obey a strict code of conduct. It is dishonorable to kill unarmed foes, women, or children, and wanton destruction of property is not tolerated. Unfair advantage is avoided – mounted bandits don't ride down unmounted enemies, and bandit mages do not attack with magic unless mages are known to be present on the enemy side. Djaffir never steal from one

another, and feel shame if their banditry endangers one of their fellows, even if accidentally. The bandits leave their surviving victims with sufficient food and water to reach help.

Before marauding a caravan or settlement, a bandit sheik sends an emissary – usually one of his sons – to invite the caravan master or ruler to the sheik's tent for a cup of mochan, over which they will discuss the bandit's price to let the caravan pass or the village remain unmolested. To refuse to parlay with the sheik is sure to provoke his anger – and an attack. A raid is deemed a success even if the victims pay the ransom price, and the bandits move on after collecting their payment. Otherwise, the bandits wait until the caravan master has safely returned to his people, and then attack.

Caravans and Trade

Few traders hazard the dangers of the Red Desert in order to trade with the Djaffir. Therefore, the nomad merchants transport their own merchandise in and out of the desert, sending their caravans all across Talislanta. Djaffir merchants pride themselves on braving any risk in order to bring merchandise to a prospective customer.

A Djaffir tribe, being nomadic, essentially *is* a caravan. Because of the threat of foreign bandits and hostile predators, however, tribes generally group together when venturing beyond Djaffa. To defend the exposed line of animals (sometimes extending over several miles), merchants send out scouts to flush out predators or detect ambushes along the route. The best defense, say the Djaffir, is to know in advance the dangers which lie ahead.

The merchant sheiks congregate at Al Ashad to discuss trade. (El Aran is traditionally the meeting place for bandit sheiks.) A sheik announces where his tribe plans to journey, when it will return, and what trade goods are to be sought. Eventually, several like-minded sheiks form an agreement, and their tribes unite for the expedition. The richest sheik is chosen as caravan master, although he may rely on all of the skilled merchants of the traveling tribes for advice.

By royal decree, all caravans must keep a written journal of their activities, starting with a declaration of their route and their trading intentions. This journal is kept by the caravan master, who is responsible for recording information on the condition of roads and trails, changes in geography, and useful information learned about native cultures. When the caravan returns, the journal is presented to the Caliph and becomes part of the Royal Archive.

Aht-Ra and the Djaffir

Djaffir herd seven species of burden animals – aht-ra, land lizards, greymanes, durges, erds, lopers and mangonel lizards. Of all these, the aht-ra are the most numerous and significant.

When Ab-Dehb Thamud led the first Djaffir into the Red Desert, they brought all of these animals with them. Unfortunately, few of the beasts could withstand the rigors of the desert, and more than half perished. As the animals continued to die in the extreme climate, the threat of starvation loomed over the nomads.

Ab-Dehb instructed his beasthandlers to crossbreed their animals to develop desert survival traits. The immediate results were stronger durges, erds, land lizards and greymanes. Eventually, the beasthandlers succeeded with the ontra as well, developing new hybrids perfectly suited to life in the desert – the

two-humped batra, and the three-humped tatra. Today, the ontra – the one-humped original breed – is bred primarily as a racing animal, rather than for use as a burden beast.

Vitally important both materially and culturally to the Djaffir, aht-ra yield several varieties of milk, hair that is woven into cloth and rope, and leather for sandals, saddlebags, waterskins, tents and fetish masks. Their dried dung is used for cooking fuel. The most essential ability of the aht-ra is its capacity for carrying heavy loads over long distance without water. If it weren't for the aht-ra, the Djaffir could not practice their nomadic lifestyle in the scorching Red Desert.

The Kasmir of the Seven Kingdoms – hated rivals of the Djaffir – are obsessed with obtaining aht-ra breeding stock, especially the multi-humped varieties. To maintain their monopoly, Djaffir merchants sell only gelded male animals. Breeding females are the heart of the herd, and are never sold. Foreigners who obtain aht-ra breeding stock are hunted down, even if the Caliph has to call on all of the tribes to do so.

Djaffir Customs

Destiny. The Djaffir do not practice any form of organized religion, but all pay homage to Destiny, who is also known as the "Spirit of the Desert." The nomads maintain that one's fate is fixed, and cannot be altered – trying to thwart Destiny is sacrilege, certain to bring a quick end to one's existence (as evidenced by the eternal sandstorm at El Hasa).

Fetish Masks. According to the nomads, "the face mirrors the soul." In order to conceal their thoughts, they wear the famed Djaffir fetish masks. Besides being a protective device against hostile magic and a psychological crutch, a Djaffir's mask records his lineage and certifies him as a family member.

The nomads receive their first masks at birth, and grow up psychologically dependent on them. Djaffir *cannot* unmask in the presence of strangers. If they must eat in public, they push the mask out from their chin and lift the food or beverage up behind it.

Djaffir do not remove their masks to sleep, but they do remove them briefly in order to wash their faces. Nomad women decorate their masks with dangling ornaments of gold and silver which mark the number of children they have born and the size of their husband's herd.

Djaffir seldom reveal their faces even to close family members – including their wives and paramours. The exception is the ceremony known as "Dab Fez," meaning eternal friendship. Having viewed the freely revealed face of another Djaffir, a nomad is pledged to protect that person as he would his own father, even to the extent of giving his own life.

Hospitality. Djaffir treat their guests with as much respect and generosity as they can. The poorest nomad would slaughter his last animal to feed visitors, even if it means that his family must go hungry. Honored male guests are invited to share a cup of mochan with the men of the family. When the mochan ceremony is complete, the callers are considered members of the family, and can expect shelter from the desert and protection from their enemies while within these tents.

Justice. The sheik is the judge of all crimes in his tribe, responsible to determine guilt or innocence and set a blood price. His decisions cannot be appealed. When tribes dispute, the sheiks bring their controversy before the Caliph, who is expected to render an unbiased arbitration.

Djaffir law is based entirely upon tradition, the chief of which is the principle of "bayir beshal" or blood price – that acts of violence or destruction, including murder, can be atoned for with money. Payment is expected in aht-ra, although coins will be grudgingly accepted – the best recompense of all is to surrender a particularly winsome concubine. A family is responsible for its members, so if the criminal cannot meet a blood price, his relatives must pay. Djaffir unable to pay the price of atonement

become the slaves of those they committed crimes against, a servitude which lasts for a length of time set by the sheik.

Each group of foreigners traveling across Djaffa is considered by the Djaffir to be a sort of family, and if a foreigner is convicted of a crime, the guilt also tarnishes all members of his party. Non-Djaffir who cannot pay a blood price do not always become slaves – they may be imprisoned, mutilated, or tortured, all as warnings for future strangers who may enter the land of the Djaffir.

Sons and Fathers. The care of Djaffir animals is performed by each family's youngest son, who is traditionally trained as a *beasthandler*. By contrast, the oldest son inherits the family's herd – by tending the herd, the youngest brother increases the wealth of his senior sibling.

At the end of each year, a beasthandler must be given an aht-ra mare by his master. After several decades, he may have enough animals to start his own herd. In the meantime, the beasthandler is virtually a servant of his master (usually his own father or older brother), stranded on the bottom rung of Djaffir society.

Second sons are expected to learn wizardry and become seers, able to divine the location of water and fashion fetish masks. The best mages are appropriated by the sheiks and the Caliph, but all share positions of honor and respect – and little wealth. For one to consult the wizard of another family is a tremendous insult to the family's seer.

The middle sons enjoy more freedom than the despised youngest sons, but still receive no inheritance from their father. In the hope of starting their own herds, most join with bandit tribes, hoping to build up a fortune which can be exchanged for aht-ra breeding stock or used to buy a place in a merchant tribe. In extreme cases, sons may abandon their nomadic lifestyle to seek employment in foreign lands as desert guides or mercenaries.

The Unmasked. A Djaffir may lose his fetish mask, becoming one of the Unmasked, in two ways: theft or expulsion. Stealing a fetish mask is a crime more heinous than murder – no Djaffir would do such a thing. If caught, the thief is blinded with heated daggers and sent screaming into the desert to die.

A male Djaffir who has lost his mask to enemies or thieves must wear a bright red mask – known as the *Mask of Humiliation* – until a new fetish can be made for him. (If a woman's mask is stolen, the shame is her husband's. If she is unmarried, the father bears the shame.) During this period (which can last several weeks), the victim's family is ritually unclean. No one speaks with them or visits their pavilions. The Unmasked can avenge themselves only by personally catching and slaying the thieves, if they can.

The other way to lose a mask is to have it taken away by the order of the Caliph. This action is taken not as punishment for a crime, but as an ultimate judgment of the victim's lack of worth. These Unmasked may be mentally unstable or guilty of acts of extreme violence. These Unmasked are chased from their tribes in flurries of stones and aht-ra dung. They no longer

have a nation or a family. The expelled often develop paranoia, depression or uncontrollable rage. Most submit themselves to Destiny and wander into the desert, where they seek a quick but painful death.

Women and Marriage. Djaffir females have few privileges, and are regarded as possessions rather than people. They own nothing except their fetish mask, and are considered merely part of their husband's household. Djaffir men often unwittingly insult the females of other races by seemingly inconsiderate treatment.

Djaffir fathers decide who their daughters will marry. The prospective husband approaches a girl's father, offering a dowry of beasts and money. Hagglng between the two men may go on for days or weeks, after which the men petition the sheik to pronounce the couple married. The actual ritual is not elaborate – it more resembles a business transaction than a wedding ceremony.

Djaffir wives are expected to care for children and perform household duties during the day, and to entertain their husbands through song, dance and intimacies during the evening. Young girls are encouraged to excel at artistic talents, which give the father a reason to ask for a higher dowry.

Most Djaffir men are content with two wives, but they may have as many wives as they can afford. Those who cannot afford a dowry join the bandits and steal foreign brides.

The Yitek and the Djaffir

Having lost their homeland in the Great Disaster, the ancient Yitek resorted to thievery to survive. Roaming the Wilderlands of Zaran and its surrounding regions, they became a race of nomadic tomb-robbers. Nearly everyone who comes into contact with the Yitek develops a deep loathing toward them, detecting an aura of "uncleanness" about them.

The Yitek's gruesome occupation is partially the cause of this, but their total lack of etiquette – including an unwholesome sense of humor – contributes to their rejection by the other races.

Nevertheless, the merchants of Djaffa long ago reached an understanding with the Yitek. They receive rare and valuable artifacts from the tomb-robbers, which they sell to collectors for exorbitant prices. In exchange, the Yitek demand supplies and burden beasts, and the right of first excavation at any ruin discovered in Djaffa.

The Spiritsingers. The Yitek claim to feel that riches buried with the dead are of no use to them, and should be retrieved for the living. Even so, they realize that their thefts corrupt the sanctity of burial grounds.

Most of the tomb-robbers fear eventual retribution from Death and angry spirits. They call upon the *Spiritsingers* to appease Death, and to protect them from malignant spiritforms.

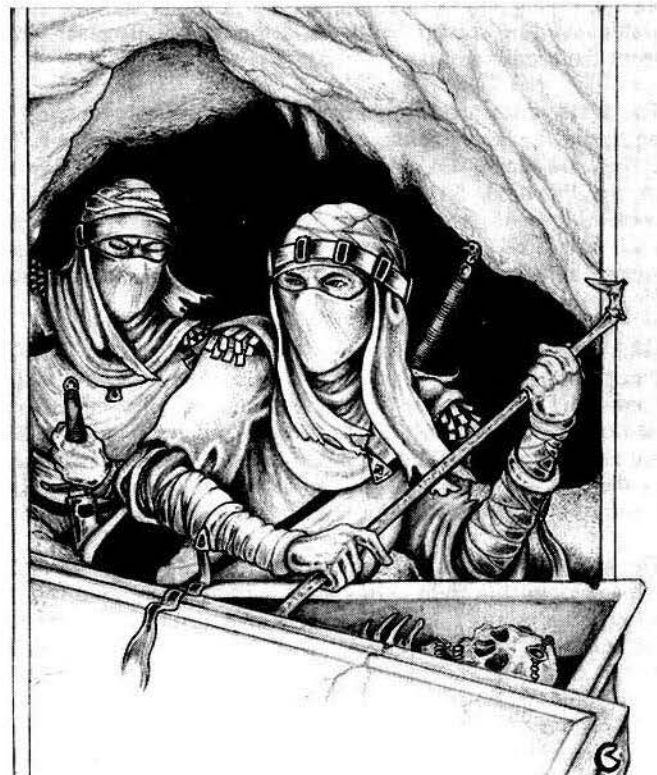
Yitek Spiritsingers are easily recognized by the black-and-white pigments which they apply to their exposed face and hands, so that they resemble the unliving as closely as possible. They claim to have been "touched" by Death, and thus be able to commune with spirits and shadow forms.

Spiritsingers are adept at detecting and removing curses and maledictions, and can also fashion charms and talismans to protect their people from such dire imprecations. They etch

their necromantic spells into bones, and wear them or carry them in bags guarded with seals and sigils.

Their close association with entities from the Gray Sphere causes most Spiritsingers to become emotionally unstable. Their unrestrained use of k'tallah and kesh also contributes to a tendency to be erratic. Many of these Yitek crave solitude, and wander alone in the desert for weeks or months at a time.

Spiritsingers are often found in the Temut, where they guard the tombs of the Djaffir. The duneships of Carantheum sometimes journey here looking for the strange clerics, in order to have them perform some spirit-warding task for a wealthy Dracartan.



RAJANISTAN

The Kingdom of Rajanistan is an arid, desolate land, where hot desert winds sweep brown sand against the wall of the Jade Mountains. The Quan Empire lies over the mountains to the east, and Faradun beyond the mountains to the south. To the north is the Wilderlands of Zaran, an ineffectual buffer zone between Rajanistan and its sworn enemy, Carantheum.

Little grows in this parched expanse of sand and grit – even the mountains are mostly devoid of plant-life. Only the briarbrush, various nettles, the kalwhit (a furry cactus, from which the Rajans get the flax to weave their ornamental garrote-cords), and the oddity known as the Arborvoir thrive in the sun-drenched soil. Plants also cluster around the waterholes which speckle the land. This is where the Rajan palm is found, as well as the water-hoarding sponge-bristle, and the long knife-grass which feeds the tribal herds.

The waterholes are life-givers, providing refreshment for the equus, aht-ra, land lizards, ovuhz and Rajans themselves. The springs are inconstant, and may spew sweet water one day and be dry the next. Sometimes the water turns foul, tainted by something beneath the desert. Tribesmen must test the springs each day to be sure the water is good – if the supply stays poisoned, they have no choice but to move their camp and look for another.

Without the waterholes, few would live in Rajanistan. Although not all of the land is sand – mountains tower in the east, flanked by rocky wastelands and desolate foothills – there is no part of Rajanistan which is not a desert. The few rivers and lakes are extremely seasonal, and spend most of the year as parched as the rest of the terrain. The environment is perfect for Sand Demons and Desert Kra, but not for many other forms of life.

The Mountain Ranges. The rocky barrier of the southern mountains blocks the rainstorms of Faradun from entering the desert. The rain that falls among the southern peaks of the Jade Mountains is locked for most of the year in ice caps. At the height of the month called Phandir the ice melts, inundating the southernmost portion of the desert with flood-waters. The water is gone as swiftly as it arrives, draining into the sand or down cracks in the fractured mountains. The southern mountains also shelter gold veins which the Shadinn mine – when the Crested Dragons who lair here allow them to, that is.

The northern range of the Jade Mountains likewise reaches high into the sky, preventing wind-blown sand from escaping this jealous country. Satada lurk beneath these mountains, and small tribes of Saurans live among the most northern peaks, raiding the Vird settlements nearby.

Earthquakes frequently rock Rajanistan, sending stones tumbling from the crags. However, unlike the Volcanic Hills, there are no volcanic eruptions here to trigger the quakes. Necromancers of the Black Mystic Cult like to claim that the proto-Necromancer Urmaan causes the events. "The dire consequences of his conversations with Death will eventually shake all of Talislanta," the Rajans say.

Land of the Necromancers

According to the ancient records which scholars have been able to assemble, Rajanistan was once a grassy steppeland, the pastureland for ancient Ashann and Sharna. The Great Disaster changed all of this, creating a desert chiefly inhabited by sand demons and sand-burrowing predators.

In the early post-Disaster years, the Rajans were nomads who ranged the steppes east of the Volcanic Hills. In the centuries before the founding of Phaedra, the barbaric Mazdak tribes created an empire, conquering all who stood in their way. A race known as the Kang fled to the steppes, driving the Rajans out. The squabbling nomad tribes were defeated one by one, then driven west into desolate regions where the Kang would not follow – modern Rajanistan.

The Rajans of those early centuries were broken down into distinct sub-racial tribes, just as they are today. The refugees from the east included the self-styled "pure" **Rajans** (sometimes known as the **Rajanin**, to distinguish their sub-race from the greater race of all Rajans); the **Zagir**, a short and wiry breed; the **Aramut**, a short, deep-chested people; and the despised mongrel race known as the **Virds**, a mixture of Rajan and other races. Members of a fifth Rajan race, the **Shadinn**, were already present in the region when the newcomers arrived.

The **Rajanin** settled the slopes of the Jade Mountains, taking possession of the Springs of Irdan. They cultivated the Rajan palm, making it into the staple food of tribesman and beast, and thereby avoiding the food shortages which plagued the other Rajans. Meanwhile, the **Zagir** took to the heights of the Jade Mountains, determined to live where no one would drive them out. The **Aramut**, driven south by Sauran raids, settled the lowlands beneath the peaks chosen by the **Zagir**. This left only the despised **Virds** in the north, plagued by Sauran raiders and **Za** bandits, but prevented by the other Rajans from migrating south. The **Shadinn** remained in their lands, battling all comers for mastery of the gold mines of the southern mountains.

The prosperous **Rajanins** turned to war, and proved quite good at it. They allied with the **Shadinn** in several expeditions against Farad-hired mercenary raiders, and then, emboldened by success, launched a war to conquer **Zagiran**. By the end of the third century, the **Zagir** forts were under **Rajanin** control.

Urmaan the Necromancer. During the next century, the **Rajans** were hard pressed to hold onto their possessions, let alone conquer new ones. There was no uniting tie among the **Rajans**, leading to troublesome revolts by the **Aramut** and **Zagir**, and intrigues between the chieftains of the **Rajanin**.

In the year 390, a **Rajanin** named **Urmaan** rose to power. A mystic, he had ventured alone into the mountains in search of wisdom. He returned as the master of a powerful new field of magic – **Necromancy**. With the aid of followers trained in the **Necromantic** arts, he made himself ruler of the **Rajanins**.

Urmaan's goal was the unification of all of the **Rajan** tribes under his rule. In 395, he treacherously attacked and defeated his **Shadinn** allies. Fielding an army of **Zagir**, **Aramut** and **Shadinn** warriors, **Urmaan's** conquest of **Virdistan** was anticlimactic. A united **Rajanistan** was born.

The **Necromancer** decreed that the **Rajanin** homestead of Irdan should be made into a mighty fortress, and drafted laborers from the subject tribes for the task. Then, bored with inactivity, **Urmaan** gathered his nomads and flung them against the wealthy northern Kingdom of **Carantheum**. Forewarned by **Djaffir** scouts, the **Dracartans** used **Thaumaturgy** and their **duneship** fleet to rout **Urmaan's** forces.

Urmaan vowed revenge, but without success – he disappeared shortly afterward, never to be seen again. Some speculate that the **Dracartans** arranged for his death, and others theorize that in his desperation for revenge, the **Necromancer** made a pact with forces which were beyond his control.

Rise of the Cult. With Urmaan's death, no one was clearly in charge of the kingdom. The tribesmen grew restless, troubled by the repulsive Necromantic arts now that their charismatic Necromancer-King was no longer there to quiet their fears.

Arjan, one of the Necromancers trained by Urmaan, stepped into the gap. To the superstitious Rajans, he proclaimed that Urmaan had departed to confer with the entity known as Death, seeking advice on how to rule all of Talislanta. Arjan then formed the Black Mystic Cult of Death, which became instantly popular with the Urmaan-idolizing nomads. The Necromancers became the priests of the cult, and Arjan became the first mystic ruler of Rajanistan, the *Khadun*.

The Cult tried once more to conquer Carantheum, launching a determined assault in the year 500. The Dracartans defeated the Rajan army once more, capturing the Khadun (Thados, the second to rule Rajanistan) and immersing him while still alive in liquified red-iron. His remains are on permanent display in Dracarta's Hall of Infamy.

Rajanistan remains an enemy of Carantheum, and its warriors and agents constantly slip across the border to raid their Red Desert nemesis. The Khadun hungers to crush his mortal enemy once and for all, and frequently hatches fiendish plots intended to weaken the Dracartans so that the Rajan army can invade and conquer.

Rajanistan Today

Rajanistan remains much as it has always been: a wind-swept desert roamed by fierce and unyielding tribes of nomads. The only difference today is that everything is under the control of the Khadun and his Cult. The Rajans are more than obedient – under the tutoring of the Necromancers, they have become fanatical devotees of Death, eager to lay down their lives at the Khadun's command.

This is a land hostile to outsiders. While the tribes still harbor ancient rivalries, all Rajans have been taught that unbelievers are the first enemy – and that converts are made by sending souls to Death. Travelers who pass through Rajanistan and escape are few, outnumbered by the dead and those taken to toil in the gold mines.

The nomadic lifestyle is an almost self-sufficient one – nearly everything a Rajan needs can be supplied by his tribe. This is fortunate, since trade is forbidden with Rajanistan's neighbors to the northwest, the Dracartans and the Djaffir. However, nomads in need of foreign goods (such as black iron for weapons, Djaffir aht-ra or Danuvian grain) are encouraged to take what they want by force. Rajans raiding north of their desolate border endanger trade and travel throughout the length of the Wilderlands Road.

Victims of Rajan raids are typically slain, unless they are strong enough to survive the trek south to the mines of Shadinnar. Djaffir and Dracartans who are captured alive face an even worse fate. The Khadun has declared that they are to be brought to the Death-Cult for ritual torture. One out of every ten prisoners ("Death's tithe") is sent on to Irdan for the honor of being killed slowly – or to suffer lifelong torture – by the Torquar, the assassins of the Khadun.

Rajanistan's only ally is Faradun. The mercantilists bring in goods otherwise unavailable here, such as magical items from Cymril, Arimite black iron, Djaffir aht-ra, and grains from Aaman. The Farad also sell slaves to the Shadinn. The returning caravans are laden with gold wrested from the slopes of the

mountains of Shadinnar. The mercantilists dislike dealing with the mercurial Rajans, and make up for this by charging enormous prices for their imports (4 x standard). The Rajans likewise despise the Farad as unbelievers, but know that their services are indispensable if the Death-Cult is to prevail.

The Rule of the Khadun

The Khadun is the absolute ruler of Rajanistan, the tribal chief of the Rajanins, and the master of the Black Mystic Cult. He rules through the Necromancer-Priests, and his orders are obeyed instantly by the fanatical tribesmen.

The tribes of Rajan technically enjoy a high degree of autonomy, but in practice they willingly prostrate themselves beneath the iron rule of the Khadun. Although each tribe is led by one of its own members, and supposedly is allowed to follow its own traditions of custom and justice, the Khadun's wishes are made known and enforced by a Necromancer-Priest sent as his representative (the "Legate of Death").

The Holy City of Irdan is a special exception. Although the Rajanin tribe has authority here, the Black Mystic Cult rules the city directly. All disputes are brought to the Necromancer-Priests for judgment, and punishments are meted out by the Khadun's Torquar executioners.

The laws of the Khadun are repressive in the extreme, intended to toughen the Rajans for the harsh war of conquest which will someday be unleashed. Fighting among tribesmen is punished with the amputation of their sword-hands, unless self-defense can be proved. Other criminals receive similar surgery: loss of the tongue (liars and perjurers), a thumb (thieves), an eye (voyeurs), and so on. Voyeurism and adultery are considered especially reprehensible crimes, and are punished strictly according to ancient tradition.

Those accused of treason or heresy are given to the Torquar for inquisitory torture. If the process reveals that the subject is innocent, the accuser is tortured in his place. The penalty for those convicted of these crimes is torture for the rest of the victim's life – and the Torquar are adept at keeping their captives alive for many years.

The Current Khadun. The Necromancer Amraam has been the ruler of Rajanistan for the last 30 years. Disciplined by the long hours of study necessary to succeed at difficult magics, the Khadun is a patient man. Whenever he considers the Dracartan enemy to the north, he controls his ire by remembering that Death is eternally patient, so he must be as well.

The majority of his time, when not keeping control over his people, is spent plotting against the Kingdom of Carantheum. Amraam has seen Dracarta grow ever more wealthy over the span of his long life, and this secretly pleases him – eventually, he believes, the accursed Dracartans will grow complacent in their riches, mistaking the dormant Army of Rajanistan for a necklace about the throat of Irdan.

Until the Dracartans show this weakness, the Khadun is content to turn the killing spirit of his followers elsewhere – Rajan raiding parties now strike into Djaffa and the Quan Empire as often as they venture within Carantheum. This warns the strangers away from Rajan sands, and sends a false message of security to the Dracartans.

When all is ready, Amraam's plan of attack will be put into action. Spies, magic and other methods will be used to convince the Za of the Wilderlands that the Dracartans have kidnapped

the *Tirshata*, their semi-legendary ruler. This will begin a carefully orchestrated wave of terror and assassination through the cities of the desert, which will have no apparent connection with the Rajans. At the height of the confusion, the Army of Rajanistan will advance and exterminate Carantheum forever.

Amraam's chosen successor is the Necromancer Sadaarm, who now serves as his chief advisor. Sadaarm is not the oldest, wisest or most powerful of the Necromancers, but he possesses the mixture of patience and cunning which a Khadun requires. If anything, Sadaarm is more Death-like than Amraam: cold, measured and utterly resolute.

The People of Rajanistan

The Rajan race is marked by diabolical facial features, dark skin tone (usually dark brown, sometimes black), blood-red eyes, and horn-like protrusions on forehead and chin. The tribesmen are thin-fleshed, with muscles laid compactly over their bones – a fat Rajan is an impossibility. They have very little hair, chiefly on their scalps and in their sparse beards.

How the tribesmen of Rajanistan inherited such characteristics is beyond the knowledge of modern sages. Some speculate that the race may have had an infusion of Shaitanic blood in ancient times, perhaps as part of a Quaranian experiment. At any rate, they are definitely not one of the races of Men.

Considering the Rajanin as the "pure" race, the other tribes each differ more or less from the standard Rajan pattern. The Zagir tend to be short and even more wiry, with a natural talent for contortionism, while the deep-chested Aramut have a darker skin tone.

The most unusual of the Rajans are the towering Shadinn, distinguished by their powerful builds, clawed feet and hands, and gigantic stature. Some Necromancers believe the Shadinn to be living proof of Quaranian experiments to crossbreed Rajans with Kharakhan Giants to produce a superior warrior.

The Virds may not be Rajans at all, although they claim descent from Rajan progenitors in the distant past. Individual Virds vary greatly in their features, reflecting the variety of races involved in their parentage. Though they lack the horns of the Rajans, the Virds have blood-red eyes and skin of the same color and texture as their countrymen. The Necromancers think that the Virds may have been created by Quaranian experiments as well, perhaps being crossbred stock that degenerated – the clawed hands and feet of both Shadinn and Vird are evidence which seems to support this theory.

Neither the Shadinn nor the Virds care about the origin of their sub-race, or about whatever non-Rajan races they may be kin to. They follow only the Khadun, and remain willing to send *all* non-believers to Death.

The Black Mystic Cult

The official religion of Rajanistan is the Death-Cult. Started by the Necromancer-Priest Arjan after Urmaan's disappearance, it has replaced all of the tribes' nebulous former beliefs and now stands unchallenged as the universal religion.

The tribesmen always held a confident attitude about death, holding that it was better to die bravely than to fear. When Arjan declared that Urmaan had gone to confer with the mysterious power identified as Death, the Rajans accepted the story as



an act of bravado – a sign that Death would reward those unafraid of meeting him. Urmaan was especially brave, since he went to meet Death while still alive. The audacity of the idea caught on with the tribesmen, and they adopted the attitude as their own: Death was not to be feared, but revered.

One of the important functions of the Black Mystic Cult is to make the Khadun's will promptly known throughout Rajanistan. To accomplish this, the Cult maintains a network of Torquar riders who take the Khadun's proclamations to the Legates of Death, and from them to individual Necromancer-Priests. Especially important messages may be carried by dragon-riding Necromancers, when time is crucial. The messengers refuse to speak their information to anyone but the recipient, and would gladly die to protect the Khadun's word.

Followers of Urmaan. All of the tribesmen of Rajanistan are members of the Black Mystic Cult. The most important tenet of the Cult is unswerving obedience to Death's will as made known through Death's avatar, the Khadun. Willingness to obey is reinforced through the teachings of the Necromancer-Priests, who instruct Rajans from birth in the fanatic belief. Obedience must be unquestioning. Those whose trust in Death is less than total must seal their lips, for those tribesmen who waver may be given to the Torquar – providing an example for others of the true appreciation of Death.

The favored way of paying homage to Death is to kill non-believers, which is said to convert them to his worship. Few people of other races ever convert willingly to the Rajan religion. The Necromancer-Priests explain that this is because only the tribesman of Rajanistan can face Death. Other races fear Death and seek to avoid him, which angers the deity.

Rajans do not attend regular worship services. Every two weeks, all who are not engaged in necessary tasks are expected to attend catechism sessions where doctrines are taught. There are a few rites and rituals: the torture and execution of captives (a combination of tribal entertainment and a demonstration to instill fear of the Torquar), special announcements from the Khadun, and the morbid week-long celebration of Pandaemonium which culminates in the Dance of Death.

The trappings of Death are highly favored by the Rajans, and appear everywhere – cooking pots are carved into the form of skulls, and weapon hilts imitate bones. A blood-like pigment is used to stain many articles of clothing. However, the Followers of Urmaan do not have idols or icons – they believe that Death's true form has only been seen by those who have met him. Talismans of Death are permitted, but each must show a different aspect of Death. Only the death-masks of the Necromancers are allowed to be uniform in design.

All Undead are revered by the Followers of Urmaan, since they are visible manifestations of Death's will – they could not walk the land unless Death willed it. Common Rajans are forbidden to disturb or deter "Death's children," and most are so awestricken at the appearance of the Walking Dead that they kneel and shut their eyes.

The worst penalty a Follower of Urmaan can suffer is to be pronounced errant, having strayed from the path shown by Urmaan. A tribesman accused of this is expelled from the Cult and sentenced to the *Living Death*: torture at the hands of the Torquar. Those doomed to this fate are kept in exquisite pain . . . and the Torquar are adept at keeping their victims alive for decades. In the end, the victim longs for Death, pleads for release from pain, and thus acquires a proper appreciation for Death.

The Rajanin

With a long tradition of involvement in sorcery, the Rajanins are the only Rajans allowed to fill the clerical ranks of the Black Mystic Cult, including the office of the Khadun. Rajanistan is ruled by the Rajanins. Since the Cult exerts a homogenizing influence throughout Rajanistan, the culture and lifestyle of the Rajanins has increasingly been imposed on the other tribes of Rajans. Therefore, what is said below about the Rajanin tribe is often true about the others, except where specific exceptions are noted.

The Land of Irdan. The tribal land of the Rajanins is a strip of dusty wasteland which lies along the western flank of the main range of the Jade Mountains. Patches of knife-grass in the wastes mark the locations of variable springs, which often provide cold, pure water supplied by the ice-capped peaks nearby. Inexplicably, the verminous Satada have never been seen in this part of Rajanistan.

What attracted the nomads to this land was the rare stretch of grassland immediately adjacent to Irdan Mountain. The mountain gives birth to springs which have never run dry, and provides irrigation water for orchards of Rajan palm, the staple food-plant of the kingdom. The Holy City of Irdan is built on the lower slopes of Irdan Mountain, and presides majestically over the lowlands.

Most Rajanins live near the City of Irdan, although seldom within buildings – they prefer to dwell in tents pitched within the walls of the fortress. These tents are sturdy, easily-pitched structures sized for a single family. Most Rajanins tend orchards and animals, providing food for the tribe. Others serve as servants to the Black Mystic Cult, and some work as journeymen enchanters, fashioning enchanted and non-magical talismans.

All Rajans keep herds of ovuhz, the primary food animals of Rajanistan. Every day, young Rajanins drive the herds from the gates of Irdan to feeding grounds beyond the army encampments, being careful to avoid mingling their ovuhz with those of other families. The Rajanins also maintain military herds of land lizards, aht-ra and greymanes, and are the only Rajans who routinely master the riding of more than one type of mount.

Families. Rajanin tribal society is patriarchal, extending from the ultimate patriarch – the Khadun – to clan chieftains, family patriarchs, heads of households, and then the individual warriors. The basic unit of society is the extended family. Families pitch their tents together, and each tribesman acquires a tent for his wife and children as soon as he can afford it. Bloodlines are traced through the male members of the family. Daughters are considered temporary members of a family, for when they wed, they become members of the groom's family. As recompense for the loss, the bride's family is paid a dowry by the new husband's family.

Males are viewed as inherently superior to females (Rajanins find the conceits of the Danuvian swordswomen laughable). The role of a wife is to uncomplainingly support her husband and offspring. Women weave the elaborate Rajanin costume: a loose-fitting garment, bound at the ankles and wrists by cords woven from the fibers of the Rajan palm-leaf, plus a grey cape and a veiled turban. The only social concession is to recognize that even women can serve Death – Rajanin females are adept at the use of the dagger and the palm-fiber garotte.

Law and Custom. The Black Mystic Cult hears all disputes among the Rajanins, and exacts the Khadun's justice. It is the Cult's will that forbids Rajans from showing their faces to

strangers. For men, this means veiling when outside of one's tribal lands. Women must be veiled whenever they leave their husband's tent. The Rajanins vary the custom, veiling their faces whenever they venture out of the holy city. Conversely, the Shadinns veil their faces in reverence when visiting Irdan.

The Rajanins chafe under the Khadun's proscription against fighting. In former times, disputes were settled by having each side send a champion into the arena – the surviving warrior would decide the question. Now, duels of honor can be conducted only with the approval of the Necromancer-Priests.

Customs. The Rajanins are obsessed with maintaining their dominance over the other Rajans. The tribesmen pride themselves on their fighting skills, but ultimate self-respect rests on their mastery of the arcane arts. Not every tribesman can cast a spell, but most have access to enchanted talismans which can trick a superstitious Shadinns or Aramut into believing that a Rajanin can work magic. Other Rajanins bluff, using talismans which have no efficacy at all – most Rajans can't tell the difference. The talismans worn by a Rajanin account for much of his sorcerous reputation.

Associated with the drive to maintain their tribe's honor is the Rajanin emphasis on dignity. Keeping one's honor is all-important – the tribesmen never forgive an insult, take offense easily, and barrage the Necromancer-Priests with petitions requesting permission to duel their adversaries.

The Rajanins have an unusual attitude concerning their dead. Upon death, they claim, the spirit goes to serve Death, and the body left behind is a husk unworthy of regard. Burials are made in unmarked graves in the desert, and the bodies are interred without clothing or belongings.

The Shadinns

The Shadinns wandered into this land, displacing villages of Yitek scavengers, long before the other Rajans arrived. Shortly after discovering the gold fields, they found themselves the target of every petty kingdom and mercenary band in the region. The Shadinns population was declining steadily, due to the constant fighting, until Urmaan united Rajanistan and drove off the bandits.

Shadinns are in southernmost Rajanistan, surrounded on three sides by mountains. Every spring, the country undergoes a trial unknown elsewhere in the Desert Kingdoms. Rising temperatures melt the snowcaps of the Jade Mountains, and water roars out of the canyons and into the desert. The Shadinns migrate into the deep desert during the month of Phandir to avoid being caught in the flash floods.

The annual floods brings fortune in two forms. Chunks of gold wash down from the slopes with the water, and can be found in the silted flats below the mountains after the water subsides. The water also soaks the desert depths, triggering the growth of deep-rooted briar bushes from one side of Shadinns to the other. Herds of land lizards feed on the plants, and in turn are preyed upon by both Desert Kra and Shadinns.

The mineral wealth of the mountains and the plentiful herds in this part of the desert enrich the Shadinns. The gold ore is traded to the Farad for black iron, which the tribal smiths use to fashion weapons, armor and war-towers. The tribesmen would be content with this abundance, but the Khadun is not. Therefore, the Shadinns operate mining camps to wrest more of the precious mineral from the rocks, then send it to Irdan to be added to the hoard in the Khadun's Tower. Slaves bought from

the Farad or captured by raiders toil in the mining pits, and are sent to retrieve gold from the silt flats after the Phandir floods. The giants oversee the mining slaves, disdaining to work beneath the ground themselves.

The Shadinns excel at the training of land lizards as combat mounts – no mean feat, when the beasts' natural lack of aggression is considered. The animals are more than steeds to the Shadinns. Lizard hide is used as armor, clothing and barding, and the belly skin is made into leather for saddles, reins, tents and water-bottles. Land-lizard meat is a staple of the Shadinns diet, and the bones, reinforced with bands of black iron, are used in weapons – the handle of the Shadinns Execution Axe is a land-lizard leg bone.

Tribal Government. The Shadinns, like the other non-Rajanin tribes, are ruled by a chieftain and a tribal council. The council consists of representatives from all of the major families, and selects a tribal ruler based on the criteria of strength and cunning. The chieftain interprets and enforces justice, adhering both to tribal traditions and the law of the Khadun. His autonomy is limited by the authority of the Legate of Death, a Necromancer-Priest who locally represents the Khadun. The Legate must ratify all tribal judgments, and on his word, a chieftain can be deposed.

Slavery. The Shadinns are the only Rajans who keep slaves. These wretches, purchased from the Farad or captured on raids, are worked until they die from their labors. At night, they are chained within stockades. Males and females are treated alike – scourged by their Shadinns overseers when they rebel, and whipped only less severely when they do obey. Next to suffering Living Death at the hands of the Torquar, being a Shadinns slave is the worst fate foreigners can suffer in Rajanistan.

Slaves who manage to escape are mercilessly tracked down by overseers and drac-handlers, even beyond the boundaries of Rajanistan. A Shadinns Overseer is shamed if his charges gain their freedom, and cannot redeem himself until they are recaptured. Returned slaves are never given the honor of death, but must be taken to the mines to earn it for themselves.

Customs. The Rajanins say that where they have one taboo, the Shadinns have two – and twice as many rituals to go with them. Each individual giant and most of their families have their own particular vows. Most of these are trivial: to only drink from one's own water bottle, to avoid looking strangers in the eye, fasting for good fortune, eating only with one hand, and so on.

The worst thing which a Shadinns can do is to fail at his assigned duty, whatever that may be. To atone for his failure, a shamed Shadinns must spend a day and a night alone in the deep desert. The tribesman must also do whatever he can to avenge his misdeed, guided by the council of his chieftain. This taboo colors the psychology of the giants – the Shadinns live in fear of failure.

Shadinns males dress in loose-fitting pantaloons, sandals, capes and veiled turbans. Their females wreath themselves in voluminous skirts and veils, concealing their forms as an act of modesty.

The giants formerly worshipped their ancestors, but now faithfully venerate Death and serve the Khadun. Unlike the other Rajans, however, the Shadinns inter their dead in stone caskets on the mountainsides – complete with arms and armor, to save Death the trouble of providing for them. The Yitek, who hate the Shadinns, love to plunder the mountain crypts, selling the richly-decorated artifacts to the Djaffir. For these crimes, the Shadinns despise the Yitek above all others.

The giants view the other Rajans as inferior, less devoted to the welfare of Death than they are. Rajanins are feared for their magical powers, and the Khadun is adored as Death's prophet.

The Zagir

Zagiran stretches northeast of Irdan in central Rajanistan, and includes much of the northern range of the Jade Mountains. While the Aramut live on the plains, the Zagir chose to live amid the heights of their mountains.

They claim that their life is the hardest of any tribesmen in Rajanistan. There are few resources among the arid peaks – the mountains are high, steep and unforgiving. In the season of Median, the twin suns scorch the land mercilessly, and cold air from the heights of Faradun freezes Zagiran in the winter. There are no dependable springs, and the available water is tainted with foul-tasting minerals. Because of the shortage of sweet water, mature sponge-bristle plants are greatly valued by the Zagir. The tribesmen are primarily foot-nomads, since the steep slopes of the Jade Mountains are ill-suited to riding.

Zagir dress consists of oversized blouses and pantaloons, bound by cords at the joints to allow freedom of movement. Ankle-high boots and a veiled turban complete their apparel. They prefer to wear colors which blend in with their environment – drab browns and greys.

The Clans. Like all Rajans, the Zagir believe in the importance of the extended family. Among the mountaineers, however, the family is virtually the only social unit. Each clan lives apart from the others, and looks upon the others with thinly veiled suspicion. Before Urmaan unified all of Rajanistan, the Zagir clans constantly fought among themselves. Under the reign of the Necromancer-Priests, the mountaineers are permitted only to shout themselves hoarse at one another during the semi-annual meetings of their tribal council.

The Zagir are hunters and shepherds, living entirely off the animals which eke out an existence in the highland meadows. The ovuhz, which adapt well to mountain life, are their main herd animals, but domesticated dracs fill an important role as trackers and guard beasts. Unfortunately for the Zagir, azoryls and Satada also thrive in the mountains.

The tent villages of the mountaineers have one characteristic which marks them as peculiarly Zagir. The settlements are always located close to a hill or other commanding height, where the clansmen erect a crude fortress by dragging boulders into a ring. Since the nomads move their villages every few years, when a region becomes overhunted, the landscape of Zagiran is dotted with abandoned hill forts.

Zagir Beliefs. The Zagir tribe is the smallest of the Rajan tribes. The mountaineers claim that this due to the harsh land they live in, which allows only the strongest and most cautious to survive – mistakes bring Death.

The Zagir appreciated the message taught to them by the Black Mystic Cult, because it fit in so well with their grim philosophy of survival. The idea of Death putting them through trials to prove their worth appealed to them. Suddenly each rock-slide, each stinging windstorm, and each battle against Satada became a test provided by a watching deity. In their view, a tribesman who fails to overcome a peril runs the risk of going to Death before the deity is ready to receive him.

The mountaineering existence also shapes other of the Zagir attitudes toward life. The tribesmen have hunted the Land

Dragons to near-extinction in their land, using only their bows. Zagir archers fire "pain arrows" to get the attention of the slow-witted beasts, then lure the great animals over cliffs or into pit traps. In each hunt the mountaineers gamble their lives, depending on their fellow tribesmen to distract the dragon when it gets too close to them. These hunts teach the Zagir to trust their family members.

The mountaineers of Zagiran spend many days away from their families on lone scouts, scouring the canyons looking for small game or signs of larger prey. They are not allowed to return until they bring food or news of something worthy of a hunting party. The Zagir prize these times of solitude, and consider silence part of their tribal character. They speak as little as possible, even to their children.

Zagir are notoriously suspicious of those not of their own clan, and regard other Rajans with nearly the same contempt as unbelievers. The only exceptions are the Rajanins, whom the mountaineers fear due to their magic, and the Necromancer-Priests, who are welcomed as Death's minions. Their adulation of the Khadun is absolute.

The Aramut

The lowlands of Zagiran, a transition zone between the heights of the Jade Mountains and the brown sands of the Rajan Desert, are the home of the Aramut tribe. Springs are relatively common here, although they are just as inconstant as most water sources in Rajanistan. Also prevalent are manraks, raiding from buried nests in the deep desert, plus Desert Kra and Satada.

The Aramut stay close to the mountains where food is more abundant, constantly moving from one water-hole to another. They travel in large multi-family clans, riding their aht-ra (the only steed which can tolerate long, waterless journeys) and shepherding herds of erds. Their society is divided into two castes: Lancers and Sustainers.

The Lancers. Aramut Lancers are the male warrior-lords of the tribe, and live in elaborate lodge-tents apart from their fellow tribesmen. They do not have wives, but take their pleasure as they please from the women of the tribe. Likewise, the Lancers have nothing to do with their suspected offspring, although an Aramut thought to be a Lancer's child is treated with respect by others in the clan.

The Lancers have one purpose in life: gaining the mastery of the Aramut lance, a long spear crafted from the hollow wing spines of the batranc. The weapon can be used mounted or on foot; one mark of a Lancer's skill is to be able to make the transition from mounted to foot combat smoothly when dismounted by an opponent.

The customs of the Aramut sharply delimit what a Lancer is permitted to do, and what he cannot. Everything revolves around the mission of the warrior-lord as the ultimate warrior. He is expected to practice constantly, and may use no weapon other than the lance. A Lancer may only hunt those beasts which are dangerous, and which are therefore worthy of being fought by a warrior. Mundane tasks, such as preparing food or caring for armor, are forbidden to him.

Young Aramut may become Lancers only if they can succeed in the Games, the tests given to aspiring boys when they reach their thirteenth year. Riding and lance-handling are the two skills essential to passing the trials, which the youths constantly practice whenever they can steal away from their chores.

The Sustainers. By custom, the Lancers are limited in their ability to hunt, and are prohibited from gathering food or caring for animals. The Aramut who perform the mundane tasks of survival, thus allowing the warrior-lords to exist, are the Sustainers. They are by far the majority of the tribesmen.

Those of the highest status are the *Personal Sustainers*, companions to the Lancers. Each warrior-lord may select one Aramut to be his sustainer, often choosing one who failed to become a Lancer but did well in the Games. These Aramut travel with their Lancers, gathering and cooking food, caring for the aht-ra steeds, and so forth. The bond between Lancer and Personal Sustainer is close, but not familiar – the difference in status is never forgotten by the warrior-lords. Personal Sustainers may never sleep in the same tent with their masters, but are expected to camp outside, maintaining guard until morning.

The other Aramut are the serfs of the warrior-lords. These Sustainers tend the erds, search for watering holes, gather the edibles of the desert, and hunt the meat animals which aren't threatening enough to be worthy of the attention of a Lancer.

Aramut Traditions. The harsh life of the Aramut produces a tough people. They are the least excitable of Rajans, displaying few emotions other than a somber determination to survive. The tribesmen scorn the "soft life" of the other tribes, prizing themselves as living closest to the nomadic traditions of the ancestral Rajans.

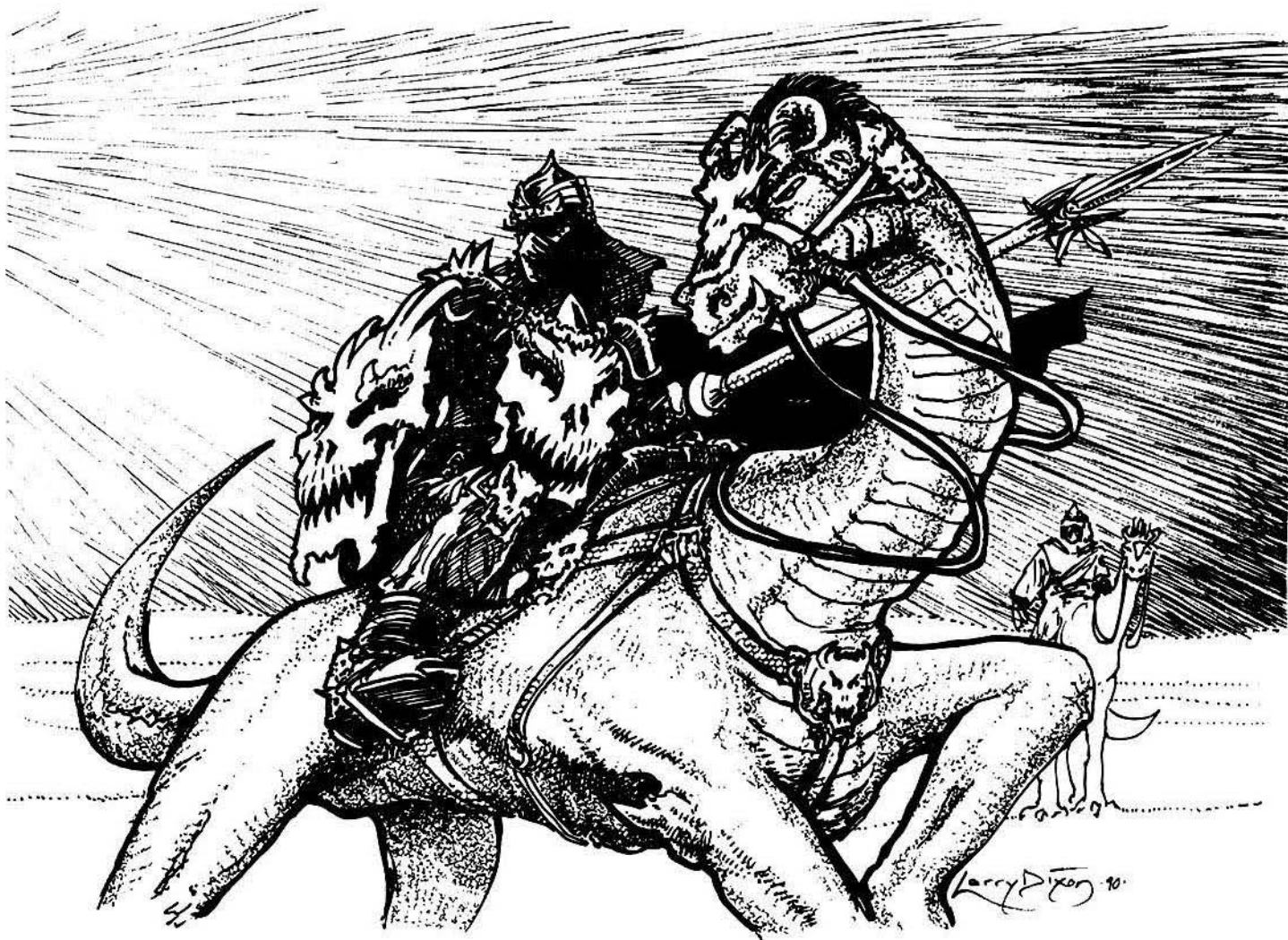
The common Aramut embrace the worship of Death, seeing in it an eventual release from the drudgery of their existence. The Lancers claim to be in the service of Death, since their lives are spent practicing killing. They call their lances "Death's Talons," and relish the chance to fight unbelievers. All Aramut revere the Necromancer-Priests, reinforced by a superstitious fear of magic common even among the warrior-lords.

Sustainers wear robes, blouses and pantaloons of dark grey linen, bound at the wrists and ankles with lengths of cord. The men wear thigh-length boots of land-lizard hide, while the women have boots of ankle-height. Only the women veil themselves, and turbans are worn only when on pilgrimage to Irdan. The Lancers dress much the same, but their blouses (and the chest plates of their armor) are painted with the symbol of the Aramut – a laughing "Death's Skull."

The Virds

Virdistan is a bowl of sandy desert, whipped by sandstorms blown in by winds from the western desert. The only habitable stretch is a highland plateau, ringed by the upper reaches of the Jade Mountains and composed of a tumbled array of tilted plains, thrusting spires and eroded ridges.

Peace is not the natural state of Virdistan – the land juts much farther north than the rest of Rajanistan, pinched between the steppes of the Quan Empire to the east and the Banditlands of



Zaran on the west. The Virds must fight the other races just to survive: Za bandits raid the fields, Araq thieves prey on the herds of erds, Kang raiders probe the defenses of Rajanistan, Sauran tribes migrate from the Volcanic Hills to the peaks of the Jade Mountains, and Satada lurk in subterranean caverns and kidnap the hapless. Opteryx, winged azoryls, omnivrax and wild duadir roam the uplands as well.

Like the other tribes of Rajanistan, the Virds migrate between water sources in pursuit of pure and abundant water. Fortunately, the plateau has bountiful springs, although the water is often brackish and is quite seasonal. Poorer than the other Rajans, the Virds have relatively few steeds of any kind, and most must carry what they possess on their own backs rather than on the backs of animals.

Harems. Among the Virds, a large family equals wealth – the more backs in a family, the more they can carry. This belief encourages Vird men to be polygamous, taking as many wives as they can feed. They have no taboos against concubines from other races. Young Vird warriors climb the mountains to raid Saurans for their fire-gems, in order to purchase female slaves from the Farad, and Vird war parties ambush caravans on the Wilderlands Road in order to claim female captives. Beauty is not an object – no woman is too ugly if she is healthy and can bear children.

A tradition of polygamy and the fierce competition to accumulate the most wives has made the Virds the most populous of all the tribesmen of Rajanistan. The only women they avoid are the females of the Za, whom they consider ritually unclean, as well as – by dictum of the Khadun – the females of the other Rajan tribes.

Vird Fanaticism. The manic Vird devotion to the acquisition of wives pales compared to their dedication to the Death-Cult and the Khadun. When Urmaan conquered Virdistan, the tribesmen expected to be enslaved because of their mixed heritage. Instead, the Necromancer granted the Vird tribe political equality with the other subject Rajan tribes. The Vird clans then pledged themselves to Urmaan and his successors forever, amazed by the honor given them in allowing them to be citizens and fellow followers of Death.

Every message received from the Black Mystic Cult is received in Virdistan with ecstatic religious fervor. The Necromancer-Priests assigned to the Virds must guard their utterances for fear the tribesmen will interpret their words literally, or mistake a ventured opinion for the will of the Khadun. The tribesmen also seek to ingratiate themselves with the sorcerous Rajanins, hoping in this way to gain favor with the Khadun.

The Virds fear (correctly) that the other Rajans despise them for their mixed blood. They are prone to hasty acts of devotion to prove their worth – dying at the Khadun's order is a perfect death to a Vird. They even delight in bright-colored clothing, saying that they are eager to attract the attentions of predators and bandits and thereby have the chance to send them to Death. Virds sneer at the drab clothing of most other Rajans, attributing the wearing of colorless attire to cowardice.

The Army of Rajanistan

The Army of Rajanistan is composed of five tribal armies, with command of the host resting exclusively with the Khadun and his priests. The army is huge – nearly 100,000 warriors. The majority is kept encamped at Irdan, where it can defend the Holy City of the Khadun against invasion.

In battle, the force is fearsome but unwieldy. The tribal armies act on their own, competing to be the first into action, to send the most foes to Death, and to reap glory in the eyes of the Khadun. Strategy is a concept foreign to the Rajans, who have not won a major battle since Urmaan's conquest of Rajanistan.

Nevertheless, the individual soldiers fight well. Every soldier is fanatically dedicated to Death and the Khadun, and is willing to risk his own life in order to win "converts" for his stern god. They try to obey any order, no matter how senseless, and are resistant to panic. Once the Rajans rout, however, they are almost impossible to rally.

The Rajans' traditional enemies, the Dracartans, have learned to create confusion through their greater mobility, drawing the Rajan tribal armies into maneuvering across one another's path. They also take advantage of the predictability of the tribesmen, knowing that the Rajans are drawn by glory to assault fortifications and to attack their most fearsome opposition. Even so, the Dracartans fear the relentlessness of the individual Rajan warrior, who often keeps fighting long after other soldiers would have acknowledged defeat and retreated.

The **Rajanin Cavalry** is the heart of the combined army. The riders are divided into specialty squadrons, depending on the mount being ridden – aht-ra, land lizards and greymanes are all found in the force. In times of war, the cavalry is reinforced with black-iron-shod war chariots. The soldiers wear black-iron partial-plate armor and carry shields, scimitars and short bows. Many Rajanin carry enchanted talismans into battle with them.

The **Shadinn Horde** is made up of the largest and strongest of this race of Rajan giants. The land-lizard riders are the shock force of the Army of Rajanistan. Even more characteristic of this tribal army, however, are the war towers which accompany the troops – mobile fortresses plated with black iron. Designed for assaulting the walls of Dracarta, they are the pride of the Shadinn. These soldiers are armored in black-iron partial plate and armed with scimitars. Their steeds are barded with the hides of other land lizards.

The **Zagir Archers** are infantrymen, and fight according to their clans. Their bows make them especially useful against the Dracartans, who like to fight at long range using hurlants. Unused to long marches in the lowlands, the Zagir nevertheless obey the Khadun's orders without complaint, and have pledged to use their mountaineering skills to scale the walls of Dracarta. Zagir bowmen carry bows, shields and scimitars, and wear armor of land-lizard hide.

The **Aramut Cavalry** is made up of Lancers and their Personal Sustainers. The smallest of the tribal armies, it is also the most proficient. Although the Lancers prefer to seek individual combats rather than make impersonal attacks against faceless enemies, they pride themselves on obedience to the Khadun's will. The Sustainers may fight only in defense of their warrior-lords, and being unmounted, are often left behind in the heat of battle. Aramut Lancers bear only their lance, a dagger, and black-iron partial-plate armor. They ride war-trained aht-ras.

The **Vird Militia** is the largest of the tribal armies. The scimitar-armed infantrymen are traditionally used for the most suicidal tasks, such as being the first to assault a Dracartan citadel. The Virds are proud of their calling to die bravely in the service of the Khadun. Vird infantrymen carry scimitars and shields, and wear armor fashioned of land-lizard hide.

CITIES OF TALISLANTA

The following descriptions cover three important cities of the Desert Kingdoms: **Al Ashad**, the tent city where Djaffir merchants gather; **Rajanistan's Holy City of Irdan** (including the infamous Temple of Death); and **Nadan**, Carantheum's northern outpost. (*Dracarta*, the capital of Carantheum, has been detailed previously in the *CHRONICLES OF TALISLANTA*.)

AL ASHAD (Djaffa)

Situated at one of the rare oases in the Red Desert, the tent city of Al Ashad is filled with countless curiosities and diversions, all of which are constantly extolled by excited merchants. From numerous braziers rises the thick smoke of burning habara resin, meant to cover the odor of beasts and close-packed people. Foreigners find the sickeningly-sweet smell offensive at first, but become accustomed to the pervasive aroma in a short time. Most of the tent city's inhabitants are only here temporarily, residing here between their travels.

The following list is representative of characters and shops which might be found in this type of settlement. (There are many more tents than are shown on the map.)

1) Ibn Dali's Wall: Over 50 years ago, a Djaffir Caliph commissioned Dracartan Thaumaturges to construct a wall surrounding Al Ashad. The barrier is made of magically-amalgamated sand, and originally had a strength comparable to black iron. Unfortunately, the Djaffir lack the ability to maintain the structure, and the wall is slowly crumbling – the desert winds have even carved chimneys and grooves in the thaumaturgic rock. Its width varies from 5 to 10 feet, and the height between 15 and 20 feet. Climbing the wall is a treacherous task (-5 penalty on the *Action Table*), since fragments of stone break off at a touch.

The wall is more important as a barrier against wind storms than as a protection against attackers. Except for the Army of Rajanistan, the Djaffir have no enemies capable of mounting a siege of the city. Since the tent city is located in the shallow sands of the Um-Femal, Desert Kra are seldom a problem. Manrak and ravengers occasionally attack from the air, bypassing the wall, but they are easily dispatched by Djaffir archers. No recent Caliph has seen fit to commission the Dracartans to repair Ibn Dali's Wall.

2) Sunset Gate: The only entrance through Ibn Dali's Wall, these red-iron portals grudgingly swivel open only at dawn and dusk. The four-man cranking mechanism which operates the gate is prone to breaking down. A rickety wooden staircase next to the gate permits access to the top of the wall. Guards seldom patrol up there, however, due to its dangerous condition (see above).

3) Guard Barracks: These stone buildings house the mercenaries employed by the Caliph to protect the tent city. The guards patrol the oasis, seeing that the Caliph's laws are upheld. They also monitor traffic, collecting a toll – from foreigners only – of 1 G.L. per man and beast which enter the city.

A Djaffir named Hassim, one of the Caliph's many sons, leads the Grim Blades, the mercenary group currently in the Caliph's employ. Hassim relishes his authority and is totally loyal to his father. He is currently looking for new recruits, having lost seven men due to rumors of gold having been discovered in the Temut. The Grim Blades include 4 Jaka, 6 Kharakhan Giants, 10

Arimites and 23 Djaffir. The mercenaries are not ruffians, but abide by the same laws which they are called to enforce.

4) Wells and Trenches: Water from the wells of Al Ashad is fed into a network of clay trenches, from which it is drawn to irrigate desert palms and other agriculture. By walking in circles around the wells, aht-ra turn the shafts of simple crank-and-pulley mechanisms, pumping water into the trenches. Even in the worst drought, the wells have never gone dry. There are no restrictions on the amount of water which can be drawn – however, foreigners must pay a water tax of 1 S.P. per gallon.

5) Desert Palms: The desert palm is central to oasis life. Its fibers are twisted into ropes, and small items – from market stalls to eating utensils – are crafted from the trunks of dead palms. The trees also yield dates, which may be eaten or distilled to make date wine. The Djaffir grow other fruit in the shade of the palms, including blue pomegranates and sponge-bristles. Amid these groves, the residents of Al Ashad erect their tents.

6) The Caliph's Garden: In all respects, the wall surrounding the Caliph's Garden is the same as Ibn Dali's Wall. The royal family of Djaffa lives within this compound, separated from the common nomads visiting the city. Five members of Hassim's Grim Blades (one of whom is always a Kharakhan Giant) guard the gate, while five more patrol continuously within. No one may enter without the permission of the Caliph or his wazirs. Many beautiful pavilions are spread beneath the swaying palms of the garden, and the gurgling springs of the oasis replenish a large pond stocked with river fish.

In a tremendous tent – made from the hides of over a hundred Desert Kra – the Caliph receives visitors, passes judgment on suspected criminals, and entertains guests. Foreign dignitaries, as well as the sheiks of Djaffir tribes, are granted quarters in adjoining pavilions.

7) Dakhil the Appraiser: A Djaffir merchant with a talent for quoting an accurate price for anything, no matter how ancient or obscure, Dakhil charges one-tenth of the item's worth for an appraisal. Some believe his ability is magical, but others contend he is simply a skilled antiquarian. Dakhil has come into possession of a map revealing the route of a caravan that disappeared in a desert storm several years ago. He is looking for partners to undertake an expedition into the heart of the Zua-ra, and believes the caravan was bearing a valuable tribute of firegems from a Sauran tribe to the Caliph.

8) The Chattering Bones: Rattling in the breeze outside this tent, the complete skeleton of a small kra hangs from a pole. Mystical symbols and artifacts decorate the tent's interior. This pavilion is one of several known as a "beytal mochan," or mochan house. Djaffir men come to these establishments to drink mochan, lounge on cushions, and associate with friends. The majority of the guests here are Djaffir merchants haggling over future caravans. The mochan served here is of average quality, and so is the price.

9) Sirruk the Slave Trader: Although slavery is legal in Djaffa, it is frowned upon. Many believe this is because of distant memories of the Djaffir's semi-enslavement among the Yassan. Sirruk feels no sense of guilt, and sells all varieties of slaves at above-average prices.

10) Hassak's Aht-Ra: Because he makes guara ropes (see the "Arcanum" section of this book) in secret, this merchant lives in constant fear of being unmasked by the Caliph. He lives alone, trusts no one else with his business, and is extremely wary of strangers. His increasing paranoia hurts his regular trade in aht-ra, and he would quickly go broke if he did not sell his foul guara ropes at the midnight market.

11) Jandir's Marvelous Ointments: A pandemonium of odors surrounds this pavilion. Inside, a Djaffir named Jandir expertly haggles with customers over an incredible assortment of perfumes, incenses, magical fumes, fragrant oils and sweet-smelling unguents. Because Djaffir seldom bathe, Jandir does a booming business. Some nomads even perfume their animals. Jandir welcomes foreigners, probing them about their backgrounds and abilities. Many of the ingredients required for his concoctions can only be found in remote regions of Talislanta, and the elderly nomad realizes that he can no longer make the long journeys himself. Therefore, he is interested in hiring others to do this for him.

12) The Troupe of Wonders: This cluster of pavilions houses a group of performers known as the Troupe of Wonders. The performers include a Sarista fortune-teller (with a malkin companion), a Thiasian fire-eater, a Monad "strong man," three Sawila and six Thiasian dancers, five Sarista acrobats, and eight Bodor musicians. Fantisto, the Sarista, directs the troupe's activities. The performers put on their show among the tents, and occasionally at Ibn Salali's House of Bliss. On several occasions, they have entertained the Caliph and his retinue.

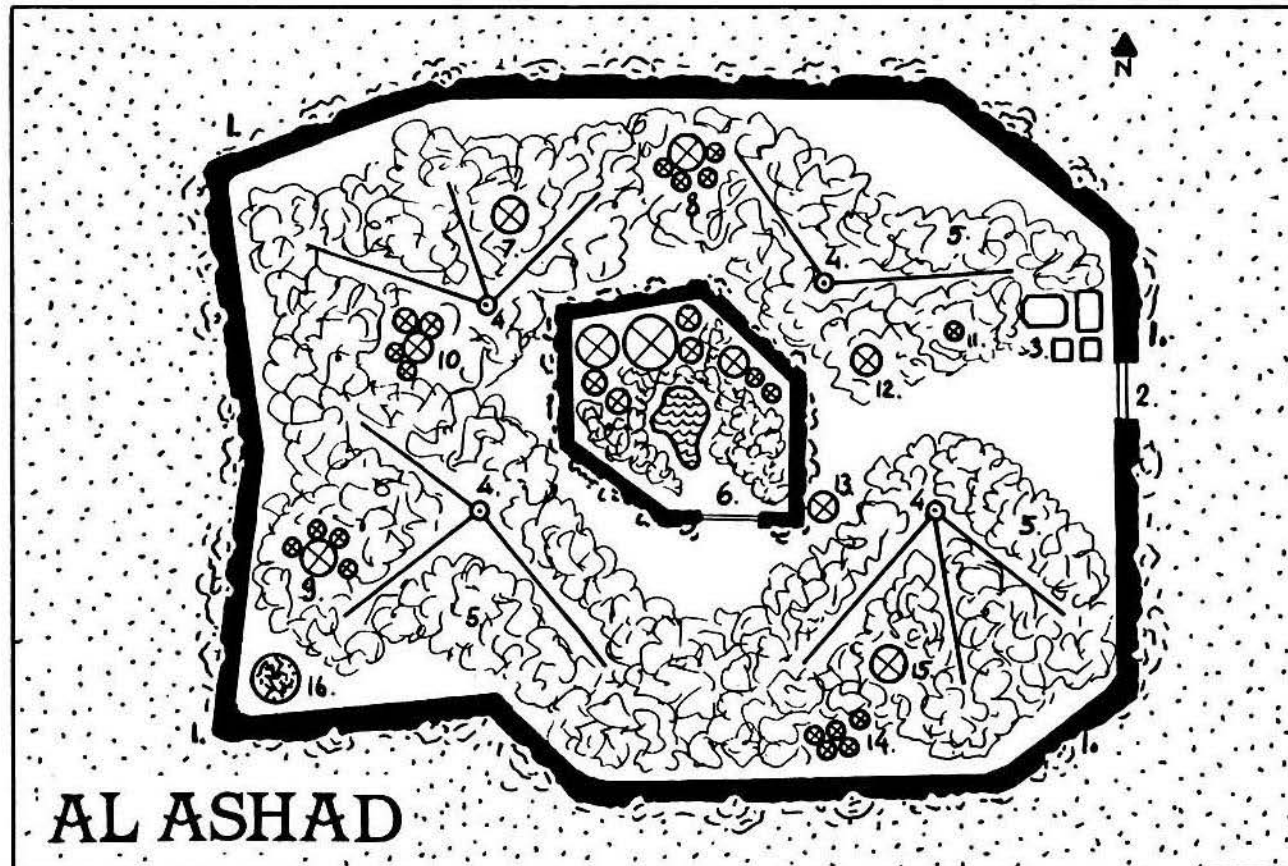
Unknown to even their fellow performers, Fantisto and the Sarista acrobats are daring thieves. (Fantisto isn't even a mage.) They have committed a number of robberies, and are planning to raid the Caliph's Garden before the troupe moves on.

13) Ibn Salali's House of Bliss: Attended by beautiful serving girls, guests of this establishment enjoy the best cuisine in Djaffa, along with intoxicating beverages of all sorts. Sawila dancers (slaves of the owner) and Bodor musicians provide entertainment. For a fee (25+ G.L.), private tents are available where romantic interests may be pursued with one of Ibn Salali's slaves. The proprietor also sells kesh, k'tallah, black lotus and fearflash to his patrons, and is thoroughly unscrupulous.

14) Hazeed's Trained Beasts: From this large tent come the chirps, squawks and bellows of a variety of animals: a draconid, a quaal, a skank, two dracs, two nighthawks, and three feathered dractyls. The skank knows several fascinating stories, and tells them to anyone who listens. A vicious loper and two dractyls are chained to palms out back. A Djaffir, Hazeed is a skilled beasthandler and his high-priced animals are expertly trained.

15) Subbakha: In the Nomadic tongue, "subbakha" means midnight market, and refers to Al Ashad's black market. Late in the evening, after most of the more honest merchants have retired, the tents of the midnight market are erected. A multitude of black-market wares are found here, including poisons, necromantic relics, various types of narcotics and euphorics, and stolen merchandise. The city guards are aware that the subbakha exists, but generally ignore it.

16) Ibn Dali's Pit: Thaumaturgically plated with red iron, this pit is actually 50 feet in diameter and 100 feet deep, although it is currently half filled with red sand. At the bottom lurks a Desert Kra which voraciously devours all of the organic matter tossed into the pit. Because it has been an effective means of waste disposal for many years, no one has worried about the refuse pit for years – or monitored the creature's growth. It will not be long before the hungry kra can climb out of the refuse pit and wreak its revenge on the Djaffir.



THE HOLY CITY OF IRDAN (Rajanistan)

The fortress-city of Irdan was carved out of the mountainside at the order of Urmaan the Necromancer, the first ruler of the united Rajan tribes. Thousands toiled to build the steep fortress. It may well be the most defensible site in all Talislanta.

1) Mount Irdan: This height rises steeply on three sides of the fortress-city, and is composed of sheer cliffs and fractured outcrops of granite. The slope above the city is pock-marked with caves. Here live those dragons controlled by the Necromancers, where they can be close to their masters. Crested Dragons in flight over the city are a stunning spectacle. The dragons also guard against spies trying to sneak in over the mountain.

2) Army Encampments: The encampments of the Army of Rajanistan stretch for miles beyond the city's wall. While awaiting the Khadun's orders – to move, attack, kill or die – the warrior tribesmen perform daily chores, and vie with one another for Death's favor in an unending series of competitions. Since each soldier brings his wife, children and herds with him, the tent city is a gathering of well over 150,000 people. The tents spread into the plain before Irdan, clustering around springs (marked by isolated stands of trees). Fortunately, this is the one part of Rajanistan where the water holes never dry up. Each tribe has its own area, off-limits to the others (except for the Necromancer-Priests and their minions). The segregation is meant to prevent the rival tribes from battling one another rather than the Khadun's enemies.

2a) Shadinn Encampments: The Shadinn consider their camps to be the most important, since they block the northern approaches to the city. Each encampment centers around one or more of the siege-towers which always accompany the Shadinn army.

2b) Aramut Encampments: The smallest element of the Army of Rajanistan, the Aramut army prides itself on its placement next to Death's Door – they protect the Holy City, and yet remain close to the revered Khadun at the same time. The Lancers continually practice their skills, and can often be seen staging mock battles with their fellows. The Sustainers crowd the bazaar (see below), eagerly looking for the best for their masters.

2c) Vird Encampments: The Virds spread farther across the plains than any of the other tribes, due to their larger families and extensive herds. Their camps are the least military in appearance. The other tribes deride the Virds about their location, furthest from the city. The Virds retort that they form the first bulwark of Irdan's defense. They aggressively maintain patrols into the desert (unfamiliar to the mountain-bred Vird tribesmen) in order to prove themselves to the other Rajans.

2d) Zagir Encampments: The Zagir live close to the foothills, and spend much of their time scaling the heights of Mount Irdan. They keep to themselves, rarely appearing within the city except during cult celebrations. However, several Zagir are always on hand in the bazaar, so they can be among the first to learn of orders from the Khadun and relay the news to their fellows.

3) Bazaar: Open to all Rajans, the bazaar provides a place for the tribes to meet and barter for each other's wares. It is run by Aramut Sustainers, but Shadinn smiths and Rajan enchanters have tent-shops here as well. There is an especially brisk trade in animals. At the center of the bazaar stands a rock pillar where announcements from the Khadun are proclaimed. The bazaar is only open to foreigners if they are accompanied by

Torquar escorts. Farad mercantilists find the marketplace very entertaining, since exotic goods – taken as plunder during Rajan raids along the Wilderness Road – are available at low prices from the ignorant tribesmen (1/2 x standard price).

4) Fortress Walls: The City of Irdan is built in ascending tiers. Somber grey walls protect each level, and stand 20 feet in height. Garrison towers (30 feet high) stud the walls, providing an overview of the level below and clear firing platforms for archers. Each tower mounts a ballista or two springals, and is manned at all times by 20 warriors.

5) Death's Door: The fortress of the lowest wall, Death's Door is garrisoned by 250 Rajanin warriors. The guards admit few visitors within the city, except the Rajanins who live here and the Shadinn who work in Irdan's smithies. Most other Rajans can enter the city only during Black Mystic Cult services at the Temple of Death, and only if they are judged worthy by a Necromancer-Priest. The tower also contains the Court of Irdan, run by the Necromancer-Priests. Tribesmen bring their grievances here to have them resolved by the authority of the Khadun, exercised by his representatives. Most of the grievances are inter-tribal, since problems within the tribes can be solved by tribal justice.

6) Sally Gates (not marked on the map): The secret comings and goings of the Torquar require concealed gates in every wall. These doors are guarded by Torquar concealed nearby.

7) Rajanin Tents: Only members of the Rajanin tribe are allowed to live within Irdan's walls. They live in tents and corral their herds wherever space permits.

8) Pools: These wide stone reservoirs provide water for the Rajanin tribesmen. The natural springs on the tier above supply the orchards with water, and the surplus water flows in sluices to collection pools on the next lower level.

9) Orchards: Built around Irdan's original springs, these orchards of desert date-palm provide vital food for man and beast.

10) Waste Pits: Each day, Rajanin women empty waste into these pits carved in the steep mountainside. When a hole is full, it is capped with waste stone and a new one is dug.

11) Upper Gate-Towers: The gates in the upper tiers' walls are each guarded by a pair of 50-foot-high gatehouses. These fortifications mount a catapult and three demi-springals, and are manned by 50 Rajanin soldiers.

12) Foundries: Shadinn smiths do their work in these ramshackle buildings, which are some of the largest in Irdan. Thousands of Shadinn work within, making weapons and armor for the Army of Rajanistan. Dark smoke from the coal fires lingers in this part of the city, coating everything with a fine film of soot.

13) Encampment of the Elite: The Rajanin warriors honored with guarding the Khadun camp here. The soldiers are anxious to distinguish themselves and gain glory – they patrol constantly, search everyone, and dream of Death.

14) The Khadun's Tower: The tallest structure in Irdan, the Khadun's residence looms 150 feet above the rest of the city, allowing the ruler of Rajanistan to examine his city and army at his leisure. The Khadun and his immediate family live on the upper floors, surrounded by a contingent of fanatical guards. The lowermost floors of the tower are reserved for the storage of valuables, including the bullion brought from Shadinnar.

One estimate of the wealth stored here, made by the conservative Kasmir, posits that 250,000,000 lumens' worth of gold lies in these vaults.

15) The Citadel of Irdan: Headquarters of the dreaded Black Mystic Cult, this is where the Necromancer-Priests, their Torquar torturers, and other secret servants of the Cult live. Only they may ever leave the squat, 100-foot-tall edifice. All others who enter these walls die here, most often as victims of torture or necromantic experimentation. Then again, many who enter are already dead – fit subjects for necromancy.

16) The Temple of Death: The centerpiece of the Rajan death-cult, the Temple was constructed for the Khadun's purposes, and has been sanctified by Death. It serves as a tangible reminder of Rajanistan's bond with its terrible deity, and is the only structure of its kind in the nation.

The predominant motif of the Temple is the skull. These are not abstract representations of Death, but actual skulls taken from "converts" to the Death-Cult. The grisly relics, representing most of the races of Talislanta, are stacked on altars, molded into friezes, and hung in clusters from the ceiling. The Temple is normally closed to most Rajans except on holy days. On the *Day of Rage*, for instance, the Khadun's generals present Dracartan captives for ritual sacrifice, symbolically avenging the First Massacre at Dracarta. During *Pandaemonium* there are sacrifices every three hours, both for the amusement of worshippers and the glory of Death.

Weekly sacrifices are also held in the Temple, but admission is only by the Khadun's invitation. During the public rites, non-believers are converted to the death-cult in a two-step ritual. First, they receive slow torture (in the Temple's main hall), then – precisely at sundown – they are killed by Shadinn Executioners. Exceptional skulls are kept to decorate the Temple, but the bodies are discarded into the Pit of Death.

Torquar constantly patrol the halls. They are highly motivated, and demand the password from all who pass. The guards are armed with Executioner's Axes and capture-spears.

16a) Followers' Entrance: These massive black-iron doors are in the form of a great skull-face which glares down on the Holy City. Six Shadinn guard here at all times. Some believe that the portal is alive and somehow sentient, and Dracartan scholars speculate that there might be a Necromane bound within it.

16b) Sacrifice Chamber: This room is decorated with one theme in mind: Death. Gibbering victims peer from tortured frescoes, and depictions of executions are molded into every column and cornice. Living victims hang in cages from the ceiling, adding their sobs to the gloom. The skulls of those already slain protrude from the walls, staring with blank eye-holes at the grim panorama.

16c) The Pit of Death: This opening leads to the Crypts of the Torquar, ten feet below. Braziers flank it, providing illumination so that worshippers in the darkened upper chamber can view the rites of torture. The crypts are a Torquar torture chamber, with facilities for 50 victims and their tormentors. Ceremonial victims are prepared for execution by death-tortures in the pit.

When the Necromancers give their assent, the victims are winched to the upper level (using ropes and tackle hanging from the apex of the Temple's ceiling) and bound to the altar. The spectacle of victims rising from the Pit of Death always brings cheers from the assembled celebrants.

16d) Altar: This massive block of black, glassy stone – carved in the semblance of a horned skull – is where the Shadinn ply their grisly trade at the climax of the torture ceremonies. The Temple is built so that the light of the setting suns illuminates the altar, signaling the time of execution. The altar can accommodate a dozen victims at the same time.

16e) Inner Sanctum: Only senior Necromancers and their assistants are allowed here. This is where Cult priests work their most powerful enchantments, such as raising the dead and summoning minions of Death. When not in use, the room is bare except for a few stone tables. Magicians may detect the weight of generations of malignant death-magic when they cross the threshold. The Sanctum is not guarded.

16f) Guard Room: Four Shadinn Executioners are stationed here, guarding the entrance to the Khadun's Tower. They stand grimly at their posts, proud of their dedication to duty.

16g) Khadun's Entrance: This door is always locked – from the other side. It cannot be opened from the Temple side, and only the Khadun carries the key. It connects to the hallway linking the Temple to the Khadun's Tower.

16h) Cult Entrance: This door leads to the citadel of the Black Mystic Cult. It is perpetually open, guarded by a trio of Shadinn Executioners. The stonework here is carved with terrifying figures of Death and scenes of torture, to remind those who pass of the ecstasy of Death.

16i) Guard Room: This is the chamber reserved for the Shadinn who guard the Temple. A large fireplace takes up much of one wall, providing heat and a place to cook meals. Stools and benches are scattered about, and sleeping guards (rolled in blankets) lie against the walls. Fifteen Executioners are here always, in-between their four-hour shifts. There is heavy competition for the honor of serving in the Temple, so new guards are rotated in weekly.

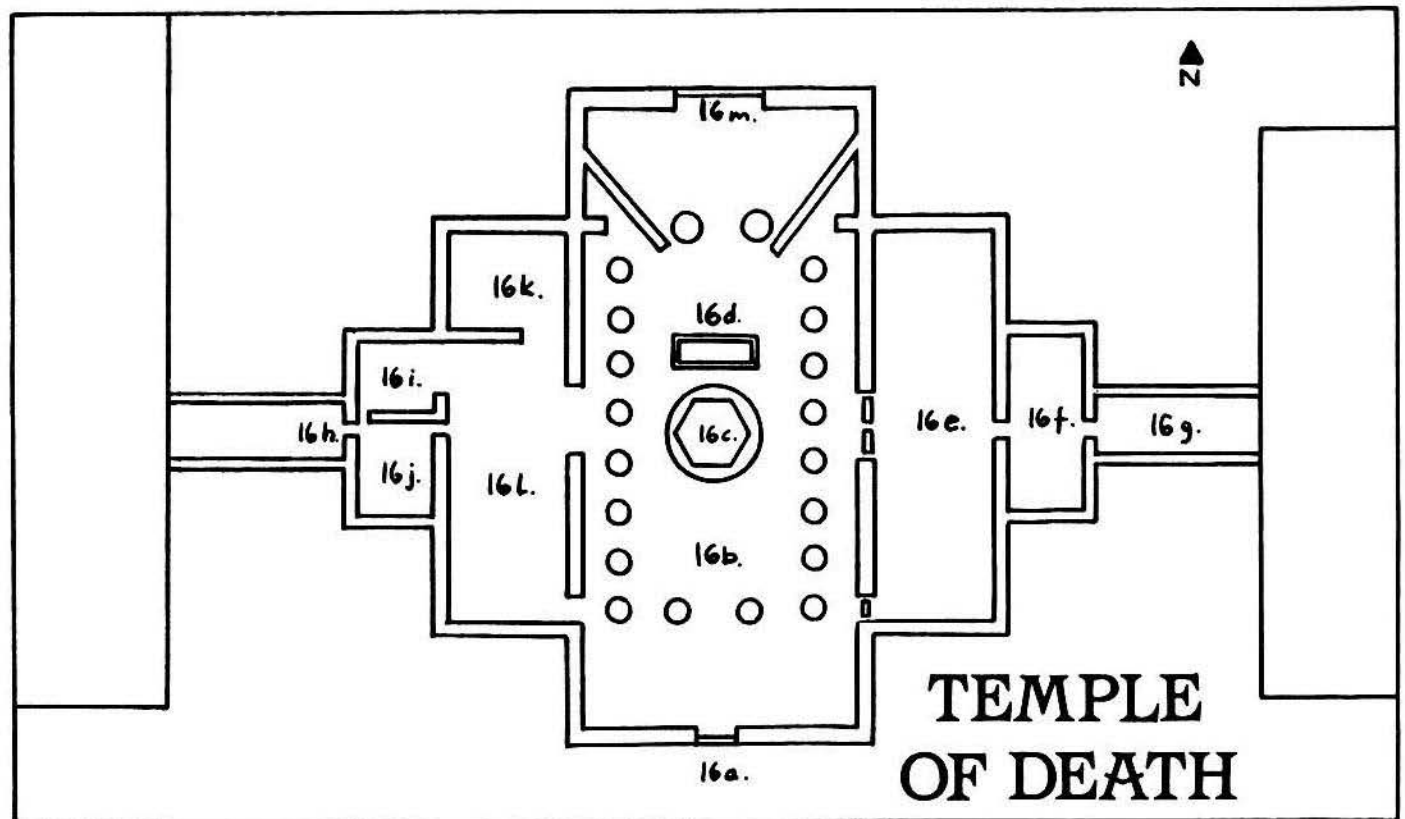
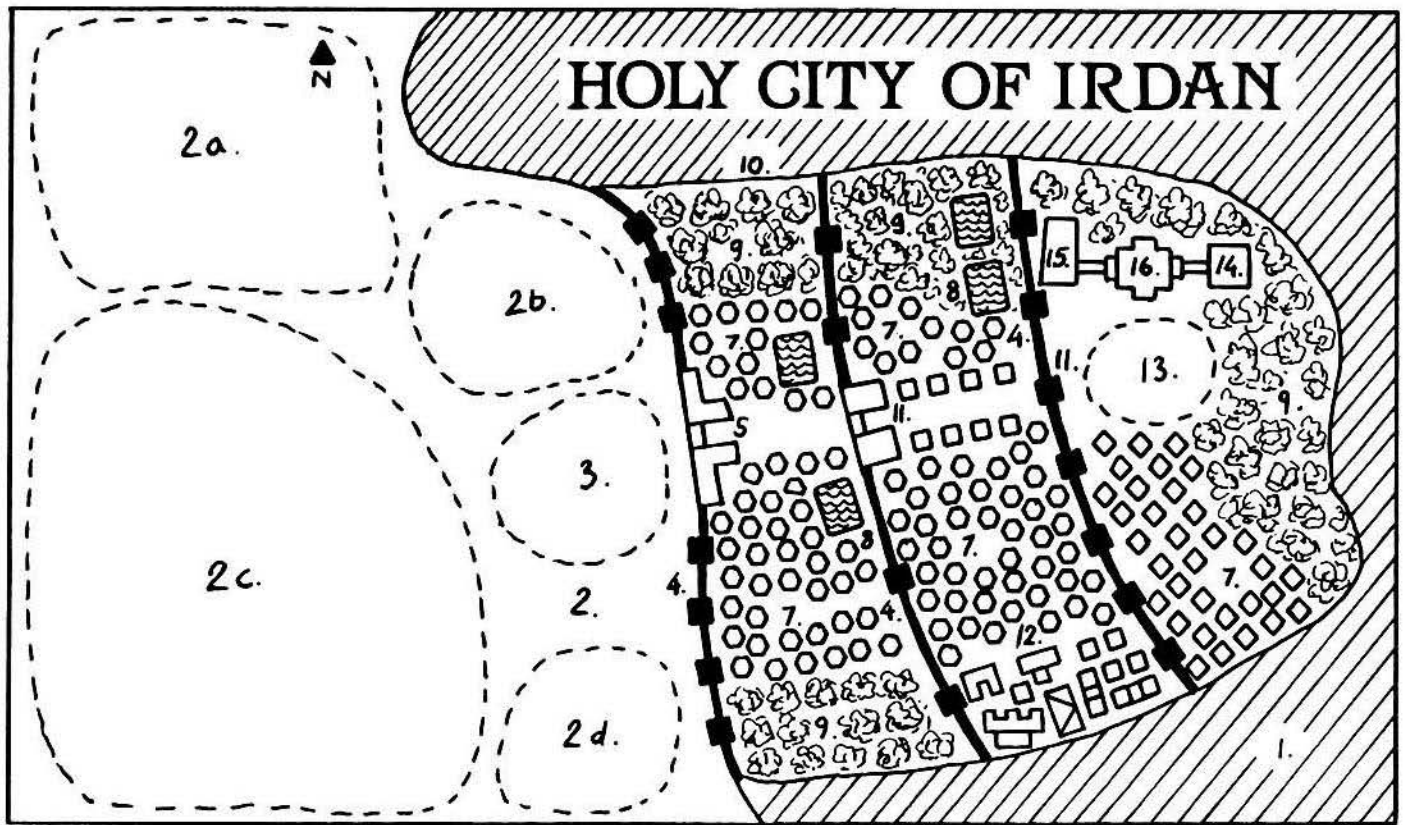
16j) Robing Room: This room holds extra robes for the Necromancers, who often become soiled during Temple rites.

16k) Scriptorium: Records of those tortured and slain in ceremonial executions are kept here. Each skull in the Temple is numbered, and Necromancer-archivists can identify former victims and review their histories from these archives.

16l) Reliquary: Holy items important to the Cult are displayed here. These include: portions of the original transcript of the Book of Urmaan, penned by the Necromancer himself; the sword of Thuduhn, a Rajan hero who slew a Thaumaturge (and died at the hands of a Dracartan mob); the *Journal of Neshdan*, the Necromancer who received a vision of the Underworld; and remembrances of several prominent Khaduns. Every Necromancer aspires to have one of his possessions enshrined in this holy chamber. The room is guarded by a pair of Executioners.

16m) Dragon Door: These stone doors are carefully balanced, allowing them to swing easily. Dragons are sometimes included in Cult ceremonies, either to impress the common Rajans, for protection during dangerous magical operations, or as pyrotechnic assistants to their Necromantic masters during torture sessions.

16n) Secret Entrances (not on map): These hidden doors are for the use of the Torquar. Not even the temple guards dare to question those who use these entrances.



NADAN (Carantheum)

"Glory rests upon Nadan, son of the slumbering kra, and of its majesty and territory there shall be no end."

— *The Ruby Tablets*

Finding these and similar inscriptions upon the red monoliths, the Dracartan prophet Astramir became intent on finding and re-establishing this pre-Disaster city. Based on clues in the Tablets, he eventually founded modern Nadan north of Jalal Oasis, where ancient well shafts were found among eroded rock outcroppings. In later years, Technomancer immigrants poured into the city to work on sarcophagi and duneships for the Dracartans. Nadan's Tek is the largest population of Yassan assembled in a single location. Nadan is a busy military post, as skirmishes with Za bandits, Araq and even Kharakhan Giants occur within sight of the outpost's walls.

1) Barrier Sandwall: A barrier of thaumaturgically amalgamated sand, 20 feet in height, surrounds Nadan and protects its wells. Unlike Dracarta's wall, it is not plated with red iron.

2) Sluiceway: A sand-filled trough crosses the upper portion of the Sandwall, allowing duneships to ride over the barrier. The outer gradient is steep, forcing incoming ships to approach the wall at a high rate of speed in order to ride up and over. The slope is much more gradual on the inside, so that departing ships can leave without building up speed.

The Sluiceway is wide enough for the runners of two duneships abreast. If a pilot disastrously fails his *Action Table* roll, his ship could collide with the barrier, lose a runner, or pitch off the wall to its destruction. Ten Desert Scouts man guardposts on either side of the Sluiceway, and can raise a concealed row of pikes across the entrance. The toll to enter Nadan is 1 G.L. per person, 2 G.L. per mount or riding animal, and 100 G.L. per ship.

3) Yassan Track: A fluted track of red iron runs within the outpost wall and around several of Nadan's major redoubts, arching on stilts in places so that duneships can pass beneath. A 20 foot-long dragon cast in red-iron — the *Yassan Sentry* — glides through the air near the track. Built two centuries ago by Master Technomancer Imahri, the Sentry detects sounds through the sand at a range of up to 500 feet, and distinguishes between familiar and unfamiliar noises. It flies along its track at 20 mph to investigate suspicious sounds, and has an alarm which can be heard half a mile away (a grating noise made by sand blasting against slate panels).

When attacked, or when instructed to do so by the Technomancers, the Sentry "exhales" Red Menace through its mouth, at distances of up to 100 feet. On a successful *Action Table* roll, the attack hits its target, causing 4 x d10 points of damage. Otherwise, the dangerous liquid misses, creating a lane of fire through the sand (lasts for d6 rounds).

The Sentry can fire 20 times before exhausting its reservoir. It can also ram targets within 10 feet of its track, inflicting 6 x d10 points of damage on a successful *Action Table* roll unless the target dodges. The Sentry has an Armor Rating of 5, and can withstand 250 points of damage before being destroyed. Attackers can sever the track by inflicting 50 points of damage on it, blocking the Sentry's movement.

4) Ship Plain: Abas the Gray, the famous Thaumaturge, first experimented with dunesailing at Nadan. The shipyards are now operated by the Ministry of Customs and Commerce as a monopoly of the Crown. Span-oak frameworks and half-finished

hulls dot the sand, while Thaumaturges and Technomancers direct artisans at work. Foreigners may visit the yards, but are prevented from approaching close enough to ships under construction to learn any of the construction secrets. Buyers of duneships must be approved by Ministry officials in Dracarta.

According to rumor, the King must personally approve each purchase — prospective buyers are advised to provide a gift worth several thousand G.L. shortly before filing to purchase a ship. Foreigners can seldom purchase duneships unless they have performed exceptional services for the Crown.

5) Redoubts: When Astramir sent the first soldiers to settle here, the only solid ground consisted of six eroded spires protruding from the sands. The Dracartans have fortified each of these, building 20-foot walls around the crests and excavating tunnels within for living quarters. Each redoubt has a sand dock and its own well (using the ancient 1,000-foot shafts discovered by Astramir), plus a garrison of 50 Desert Scouts.

6) Pyramid of Nadan: The Dracartans built this temple in the year 40, and Astramir himself laid the first stone. Fifty silent priests maintain the temple. Worshipers come to listen for Jamba's words and to obtain water from this well, which is reputed to have healing effects. When a coin is deposited in an altar slot, a spigot automatically dispenses a gallon of temple water. There are conflicting rumors about what lies beneath this temple. Renegade Dracartans claim that the priests have carved tombs into the bedrock. Some foreign scholars believe that the clerics are concealing ancient ruins, which they are excavating. Treasure seekers affirm that Astramir buried the long-missing Tablets here.

7) Citadel of Nadan: The fortress has walls of red iron, with rounded corners designed to deflect blows from siege artillery. Four towers each mount a large hurlant and a Red Menace projector. Within are the barracks of the North Dune, and a channel bored through the rock allows duneships to harbor within an enclosed harbor. A fragile-seeming tower rises 180 feet from the peak of the spire, where Desert Scouts man a Yassan Glass and search the horizon for hostile forces.

8) Palace of Nadan: This geometrical villa has been designed so that every surface is triangular, a shape holy to Jamba. The exterior is plated in red iron, tinted by the Technomancers to create a scalloped effect that reflects light in a variety of rosy shades. This is the residence of the Prince of Nadan, one of those who qualified for but failed the Test of the Ancients. Royal bureaucrats have offices in the subterranean tunnels. The current prince is Fabron, formerly a master merchant of Dracarta. He cultivates a reputation for harsh justice, especially toward the Yassan, since they do not understand Dracartan solidarity.

9) Redoubt of the Thaumaturges: The rock upon which this redoubt was built had no level surfaces, so the laboratories of the Thaumaturges are within chambers hewn from the rock. The Desert Scouts man five red-iron towers on the periphery of the rock, firing on unauthorized visitors.

Thaumaturges come to Nadan to work on experiments which are too dangerous to tolerate in Dracarta itself. Mages also assist in the production of the duneships and in maintenance of the outpost. The Lord Proctor of the Caduceus Mutada keeps a watchful eye on activities here, fearing that the isolation might encourage a Thaumaturge to indulge in prohibited dabblings.

10) Artisans' Redoubt: The Dracartans who work in the shipyards or service the military live here, in homes carved into the

ledges and promontories of this rock. There are few level places, forcing the few streets to be stairs in many places.

11) Yassan Enclave: Technomancers live in subterranean complexes here, disdaining the sunlit surface of their rock. Nikhili, chief of the local Tek, works doggedly to prevent his district from becoming a slum. Yassan patrols keep the passages remarkably clean, and deter the gangs of unemployed youth which plague other Tek. Technomancers scurry from one project to another, their work-aprons flapping.

12) Mining Plain: Trenches score the sand where mining duneships have collected sand to be converted into red iron. Over the centuries, mining has reduced the level of the desert within the Sandwall by four feet.

13) Market: Thaumaturges and Technomancers wait impatiently to buy tools and materials from the next duneship or Djaffir caravan. Travelers may also purchase food and other supplies here (2 x standard prices).

14) Ministry of Customs and Commerce: The Crown maintains these offices at the shipyard. Clay pipes in the interior of the building circulate thaumaturgically-cooled water, keeping the interior pleasantly chilled. The bureaucrats supervise the construction of ships and watch for waste or inefficiency.

15) The Blowing Grain: Saulid, a Dracartan cartographer, charts duneship courses at this shop. His detailed maps are kept in a locked chamber, and he refuses to let anyone near them. For 100 G.L., Saulid will plot a safe, direct route across the Red Desert. Travelers may also hire him (for 20 G.L.) to arrange passage on a duneship – Saulid has influence even with the Dracartan military.

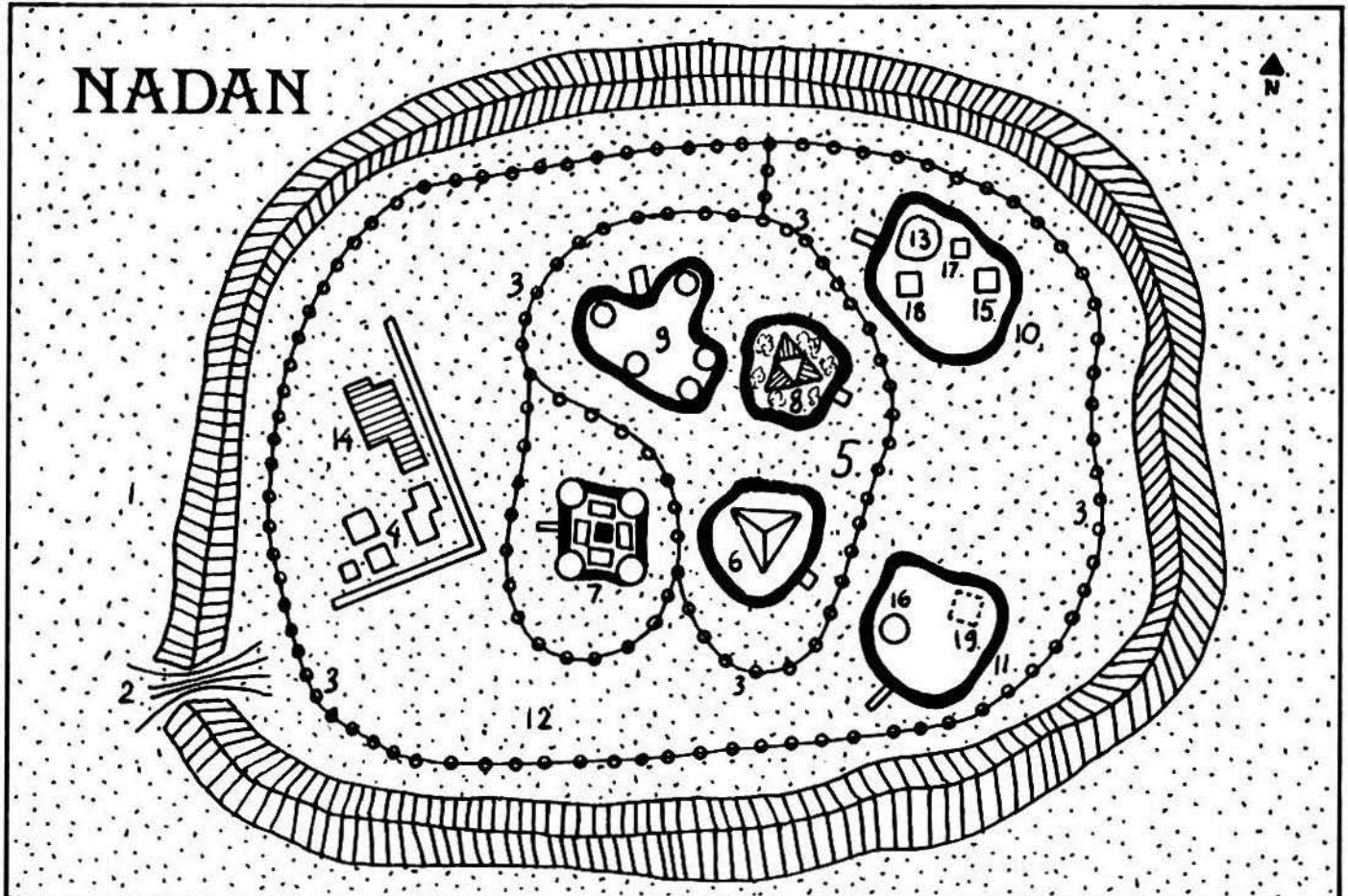
16) The Extra Thumb: A red-iron sign in the shape of a pair of thumbs hangs outside this subterranean chamber. The lower floor is a tavern where Technomancers discuss projects over mugs of grog. Chief Nikhili holds court here, considering it his unofficial "throne room." The upper chambers provide some of the few accommodations available for visitors to Nadan.

17) The Shop of Laru: A Sindra merchant, Jhan ni Laru, imports obscure mechanisms for sale to the Yassan. In exchange, he receives mechanical wonders from the Technomancers and ships them to the Pyramids of Sand emporium (in Sindar), where Naddir Medithi ura Jatan sells them for huge profits.

18) The 1,405th Saint: Abas the Gray, the inventor of the duneship, was also a playboy who kept a Zandir as his paramour. The two established this club to honor their favorite member of the Paradoxists' Ten Thousand, and it has been a favorite of the Desert Scouts ever since.

One may join by paying 500 G.L., or buy a "night's grace" for 50 G.L. Patrons may enjoy music, wine, delicious food, or private suites where they can "contemplate Paradoxist aesthetics with an enlightened priestess."

19) Adar Gurtu, Restorer: The Yassan who runs this shop sells Technomantic limbs to replace amputated arms and legs. He learned his techniques by studying ancient artifacts, and sometimes hires explorers to excavate for new items. Adar can rig new limbs for 500 G.L., but he cannot match the work of the ancients. When he does have an ancient limb of the right size in stock, there is a three-in-six chance that it isn't man-like – it might resemble the leg of a huge insect, for instance.



TALISLANTA ARCANA

The peoples of Talislanta's great deserts are familiar with the arcane, and understand more about the ways in which Death acts on this plane than most other Talislantans. The following topics are covered in this section: Djaffir fetish masks, Rajan dragon-steeds, Technomancy, and Thaumaturgy. There is also a listing of new spells (including those of the Yitek and the Black Mystic Cult), and a selection of new magical items.

FETISH MASKS

A Djaffir's mask is his most treasured possession, and each is unique to the individual for whom it is made. Many of the nomads further differentiate their masks by ornamenting them with bangles of gold and silver, or beaded tassels of aht-ra hair.

Using special pigments and tools, Djaffir wizards make fetish masks from cured aht-ra hides. Junior mages handle the initial crafting: The noses and mouths of the masks are perforated, and a curious membrane – a portion of a fibrous organ found in the snouts of Desert Kra – is sewn in to act as an air filter. Thin crystal lenses are placed in the eye slits. Then the masks are given to the senior wizards for completion.

Employing their instruments with care, the experienced magic-casters etch tiny runes, sigils and patterns over the entire surface of the mask. The pigments used in coloring these shapes are formed by mixing the blood of the prospective wearer with powdered amethysts (which have the power to conceal emotions) and topaz (which gives resistance to magical influence). To an experienced Djaffir wizard (on a successful INT Roll), the prismatic etchings reveal the wearer's identity and family history – as far back as the family's flight from the doomed Quaranian Empire.

The process of creating a fetish takes one month to complete, and requires 50 G.L. worth of materials. Two successful skill rolls are required – a Magical Operations roll to correctly formulate the magical pigments, and a Primitive Magical Talents roll to properly enchant the mask. If either roll fails, the mask appears to be a normal fetish, but has no magical powers.

A properly-made mask wards its holder against all spells of magical influence or control. However, this power only functions when the mask is worn by the person for whom it was made. Equipped with lenses and an air filter, even the non-enchanted masks serve to protect their wearers from the dangers of sand and dust storms.

RAJAN DRAGON-STEEDS

The Necromancers of the Black Mystic Cult sometimes use immature Crested Dragons as war-mounts. Acquiring such a steed is a lengthy and dangerous process, but the advantages are obvious.

The first step is to create a *Dragon Collar*. This yoke is constructed of bands of black iron and gold (2,500 G.L. worth), which fuse together into black gold during the enchantment. The collar takes one month to enchant for every level of the binding spell desired. (When dealing with dragons, a +10 *minimum* enchantment is suggested.)

The spell placed upon the collar is a Cult secret, and it is forbidden to record it – the only scrolls are kept in separate hid-

den places in the Temple of Death, and each is deliberately incomplete. The Necromancers realize that if a mature Crested Dragon could learn the spell, it could use its mastery of magic to analyze the formula, and then permanently nullify the effect of a Dragon Collar – or even reverse the enchantment, slaving the Necromancer to the will of his steed.

Catching a Dragon. To bind a dragon to his service, a Necromancer must first face the chosen dragon and personally place the collar about its neck. This is the most dangerous step of acquiring a dragon-steed, but the Necromancers have learned many ways to lessen the risk – using magic to first stun or beguile the dragon, hiring others to trap the beast.

Once the collar is in place, the Necromancer must immediately command the dragon to reveal its name, speaking to the beast in Dragon Tongue (also known as the Ancient Tongue). To determine if the collar can bend the will of the dragon, the caster must roll on the Magic column of the *Action Table*. The level of the collar's enchantment and the Necromancer's WILL and Magic Rating act as bonuses, but there is also a difficulty modifier equal to -10 *plus* the dragon's WILL score.

A result of "Success" or better binds the dragon to the Necromancer's service. (Remember, however, that this spell only works against *immature* Crested Dragons: level 15 or less.) Any other result leaves the Necromancer in the immediate presence of an enraged dragon – and a "Magical Mishap" also disenchanting the Dragon Collar.

The rite of binding is not complete until the Necromancer commands the dragon to recite the Oath of the Death Slave:

I am your slave.

I serve only Death.

Blood, bones and dust!

I follow your orders willfully

until given release.

The collar compels the dragon to repeat these words, but once the oath is spoken, the enchantment spell warps the dragon's will and makes it a willing slave. Each Necromancer may have only one dragon-steed at any time.

Crested Dragons do not remain in necromantic service for very long, at least not by dragon standards. As the dragon matures, its growing magical powers erode the ensorcelment of the collar – in game terms, the Gamemaster must *secretly* try a WILL roll for the steed every year, with the spell level of the collar acting as a penalty to the roll.

With a result of "Success" or better, the dragon is capable of successfully revolting against its master. From then on, the Gamemaster must *secretly* roll whenever an order is given to the dragon-steed: on a roll of "1" the beast rebels, and the Dragon Collar loses its enchantment.

Most Necromancers release their steeds of their own accord after 15-20 months of service, while the collar still controls the beast. The enchantment ensures an amicable parting, and influences the dragon against holding a grudge.

SPELLS OF THE DESERT

A number of special magics have been developed by the mages of the Desert Kingdoms. Some spells are known by Djaffir, Dracartan and Rajan wizards alike. Others (as indicated) are secrets of particular cultures or organizations.

ARDOR OF THE TWIN SUNS: The caster must hold a large firegem (10 carats or more) within the light of the twin suns of Talslanta. Reciting this spell successfully causes the jewel to become flame bright, emitting shafts of ruby light. The gem immediately becomes too hot to hold, and must be thrown or dropped. The jewel may be hurled 50' (plus 10' per +1 STR of the thrower). However, a DEX roll is required – a "Failure" means the gem misses its target by d10' in a random direction, and a "Mishap" indicates that the gem is dropped within d10' of the caster.

Starting with the second round after the spell is cast, and continuing for one round per spell level, waves of intense heat spread from the firegem, doing d4 points of damage per round to everything within 10' – and armor is no protection.

Modifiers: Up to -10, depending upon the climate (arctic, temperate, arid, etc.).

Magic Resistance: Creatures warded versus fire are immune.

BANISH SAND DEMON: This spell seeks to banish a sand demon to Cthonia, the creature's plane of origin. To activate the magic, the caster spends a round boldly stating the incantation while holding forth the heart of a sand demon (a black diamond). On the following round – if the *Action Table* roll is successful – a thin beam of black light lances from the heart toward the target of the spell. Range is limited to 10' per spell level. If the demon cannot avoid the ray of energy, it is sent screaming back to Cthonia, where it must remain for one year per spell level. The spell affects only sand demons.

Magic Resistance: Roll vs DEX to dodge the beam of light, with the spell level acting as a penalty.

CURSE OF THE DEATH SHROUD: It is a common Djaffir custom to wrap the deceased's jewelry within the death shroud. To protect this finery, a spell is traditionally placed on the graveclothes by Djaffir wizards. Anyone who touches the clothing and then steals the possessions within is cursed to die in the same manner as the wearer of the shroud. A small, skull-shaped mark appears on the victim's forehead, warning others than this person has desecrated the home of the dead. *This spell is known only by Djaffir wizards and their apprentices.*

Gamemasters should devise imaginative deaths for cursed characters, which may be put into action at any future date. Strange dreams and omens may pursue the victim, hinting at his doom. Players should come to believe that their characters are in grave danger, and that a remedy must be sought.

Magic Resistance: Roll vs WILL, with the spell level acting as a penalty to the roll. Any wizard knowing this spell also knows the appropriate counterspell, which is merely a reversal of the incantation and disenchant the shroud (but cannot remove a curse once cast).

CURSE OF THE DESERT SANDS: This spell evaporates fluid from the target's body, immediately causing d4 points of damage per spell level. Additionally, the victim must drink within 20 rounds or die of thirst. To cast the spell, the caster speaks an arcane phrase and disperses a handful of sand in the direction

of the intended victim, taking one round to do so. Range is 10 feet. Note that Djaffir are protected by their fetish masks, as is anyone else whose face is covered.

Magic Resistance: Roll vs DEX to dodge the flying specks of sand which form the material component of this spell, or to quickly cover one's face (with a shield, cloak, etc.).

FURY OF THE DESERT: This spell, which must be cast in a sandy region, creates a cylindrical sandstorm 5' in height and diameter per spell level. The storm persists for 10 minutes per spell level, and may be made to move at 10 mph per level. Creatures caught in the storm suffer the damaging effects of stinging sand (see the "Optional Rules" section). As part of the conjuration of the storm, the wizard must spend 2 rounds singing an ancient dirge to Destiny. Range is limited to eyesight.

Black Mystic Cult Spells

These spells are known only to the Necromancers of the Black Mystic Cult of Rajanistan.

DIRGE OF THE FACE-STEALER: The Face-Stealer spell changes the face and body of its subject to match that of a chosen corpse. The Torquar use this as a disguise spell, borrowing the forms of persons long dead to conceal the appearance of those individuals whom they employ as spies.

When casting this spell, the mortal remains of a dead person are required – a skeleton, at the very least. The spell takes 5 rounds to cast, during which the Necromancer must hold one hand on the corpse and his other hand on the subject. When the spell is complete, the dead body crumbles to dust and the subject's entire body transforms into the semblance of the body the dead person had while alive. The duration of the change is one week per level of the spell. The magic confers only the physical semblance of the corpse when it was alive (at the age of death) – it does not allow the subject to use any of the dead person's knowledge or abilities, except those natural to the body.

Face-Stealing is very painful to the subject, causing d10 damage when the spell is originally cast, and again when the spell wears off and the subject regains his original form.

Modifiers: The level of the corpse (when it was living) and the WILL of a resisting subject act as penalties to the caster's *Action Table* roll.

CONTROL THE DEAD: This spell allows a Necromancer to take control of Undead animated by other Necromancers. It is cast by crossing the forearms – the symbol of Death, crossed bones – and reciting the incantation (which takes one round). The spell has a range of 10' per spell level, and lasts 5 minutes per level. Rajan Necromancers commonly use this spell when battling foreign necromancers.

Modifiers: The level of the spell used to animate the walking dead acts as a penalty to the *Action Table* roll.

Magic Resistance: None. Jujus are immune to this spell, since they are bound only to owner of the image which controls them.

NECROMANTIC STASIS: This spell, cast on the recently dead, halts decay and preserves the corpse of any man-like being. To cast the spell, the Necromancer touches the eyes of the corpse and utters the incantation (which takes one round). The spell lasts until lifted by a counterspell. The Black Mystic Cult keeps

this spell secret since, if cast in reverse (as a counterspell), it causes the walking dead to decay retroactively – destroying all forms of Undead.

Modifiers: When using the counterspell, the level of the spell animating the subject acts as a penalty on the *Action Table* roll.

SPELL OF THE WALKING DEAD: This spell enables a Necromancer to animate the corpse of any man-like being and make it do his bidding. The remains must be relatively intact, either fresh or preserved by magic. Kneeling beside the corpse, the Necromancer says, "By the power of Death, I order you to rise and walk again!" The caster must then give the corpse a specific task. When the Undead completes the task, it loses its animation and becomes dead flesh once again.

Tasks given to animated corpses must be specific and simple – "Walk south for five days," "Kill that person," or "Carry this until I tell you to put it down" are good examples. Enchanted dead fight with the same combat skills they had when living. However, this spell does not have the power to compel the corpse's departed spirit to return. Therefore, the walking dead cannot answer questions about their former life.

Modifiers: The corpse's former level acts as a penalty to the Necromancer's *Action Table* roll.

SUMMONS OF THE SOUL: This is the most difficult spell of the Cult. Performed correctly, the rite returns the soul of a dead person to its magically animated body, deceiving the spirit into believing it lives once again. The corpse of the subject must be in good condition. It must also be animated, most commonly by use of the *Spell of the Walking Dead* (see below).

Further, a living sacrifice is required, so that its soul might be exchanged for the spirit of the dead. The victim must be a volunteer – in Rajanistan this is seldom a problem, for any tribesman would gladly go to Death at the request of a Necromancer. The spell must be cast in a place holy to Death, such as the Inner Sanctum of Irdan's Temple of Death. It takes an hour to cast, during which the caster makes a detailed and impassioned appeal to Death listing the reasons why the Cult needs the services of the spirit.

If the casting succeeds, the spirit awakes to semi-life. Returned to a body, it can move, speak, or take the other actions of a living being. The embodied spirit does not require food or water, but must sleep. Its skin is cold and lifeless to the touch. It perceives pain only dully, and physical pleasures are few.

The spirit's body does not age, heal from injuries, respire, or have a pulse. In game terms, embodied spirits can gain levels but cannot advance in total hit points. Some damage can be repaired – limbs can be sewn back on, and wounds can be stitched shut – but once the body's original hit points are gone, the spirit returns to whence it came.

Resistance: vs. the spirit's WILL, penalized by the level of the spell. (Not all spirits will resist, however.)

Magical Mishap: Death becomes annoyed at the disturbance, and retaliates by banishing all present to the Plane of Oblivion.

Yitek Death Magic

The spells of Yitek Spiritsingers relate to Death and the dead. Some were discovered by Spiritsingers exploring forgotten crypts near the Ruins of Quaran. Others were acquired from ghaists, shadow wizards, and other grisly entities.

DUST TO DUST: This spell is used to create enchanted corpse dust. It causes the body of any creature that has been dead for at least one week to crumble into dust. The magic has no effect on the living. A man-sized being yields 1 cubic foot of powder. The magic dust is used as a component for a number of spells. The Yitek believe that older remains (especially those of wizards) produce the more potent corpse dust. This spell takes 10 rounds to cast.

MUTTERINGS FROM BEYOND THE GRAY VEIL: After reciting a complicated mantra (requiring 5 rounds of concentration), the Spiritsinger enters a deep trance during which he is able to listen to the ramblings of entities residing in the Gray Sphere. He cannot communicate with them, but may eavesdrop – perhaps learning the location of the spirit's tomb or a forgotten spell, depending on the level of the spell and the charity of the Gamemaster.

Magical Mishap: The caster attracts the attention of those he listens to.

CHARNEL MISTS: This spell causes tendrils of green smoke to rise from the ground (in an area 10' in diameter per spell level). The horrid stench is such that all within the area must succeed at WILL Rolls, or become incapacitated due to uncontrollable retching. The spell lasts for one round per spell level, and has a range of 5' per spell level. To activate the spell, the caster voices an arcane phrase and tosses a handful of corpse dust into the air (takes one round).

Magic Resistance: Roll vs CON to avoid incapacitation. Those unable to smell are immune to this spell.

SUMMON DISEMBODIED SPIRIT: A variation of the more common *Spell of Summoning*, this magic allows a Spiritsinger to summon a disembodied spirit and bind it into his spirit staff. Before casting the spell, the Spiritsinger forms a triangle with corpse dust, and then thrusts his staff into the center. If the spell is well cast, a disembodied spirit appears within the triangle, where the corpse dust confines it. The level of the entity is equal to the level at which the spell is cast. The Spiritsinger may then command the spiritform to enter his staff.

Magic Resistance: The spiritform is allowed a WILL Roll to resist entering the staff.

Magical Mishap: In the case of a spell failure, the triangle of dust is accidentally pierced, allowing the spirit to attack the caster. In the event of a "Mishap," a temporary interdimensional rift is created, leading to the Gray Sphere.

TECHNOMANCY

The turns of axles, the interplay of gears, the geometrical perfection of efficient design – all of these fascinate the Yassan. The Technomancers are engineers and tinkers whose genius is augmented by the incredible dexterity of six-fingered hands. Their clockwork is so exquisite that it can summon and shape supernatural energies, in a similar way to that in which a wizard's gestures produce spell magics.

The principles upon which most Yassan devices are designed are unknown to other Talisnantans. The foundation of Technomancy rests upon a body of secret knowledge, and on the incredible mechanical skill of the Yassan. Only those who have been indoctrinated into the secrets of Technomancy can hope to master it, an accomplishment which requires a minimum of seven long years of apprenticeship.

Besides having a superb grasp of the skills of engineering, design, repair and sabotage, individual Yassan Technomancers can spend experience points to learn the following advanced technological skills:

Clockworkery. The Yassan use gears, springs, wheels and hinges to perform amazingly precise actions in complex sequences. Levers connected to tripwires or similar triggers can even allow their devices to "respond" to the actions of others. Artifacts can be made to "hear" by means of finely tuned diaphragms, and to "see" by sensing motion around them.

A Technomancer who masters both this science and the related art of Automaton Construction (see the *TALISANTA HANDBOOK*) can create superb man-like constructs. The best such have STR ratings of +5 or more, though none have a manual DEX above -5. Typical Yassan automatons cost 30,000 G.L.

Essential Actuation. This is the art of harnessing the power of the Prime Products of Thaumaturgy. The Yassan are not Thaumaturges, though they build the most intricate parts of the essential accumulators for their Dracartan allies. In exchange, the Technomancers receive quantities of the Prime Products. Storm Crystals and reservoirs of Red Menace have been used to power some of the largest Yassan creations. Likewise, the essential forces have been harnessed to provide awesome weapons of destruction.

Technoaurism. The Yassan are knowledgeable in the field of acoustics, and are adept at the design and construction of devices which can be used to amplify, deaden, or re-direct sound. These technoaural devices require no power source, and may take the form of elongated tubes, horns, or baffles, typically made of lightweight red iron or red iron alloys. Dracartan temples utilize elaborate technoaural systems to dampen sound and suppress unwanted noise. The Yassan are also skilled at designing spy systems – networks of tubes concealed within the walls of a room or even an entire building, which can be used to eavesdrop on individuals without their knowledge.

Technomagnetism. The Yassan make intensely powerful magnets from red iron, and use them to levitate and manipulate magnetized objects.

Telescopy. By carefully arranging lenses of red glass, suspended by fine chains within a circular frame, the Technomancers are able to build devices which allow one to view distant objects as if they were close at hand (up to 100x magnification). Special lenses to screen out certain factors are theoretically possible, including devices to spot intruders (by singling out the images of living beings) or to see at night (by magnifying moonlight).

THAUMATURGY

"Matter is but the shadow of its Essence. Alter the Essence, and its image is likewise changed." – Astramir

The art of Thaumaturgy consists of obtaining the Essence of a substance and manipulating it. Almost everything has its own Essence, but the four Primary Essences which underlie the Omniverse are *Fire*, *Ice*, *Wind* and *Earth*. The *Aether*, a nullifying substance which suffuses the planes, freezes these fundamental Essences into the amalgamations known to mortals as matter. Thaumaturges work to neutralize the aether, thereby liberating the Essences.

To obtain Primary Essences, Thaumaturges use a device known as an *Essence Accumulator*. Employing the magnetism of red iron to create ripples in the foundation of the Omniverse, the

accumulator opens a vacuum in the aether which attracts whatever Essence the artifact has been calibrated for.

Essences are shimmering, colorless substances which are neither liquid, solid nor gaseous in form. They are highly unstable, and must be contained within vials of solid amberglass. If released, the Primary Essences react violently with the surrounding aether, potentially causing any of the following side-effects:

Essential Earth: The ground pitches and trembles violently, possibly tumbling buildings to the ground. Cracks may open in the surface of the earth, venting steam and noxious fumes. If the region is volcanic, eruptions might be induced.

Essential Fire: All fires within 100' suddenly grow to ten times their former size, burning with furnace-like intensity for d10 rounds. Waves of heat may radiate out from the point of spillage, and nearby flammables might burst into flame. Glaciers fracture and ice melts.

Essential Ice: Cold rushes out from the opened vial, freezing all motion within 100' for the next d10 rounds. Fires flicker or go out. Water and other exposed liquids freeze solid.

Essential Wind: Wind explodes outward with hurricane force, creating a whirlwind which ascends into the sky – perhaps snatching people or items in its hasty departure.

Practical Thaumaturgy

Dracartan Thaumaturges rely on a substance known as *Quintessence* to transform the Primary Essences into stable and useful forms. For instance, Type I Quintessence, which can turn anything to solid form, is used to create Storm Crystals out of essential wind. Type II, which creates liquids, produces Red Menace (from essential fire) and Blue Havoc (from essential ice). Type III Quintessence turns essential earth into the gas known as Yellow Peril.

The four traditional transformations of the Primary Essences – known to Thaumaturges as the *Prime Products* – are sources of energy which can be used with more control than the volatile Essences from which they come.

Blue Havoc: This dark-blue fluid can be decanted by drops from its amberglass vial. Upon contact, Blue Havoc boils away, in the process transmitting incredible cold to the object it touches. Each drop does d10 of cold-related damage to living beings, makes metal brittle, and may shatter stone.

In larger quantities, Blue Havoc freezes creatures solid without killing them. In game terms, this happens when someone takes cold damage in one round equal to 5 x his original hit point total. Victims are essentially unharmed, since the massive cold flash-freezes them into a state of suspended animation.

The greatest danger to flash-frozen victims is heat, for if their temperature rises above freezing, their flesh fatally ruptures. The only known way to resuscitate a flash-frozen victim is to flash-warm him with Red Menace.

Blue Havoc may also be used as a temporary glue, freezing together items on which it is poured. The liquid causes its usual cold damage, and seals the items together (in temperate climates) for d10 rounds. The frozen objects can be liberated by a STR Roll, but the violence causes d4 damage to bare flesh, and may rip fabric or break metals. (1,600 G.L. per cubic-foot [8 vials]; 200 G.L. per vial [20 drops])

Red Menace: This glowing red liquid works in a similar fashion to Blue Havoc, creating heat as it boils away on contact. Flammables on which it is poured burst into flame, and metal and rocks glow bright red or even melt. A drop of Red Menace does d10 points of fire damage to living beings. (1,600 G.L. per cubic-foot [16 vials]; 100 G.L. per vial [20 drops])

Storm Crystals: Unlike the other Prime Products, Storm Crystals are inert until their energies are released by thaumaturgical manipulation. Wind machines dissolve these crystals slowly, creating winds which blow away from the alchemical devices. The magical winds are used to power duneships and other sail-driven devices. If a Storm Crystal is exposed to elemental flame, it erupts into a cyclone similar to that caused by the release of essential wind. (1,600 G.L. per crystal [one cubic-foot])

Yellow Peril: This yellow gas is confined within vials under pressure, and explodes in a noxious 10' x 10' x 10' cloud when its container is breached. Within d10 rounds, the heavy gas sinks to a 2' height, filling depressions in the local terrain. After d20 x 4 further rounds, the gas is absorbed into the soil and is no longer a threat.

Yellow Peril is the most pernicious Product since it corrodes the flesh of its victims. Those whose skin is exposed to this danger receive d10 damage per round, and must make two resistance rolls each round. Failure of the first CON Roll indicates that Yellow Peril has seeped into the victim's eyes, causing blindness for d4 weeks. Those who fail the second roll actually inhale the gas, and continue to take damage from the poison until it is exhaled. To cough up the heavy gas, a victim must hang upside down. (800 G.L. per vial [one-half cubic foot])

Quintessence

The sparkling powder known as Quintessence can do more than distill the Primary Essences into tractable forms. This thaumaturgic substance can, according to its variety, change matter to any state – solid, liquid or gas. It reacts at the rate of one cubic inch per second.

Carantheum's merchants use Quintessence to solidify drinking water for ease of transportation. Masons use it to liquefy marble, then pour the fluid stone into molds and solidify it. Thieves use it to melt holes into treasure vaults.

Quintessence affects whatever it touches, *including flesh*. When the magical substance interacts with living material, however, it acts in unpredictable ways. Type II Quintessence, for instance, might cause flesh to liquify and run away, or it may temporarily turn it to a jellylike consistency that can be molded into new shapes. Type III, which often makes living tissue burst into gas, might also inflate the flesh or fill it with pockmarks from bursting bubbles. Wart-like protuberances and armor-like skin may result from exposure to Type I Quintessence.

Thaumaturges do not like to discuss the accidents which can occur during the production of Quintessence. The distillation process, in which 4 drams of Essence (one dram from each of the primary types) are combined with 12 carats of powdered diamonds, takes place in a sealed amberglass alembic over a 2-week period. The lore of the Thaumaturgists contains instances of distillation catastrophes, in which Quintessence has been spewed in large quantities upon Thaumaturges and assistants alike. Some were transmuted into clouds, pools of liquid, or immobile blocks of rock-hard flesh. None lived for long.

Use of Quintessence against living victims is strictly forbidden by the Caduceus Mutada.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS OF ARCANA

ASTRAMIR'S BEQUEST: The first ruler of Carantheum filled his final writings with quotes from the Ruby Tablets concerning Thaumaturgy and the hidden riches of the Red Desert. The excerpts offer many insights into Thaumaturgy, but the Caduceus Mutada limits the number of those who can study from them for fear of what might be learned. Any Thaumaturge who reads it gains one point of skill in Thaumaturgic Operations. (Level: 10, X.P. 2 points, Worth: 2,000 G.L.)

BLACK TALISMANS: Crafted by Rajan enchanters, black-iron Cult talismans are made in one of the visages of Death. The talismans are said to confer the favor of Death upon the possessor. A few are enchanted with minor spells (usually of first level), which can be used up to three times daily by Death's disciples. (100 G.L. for a non-magical talisman; 500+ G.L. for an enchanted talisman; not sold to non-Rajans)

THE BOOK OF URMAAN: The closely-guarded textbook of the Rajan Necromancers, the *Book of Urmaan* is a large tome covered with the tanned skin of one of Urmaan's former enemies. The script describes the realm of Death in great detail, including secrets concerning the state of the dead before they are transported to their planes of destination. The Cult ignores the more mysterious and dire things hinted at in the volume, concentrating on its necromantic content. The book is very rare, as the Black Mystic Cult has made only five copies. (Level 10, 4 X.P., 5,000+ G.L.)

CLEAR WATER: The water from wells and oases is often dangerous to drink. The Djaffir solution is to mix suspect water with Clear Water. Each dram of enchanted water purifies 5 gallons of well water, purging it of harmful lifeforms – such as rayloks and Desert Kra larvae – as well as toxins. Clear Water cannot be used to damage large creatures in any way, but swallowing a dram of it does cure infestations of parasites. (10 G.L. per dram)

CODEX OF LAMENTATIONS: A lost tome penned years ago by Malec-Keth, a deranged Yitek Spiritsinger, this ponderous text is considered to be the most complete source of information on the infliction and alleviation of maledictions and curses. Malec-Keth's work is thought to be the origin of such incantations as *The Black Mists of Malnagar*, *Charnel Mists*, *Mutterings From Beyond the Gray Veil*, and the *Spell of Unending Torment*. Several abridged versions of this book are extant, some of which are fraudulent and none of which are complete. The original volume is said to have been bound between engraved covers of black iron. (Level d10, d4 X.P., 1,000+ G.L. for an abridgment; the original is Level 13, 5 X.P., 20,000+ G.L.)

DRACARTAN SARCOPHAGUS: Dracartans believe that the spirits of the dead travel a dangerous road through the Underworld to their final home. They might lose their path, or be attacked by malignant spiritforms and extradimensional sorcerers. Necromanes are thought to persecute those who fought Death's worshipers during life. To defend their deceased loved ones, Dracartans entomb them in enchanted sarcophagi. These pyramid-shaped mausoleums contain a diamond which acts as a beacon, guiding dead spirits through the Underworld. The structure also shields the corpses within from all forms of necromancy. (3,500 G.L. [includes cost of embalming]; the diamond alone is worth 500 G.L.)

ESPYING AMULET: Fashioned of bone, this Yitek amulet is shaped like a Death's visage. The carnelian eyes glow when the wearer approaches within 50' of a cursed creature or object. (200 G.L.)

GUARA ROPE: A foul item fashioned only by unscrupulous craftsmen, a Guara Rope is formed from the hair of a corpse, enchanted by reciting an ancient dirge while tying the strands into an intricate pattern of tiny knots. Most are seldom longer than 3'. Anyone strangled with a Guara Rope is sapped of vitality (d8 points of damage per round) until he breaks free or dies. If the individual expires, the stolen hit points are channeled through the rope into the killer, adding to the assassin's hit point total until the next sunrise. (A strangler may not accumulate more than double his normal hit points.)

The souls of dead victims are trapped within the rope's knots, and are freed when the knots are untied. Liberated spirits usually seek revenge upon their murderer. If the assassin devours the gruesome rope, however, the unfortunate souls are destroyed forever. The rope can no longer steal vitality once its knots are full (d20 spirits per foot of rope). Guara Ropes are illegal in most lands. (4,500 G.L.)

KRA-MUNDEL: Djaffir wizards use this artifact when they cast the *Spell of Divination*. It is fashioned from the skull of a Desert Kra turned upside down, its openings plugged with silver, then filled with sand and embellished with runes and sigils. To use the item, the soothsayer thrusts his wand, staff or Kra-Zuul into the confined sand while casting the *Spell of Divination*. After the caster speaks a question or concern, the rod moves of its own volition, tracing runes and shapes in the sand. Kra-mundel are large and bulky, often weighing in excess of 300 lbs. (1,150 G.L.; grants a +3 bonus when divining)

KRA-ZUUL: Magically crafted from the dorsal spine of a Desert Kra, a Kra-Zuul has the power to lead its bearer to the nearest water source. To activate the rod, the user must chant an ancient mantra known only to Djaffir wizards. In the desert, the closest water is usually underground (d10 x 2 feet deep), in which case the thirsty individual must dig for it. (500 G.L.)

NECROPHAGE HAND: Rajan Necromancers value the heads and hands of Necrophages, for they imbue them with preternatural power. The Hands move of their own accord, sensing and identifying victims through unknown means. Necromancers use them as weapons of assassination, for the Hands possess all the throttling strength of the necrophage they came from. (1,200 G.L.)

NECROPHAGE HEAD: A enchanted Necrophage Head has unusual insight into the affairs of Death, and can predict great deaths in the offing (large numbers of people dying) or specific violent deaths – but never more than d20 x 6 hours in advance.

The Head can also discern whether Death or Destiny is currently interested in the questioner's fate – an ominous omen of danger or disaster. The Head is bound to truthfully answer the Necromancer who enchanted it, but may (and probably will) lie to other questioners. (1,500 G.L.)

SPIRITSTAFF: These staves are crafted and employed by Yitek Spiritsingers. Each is made from a single carved bone belonging to a dragon or other large creature. The Spiritsinger then binds a disembodied spirit into the staff, forcing it to serve as his advisor. Although the staff may be used as a bludgeoning weapon, it can also employ the energy attack of the bound spirit, either on contact or as a ghostly white beam (20' range) – the damage done is one point per level of the spirit. (1,300+ G.L.; 500 G.L. for an "empty" staff)

THE THAUMATURGIC APOCRYPHA: According to Dracarta's legends, there were only twelve Ruby Tablets, and these were lost around the time of Astramir's death. Yet a verse of *Astramir's Bequest* reads, "Lo, beneath the desert lie my Tablets, numbering one score less three. Let each be sealed till our Lord shall speak again." From this, thaumaturgic scholars theorize that there were once 17 Tablets, and refer to the unknown five as the *Thaumaturgic Apocrypha*. (Level: 20 per tablet, X.P.: 5 points apiece, Worth: 30,000 G.L. each)

YASSAN LEVER: A great tripod equipped with block-and-tackle mechanisms driven by large treadmills and counterweights, this device allows the Yassan to lift building-stones, plates of red iron and other heavy objects. A Yassan Lever can lift up to 8 tons, to a maximum height of 100'. (3,000 G.L.)

YASSAN LUNG: These external lungs store air, allowing those who wear them to breathe for up to three hours. The carapace-like devices are light but bulky, and extremely vulnerable to damage. They cannot be used underwater. (1,600 G.L.)

YASSAN PROSTHETIC: The Technomancers of the Forgotten Age are purported to have made artificial limbs of leather and red iron which surpassed real limbs in their strength and dexterity. Modern Yassan limbs are never better than DEX -5, and always have an artificial appearance. (500 G.L. for Yassan limbs; 4,000+ G.L. for limbs from the Forgotten Age).

ZUBA BAG: Made by Djaffir wizards, a Zuba Bag is a small leather pouch worn around the neck. It contains the corpse dust of a sand demon, and allows its wearer to see through mirages created by the demons. (800 G.L.)

THE NATURALIST'S COMPENDIUM

The following section details new varieties of life native to the central deserts of Talislanta. The basic format for the animal statistics is:

SIZE: Typical height/length and weight, usually expressed as a range.

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: Any unusually low or high attribute score possessed by a typical member of the species. Positive ratings indicate superior abilities, and negative modifiers denote below-average scores. Attributes not listed are average. The attributes used in the Talislantan system are: physical strength (STR); dexterity (DEX); constitution (CON) *or* endurance; speed (SPD) *or* quickness; intelligence (INT); willpower (WILL); perception (PER) *or* sensory awareness; and charisma (CHA).

LEVEL: Indicator of general degree of ability. If a range is given, then all creatures have at least the lowest score in the range. If a plus sign is used, then the entity has an unlimited potential for improved levels. If both are used, then most individuals will be from the range of levels given, but exceptional beings can have almost any score.

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Indicates the type of attack used, and the typical damage caused.

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Extraordinary talents or powers.

ARMOR: The rating of a creature's natural protection is given in terms of manufactured armor (chain-mesh, plate, and so on).

HIT POINTS: Typical score for an average individual, usually given as a range.

HABITAT: The region or terrain types where this creature can be found.

COMMENTS: Miscellaneous information for the Gamemaster.

ARBORVOIR

SIZE: 1-4'; 30-180 lbs. (5 lbs. per hit point, when full)

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: DEX -2, SPD -6, INT -4

LEVEL: 2

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Needle Limbs – d4 damage (d6 attacks per round)

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Sense subsurface water (10-mile range)

ARMOR: As per leather armor

HIT POINTS: 6-36

HABITAT: Deserts – Rajanistan, Desertlands (east of Danuvia)

COMMENTS: Shadinn value the Arborvoir for its water – every 12 lbs. of Arborvoir yield a gallon of pure water. With its taproot in a water source, the plant absorbs water at a rate of one gallon (12 lbs.) per hour.



ARBORVOIR

A semi-plant, the Arborvoir is a pulpy creature composed of a single barrel-like stalk from which leg-tendrils and needle-covered branches spring. It is thought to be related to the mandragore, and has a similar method of locomotion – inactive by day, but able to uproot itself and walk the desert at night.

The Arborvoir is not a malefic creature – its walking capabilities are used to seek water, not prey. The tree can sense water at a distance of many miles. The Shadinn know that to find the next waterhole, all they need to do is to follow an Arborvoir trail.

When the tree settles its taproot into a water source, it rapidly expands, absorbing water throughout its tissues. When the Arborvoir is at its full capacity, it wanders back into the desert to avoid predators. It returns only after its reservoir dwindles.

BODORIAN CRAB

Native to the Desert Kingdoms, Bodorian Crabs have eight spindly legs which propel them quickly across the arid sand. Their chitinous backs are covered with long spines, which are sharp and durable and are gathered by the Djaffir for use as quill pens and sewing needles. These spines can be flung by the crab at its enemies, and are filled with poison.

During the heat of the day, Bodorian Crabs burrow into the sand, and may be stepped on by incautious travelers. In the evening they emerge and cling to the habara trees, where they drink moisture and eat the plants' resin. The crabs also dine on carrion and other detritus.

While feeding, a Bodorian Crab's spines vibrate, producing eerie melodies that grant the desert night a melancholy mood. It is this ability which gives the crab its name, for its songs have some resemblance to the tunes of the Bodor musicians.

BODORIAN CRAB

SIZE: 6-24" diameter; 1-3 lbs.

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: STR -3, DEX +3, SPD +5, INT -10

LEVEL: 1

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Spines – 1 point plus poison (see "Comments" below) (d6 attacks per round)

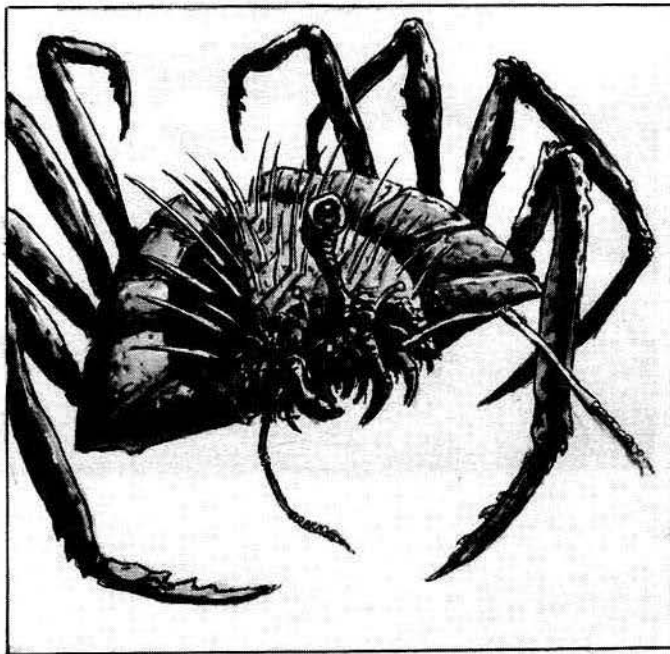
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Fling spines

ARMOR: As per chain mail

HIT POINTS: 6

HABITAT: The Red Desert (Carantheum, Djaffa)

COMMENTS: Bodorian Crabs have d20 spines available for use during any given encounter. Range is 10 feet. The spines are filled with a mild neurotoxin, causing paralysis lasting d20 minutes in man-sized creatures (resisted by a successful CON Roll). The poison becomes inert d20 minutes after the spine is separated from the crab.



DESERT KRA

A sightless, serpentine creature adorned with glistening spines, the seldom-seen Desert Kra grows to be the largest of the several varieties of kra. It swims beneath the sands of the deepest deserts, betraying its passage with only the faintest of "worm trails" in the constantly shifting terrain.

The Desert Kra is incredibly fierce, and feeds on such formidable prey as sand demons, satada, other kra, and desert travelers. The eggs and larvae of manrak are its favorites – a Desert Kra can destroy an entire manrak nest during a feeding frenzy.

The coloration of the Desert Kra varies from a dark purple along its back to a pale white underside, with streaks of light purple along its flanks. Unlike most other kra, Desert Kra have segmented bodies.

DESERT KRA

SIZE: 30-60'; 3,000-6,000 lbs.

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: STR +8, SPD +2, INT -4, PER +2

LEVEL: 2-20

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Bite – d20

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Burrowing, sand gills (can breathe through sand), sense vibrations (see "Comments" below)

ARMOR: As per chain mail

HIT POINTS: 16-36+

HABITAT: Deep sand in desert regions – Carantheum, Djaffa, the Desertlands (east of Danuvia); Kasmir (rare)

COMMENTS: Although the Desert Kra is blind, its dorsal spines allow it to sense the movements of prey up to a half mile away. The largest specimens (in excess of 50') swallow man-sized creatures whole on a "Critical Hit" result, unless the victim succeeds at a STR Roll to break free.



ECTOMORPH

Malign and eternally hungry, Ectomorphs stalk dry regions, preferring shaded ruins or rock formations. Dracartans speak of them as "the Devil Ghosts of the Desert" because of their pallid color and uncanny stealth. The creatures are vast in size, with scaly flesh that hangs limp between "ribs" of chitinous exoskeleton. Sixteen arching legs keep the predator's body higher than the reach of most of its enemies. Serrated pincers and a single fang project from its mouth, which is fringed with a wet-looking beard of hairy feelers.

Ectomorphs secrete a sticky cement with their mouth hair which they use to capture food. The glue is spread on the ground to trap prey, and gelatinous strings of cement festoon Ectomorph lairs. Skilled Desert Scouts can tell how long an Ectomorph has been gone from its nest by inspecting these strands, for the glue loses its potency after being exposed to the desert air for a few hours.

Ectomorphs eggs only hatch when exposed to water. The females lay their clutches in dry riverbeds and defunct wells, then leave the area before a rainstorm moistens the eggs; a young Ectomorph would gladly eat its mother, if given the chance.

ECTOMORPH

SIZE: 10-50' long, 6-8' tall; 150-600 lbs.

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: STR +3, DEX +3, CON -5, SPD +3
LEVEL: 4-16

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Sting – d12 plus cement (see below); Kick – d4 apiece (8 attacks per round)

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Cement, walk on walls/ceilings

ARMOR: As per plate armor (armor doesn't protect against impaling attacks due to the rib structure of the exoskeleton)

HIT POINTS: 20-60

HABITAT: Red Desert, Volcanic Hills, Wilderlands of Zaran

COMMENTS: Victims snared in Ectomorph cement must succeed at a STR Roll in order to tear free (which does d4 damage, if bare flesh was contacted).

INCARNATOR

Some spirits cannot content themselves in death. Necromancers drag others back to the material plane, or goad them with extra-dimensional vexations until they return. Some of the spirits that return become Incarnators and roam the world looking for new bodies. Ideally, these spirits hope to infest newly fertilized eggs and experience rebirth. When eggs are not available, Incarnators attempt to steal grown bodies.

Incarnators look like any other spiritform, commonly appearing as luminescent clouds in the form of their original body. They are often mentally disturbed or deranged, although this condition may be cured when they gain a body.

INCARNATOR

SIZE: 5-7'; no weight

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: DEX +2, SPD +2; STR and CON not applicable; other attributes as per former life

LEVEL: 1-16

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Chill aura (1 point of energy damage per level of the Incarnator)

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Chill aura (range of 1' per level), flight, pass through solid objects at will, possess/inhabit living beings (see "Comments"); can use any magic known in life

ARMOR: Unarmored. Can be harmed only by extradimensional entities, or by silver or magic weapons.

HIT POINTS: 6, plus 1 per level

HABITAT: Tombs and wastelands, especially in Carantheum

COMMENTS: An Incarnator may steal a body from a victim only by winning an astral duel. The victim makes a WILL Roll for each minute of fighting, subtracting the Incarnator's WILL from the die roll. On a "Mishap," the Incarnator wins and takes possession of the body. On a "Success Plus," the victim casts the Incarnator to Oblivion. With any other result the struggle continues, but the victim receives a +1 bonus to his die roll for each previous roll which he has survived.



LARVAL DESERT KRA

A Desert Kra must give birth to its young in a body of water, harking back to the aquatic origin of the species – usually in a well or oasis spring. The parchment-thin larvae spend up to eight months in their watery environment before metamorphosing into the sand-burrowing form. When men and beasts drink polluted water, they may swallow larval kra (5-in-10 chance of ingesting d6 larvae). Ingested larvae attach themselves to their hosts' digestive organs, where they feed and begin to grow at a disturbing rate. Eventually, they eat their way out of the victim.

The best cure (though dangerous) is to drink a solution containing one-sixteenth of an alkahest vial diluted with pure water. The acid inflicts d8 damage upon the consumer, but has a 5-in-10 chance of killing the larvae (roll once for each). Cleansed Water also will kill the parasites (see the "Arcanum" section).

LARVAL DESERT KRA

SIZE: 1½" long; no appreciable weight

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: SPD -2 [land] / +2 [water], INT -6
LEVEL: 1

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Only if ingested (see "Comments")

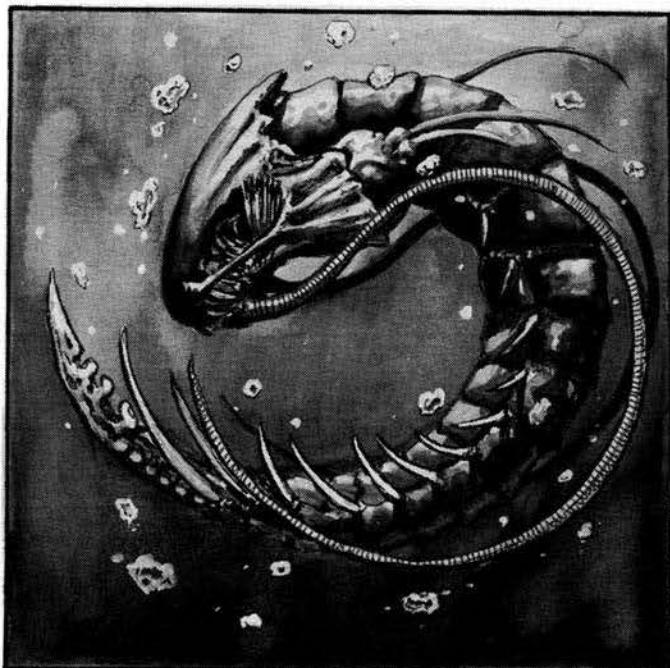
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Breathe water, digest host (see "Comments" below), swim

ARMOR: None

HIT POINTS: 1

HABITAT: Oasis springs and wells in sandy regions – Carantheum, Djaffa, the Desertlands (east of Danuvia); Kasmir (rare)

COMMENTS: The host suffers severe abdominal cramps within d8 hours of drinking the contaminated water. After d6 days, the victim loses 1 point of STR and CON daily for each larva swallowed, and is in increasingly intense pain. He dies when STR or CON reach -10. At this stage the creatures are 1' long, can bite for d4 points of damage, and have 2-4 hit points. Once larvae are purged from the body, lost attribute points are regained at the rate of 1 point per attribute per week.



NAGUS

Seeking to take his caravans to the air, the Caliph of Djaffa petitioned his beasthandlers to breed a hybrid between an ontra and a dractyl. The Nagus was the result. Only five of these bizarre creatures are known to exist, and all are the prize possessions of the Caliph.

The Nagus retains the gray-green hide and membranous wings of the dractyl. However, the hybrid creature is a better flier than a dractyl, and is willing to carry its rider to greater heights. The short front legs of the dractyl have been replaced with the long legs of the aht-ra, causing the Nagus to be less awkward than a dractyl while on the ground.

Unlike an ontra, the Nagus is omnivorous and eats practically anything. It has spiraling horns and an ontra-like snout. The Nagus also has a fatty hump on its back, which can store enough water to last it for three weeks.

The Nagus is notoriously stubborn and difficult to train, and must be constantly goaded. The few hybrids known to exist are heavily guarded by their Djaffir masters.

NAGUS

SIZE: 6-7' at shoulder, 25' wingspan; 500-600 lbs.

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: STR +4, CON +4, SPD +3 [land] / +5 [air], INT -5

LEVEL: 1-6

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Bite – d4, Claws – d6

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Flight, subsist without water (maximum: 3 weeks), travel without rest (maximum: 3 days)

ARMOR: As per leather armor

HIT POINTS: 20-40

HABITAT: Specially bred for the Caliph of Djaffa

COMMENTS: A Nagus can fly bearing burdens of up to 300 lbs. The Beasthandlers have not decided whether more than one of these beasts constitute "nagusi" or "naguses."



OVUHZ

Ovuhz are six-legged, furred animals bred by many desert tribes for wool. Omnivores, they eat small animals to supplement their diet of plants. Ovuhz are excellent rodent-catchers, capable of reaching their long necks and small heads down holes after their prey.

Their white-colored wool serves a dual purpose – during the day it reflects away the desert heat, and during the cold night it keeps the Ovuhz warm. Consequently, ovuhz-wool robes are popular throughout the Desert Kingdoms. The wool is harvested bimonthly, when the animals shed. The thickness of the wool depends on how cold the recent weather has been, and on how well the Ovuhz have been fed. Once carded, the wool can be woven into cloth.

Ovuhz are edible, but are generally not eaten due to their worth as wool-bearers. Predators find them tasty, however.

OVUHZ

SIZE: 4-5' long; 100-150 lbs.

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: STR +1, SPD +2, INT -6

LEVEL: 1

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Body-slam – d6 (see "Comments")

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Serpentine neck

ARMOR: As per leather armor

HIT POINTS: 8

HABITAT: Deserts and arid regions

COMMENTS: Ovuhz are very affectionate, and give their "body-slams" as a sign of favor. They also bond with their shepherds, and attack anything they perceive as being a foe of their masters. (If they weren't very dumb animals, this might be a more useful characteristic.) Victims may try a DEX Roll to avoid being slammed, and if hit, must succeed at a second DEX Roll if they wish to remain standing.

PARADRAC

Another member of the dragon family, the Paradrac's ancestry is marked by the wing-like fringe on its middle leg (devolved from the great wings of the larger dragons). Paradracs can be found near dragons of all sorts, ridding them of painful insects and keeping them company. In return, the dragons keep the Paradracs safe from predators.

The long, narrow head of the Paradrac enables it to thrust its snout underneath dragon scales, where parasites (such as the rotavrax) nestle. Its chitin-covered, prehensile tongue then draws the prey into the Paradrac's mouth. A strong, dextrous mandible on the end of the Paradrac tongue probes for its prey, seizes it, and draws it back to the mouth for consumption.

Rajan Torquar train Paradracs for use in their torture chambers, and wear special pads on their arms and shoulders for the creatures to perch on. The animals use their barb-ridged tongues and sharp mandibles on torture victims, achieving precise and hideous effects.

PARADRAC

SIZE: 1-2'; 5-8 lbs.

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: STR -4, DEX +1, INT +1, PER +1

LEVEL: 1-2

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Claws – d4, mandible bite – 1 point

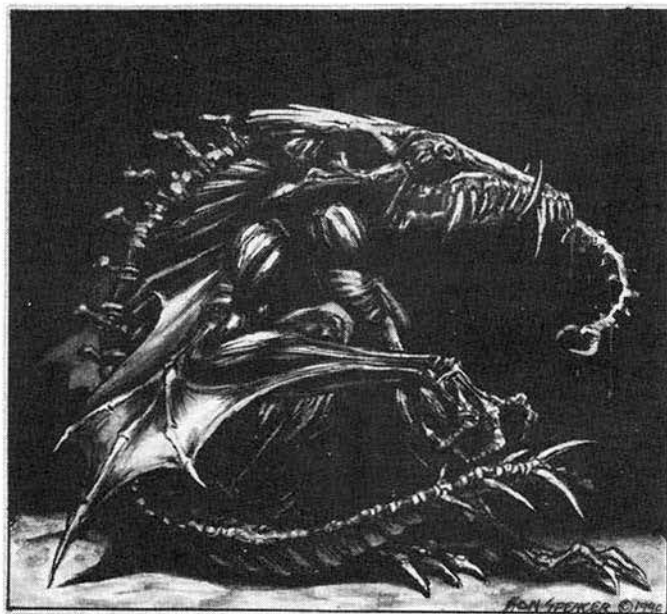
SPECIAL ABILITIES: Speaks a slurred dialect of the Dragon language (whisper only)

ARMOR: As per leather armor

HIT POINTS: 3-6

HABITAT: Dragon caves and desert mountains

COMMENTS: Paradracs mate for life, and become disconsolate and soon die if separated from their mates. A torturer aided by a pet Paradrac gains a +2 bonus to his Torture skill roll.



ROTAVRAX

A parasite common to large, scaled beasts, the Rotavrax is an especially tough insect. It prefers to make its home beneath the scales of dragons, where the creature grouts into dragon flesh with its rotary mandibles and drinks its host's blood. The sting is quite painful, even to dragons – this may account in part for the legendary bad temper of the great saurians.

The torturers of Rajanistan use every tool at their disposal, including Rotavraxes. The insects are retrieved by trained paradracs and used to horrid effect on the bodies of torture victims, particularly in and around the ears and eyes.

ROTAVRAX

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: STR -15, DEX +8, CON -10, INT -15, PER +1

LEVEL: 0 (no modifier)

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Bite – 1 point

ARMOR: As per battle armor

HIT POINTS: 1

HABITAT: Dragons and large reptilians

COMMENTS: A torturer skilled in the use of Rotavrax gains a +1 bonus to his Torture skill rolls.



SAND MANTA

The Sand Manta's flat, circular body is surrounded by a mass of long, thin tentacles. In the center is the creature's toothy maw. Its spongy skin is bright red, speckled with black starbursts that serve as eyes.

A Sand Manta lies on its back under a thin layer of sand during the day. Spreading its tentacles, the creature waits for its quarry to approach. The Sand Manta wraps its strong limbs around the leg of any beast or man who comes too close. Once it has firmly grasped its victim, the predator begins to feed.

During the cool of the pre-dawn hours, Sand Mantas move slowly across the desert in search of slumbering prey. Stalking over the dunes in the moonlight, they resemble eldritch wraiths or wandering spiritforms. Desert travelers are advised to see that their tents are well sealed before lying down to sleep – a Sand Manta enveloped about someone's face is a horrifying sight.

SAND MANTA

SIZE: 1-3' long, 3-6' tentacles; 3-6 lbs.

EXCEPTIONAL ATTRIBUTES: STR +3, DEX +2, SPD -3, INT -10

LEVEL: 1-3

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Bite – d8 (see "Comments" below)

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Constricting tentacles (see "Comments" below)

ARMOR: None

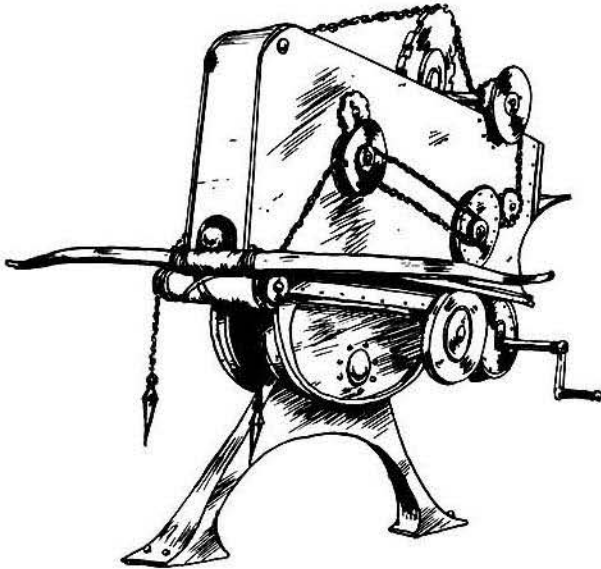
HIT POINTS: 6-10

HABITAT: Desert regions of Carantheum and Djaffa

COMMENTS: To entangle its victim in its tentacles, a Sand Manta rolls on the "Combat" column of the *Action Table*. The victim's SPD or DEX (whichever is greater) counts as a penalty to the die roll. On a successful hit, the tentacle grabs its target, after which the Sand Manta will begin to feed on its victim. Breaking free of a Sand Manta's tentacles requires the character to succeed at a STR Roll, using the Manta's STR as a penalty.

WEAPONS & EQUIPMENT

These new weapons, devices, and other items of equipment are available throughout various regions of the Desert Kingdoms. (Statistics for the Gamemaster, where necessary, are provided in the "Gamemaster's Section.")

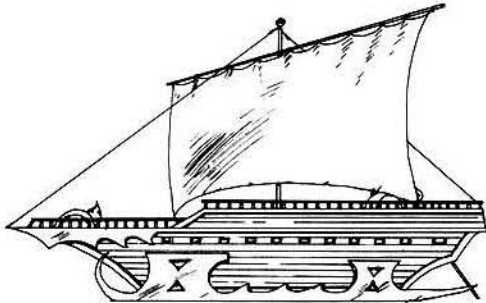


CAPTURE-SPEAR (Rajanistan)

This hooked spear is used by Torquar guards to capture their victims without killing them. Both the blade and butt of the spear feature barbed hooks which can be employed to snag fabric or flesh. (1 G.L.)

CHAIN-HURLANT (Carantheum)

Chain-Hurlants are similar to ship's hurlants except for the complex gears and chain drives. When the operator turns a crank, a claw mechanism automatically cocks this weapon, inserts a new bolt into position, and fires it. Dracartan artilleryists mix their ammunition to save money, primarily using red-iron arrows but firing a Thaumaturgic bolt every fifth, tenth or twentieth round. Yassan Technomancers build the devices, which the Dracartans mount on their largest duneships. (3,500 G.L.)

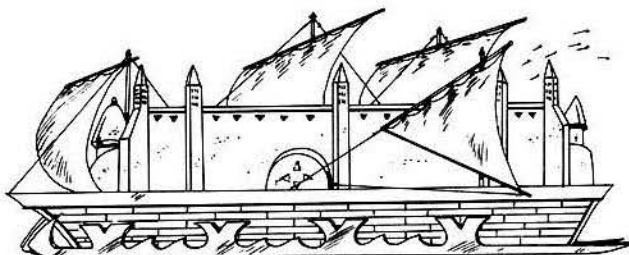


DUNE ESCORT (Carantheum)

The majority of the footsoldiers of Carantheum go to war riding in these small, sharp-prowed duneships. Each carries a crew of five sailors plus a company of 50 warriors and their mounts. When the enemy is encountered, the troops swarm down the stern ramp to fight, while the sandsailors support them with fire from the Escort's hurlant. A trained company can board or debark from its ship in d6 x 10 seconds. (20,000 G.L.)

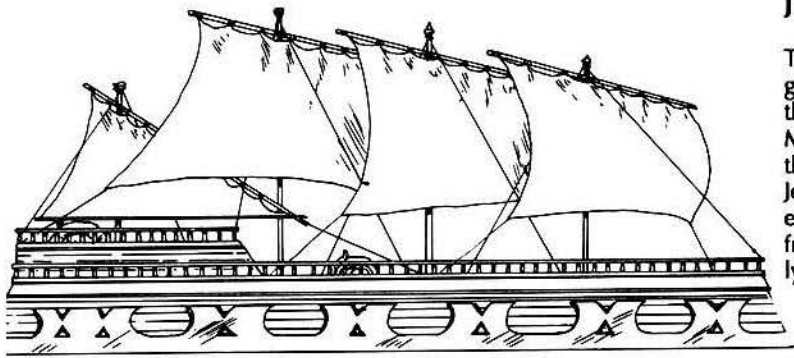
GREAT WAR DUNESHIP (Carantheum)

Only two of these ships exist – the *Astramir* and *Abas the Grey*. They lead the King's fleet. Both mount seven masts and twenty siege hurlants, and can carry 1,000 troops apiece. (75,000 G.L.; built only at the command of the King of Carantheum)



HURLANT BARGE (Carantheum)

These land barges have red-iron walls and towers, and resemble nothing else so much as fortresses on sandrunners. Behind the fortifications are batteries of weapons and ammunition: 5 siege hurlants and 10 ship's hurlants for heavily-armed barges; 30 ship-size hurlants for support barges; and ballistae on the barges of the Red Desert Fleet. Hurlant Barges maneuver slowly, but are devastating in their firepower. (25,000 G.L. *plus weapons*; sold only by the King of Carantheum)

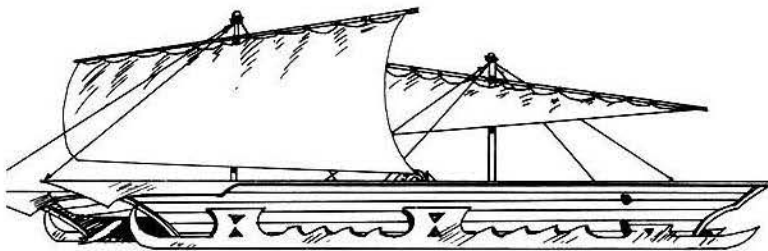


JEWEL OF HONOR (Djaffa)

This ornament – a 30-carat blue diamond from L'haan, set in a gold band engraved with the owner's name – is presented to the Caliphesse of the Djaffir when she must pass the Obsidian Mask to her successor. It is a high crime for any woman other than a Caliphesse or one of her direct descendants to wear a Jewel of Honor. Djaffir families highly value their heirloom Jewels . . . as do Sindaran collectors, who pay top prices for those from certain historical periods. (3,000+ G.L. to collectors; rarely for sale)

LAND BARGE (Carantheum)

These immense, unmaneuverable duneships look like rafts, having flat, square decks that rise above the sands on five or more runners. Three tripod masts deploy massive square-sheeted sails. Merchants prefer Land Barges because of their low price and great capacity. A single barge can carry 5,000 tons of cargo. (10,000 G.L.)



MINING DUNESHIP (Carantheum)

This unique twin-hulled style of duneship is designed to collect the ore-rich sands of the Red Desert. When the ship is at high speed, the collection troughs which protrude from between the hulls are lowered beneath the surface of the sand. The iron-toothed scoops force sand up chutes and into the ship. A mineship can collect 6 x 10 cubic feet of sand-ore per day (depending on the wind), and each cubic foot of red sand, when processed, yields one pound of red iron. (35,000 G.L.)

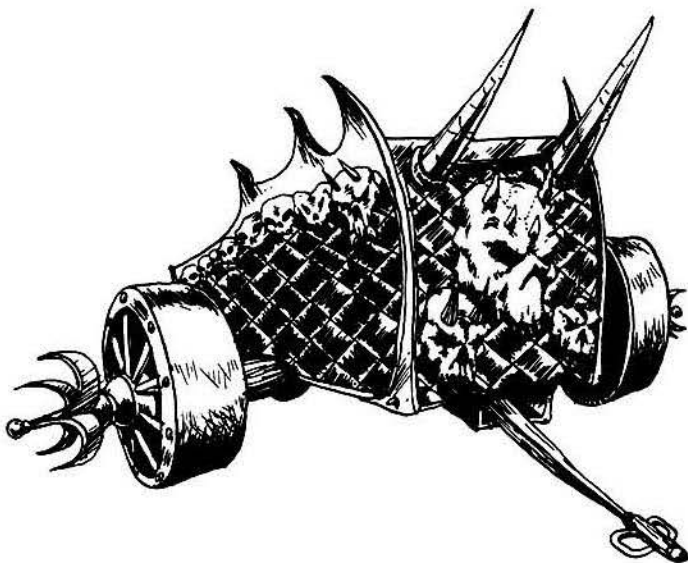
POLE-LASSO (Djaffa)

Employed by Djaffir beasthandlers to capture wild or miscreant animals, the pole consists of a 15-foot length of light wood with a hoop at the end. A sturdy rope runs along the shaft and around the hoop, forming a lasso. While riding an aht-ra, the Djaffir places the pole-lasso about his quarry's neck or leg, then releases the pole and pulls the lasso tight. These devices are also useful for snaring slaves. (2 G.L.)

RAJAN WAR CHARIOT

The Rajan Army employs equus-drawn chariots plated with black iron. Made by Shadinn smiths, the war conveyances provide protection and a steady platform for Rajan archers. The chariot has a crew of three: the driver, the archer, and a spearman charged with defending the archer.

The war chariot is made of desert palm, strengthened and plated with black iron to add strength and protection (armor value 6). It is drawn by two leather-barded equus. The tongue of the hitch runs between the animals to allow maximum maneuverability, and the black-iron wheels are broad and wide in order to support the chariot on the soft sands of the desert. (1,500 G.L.; not sold by the Rajans)



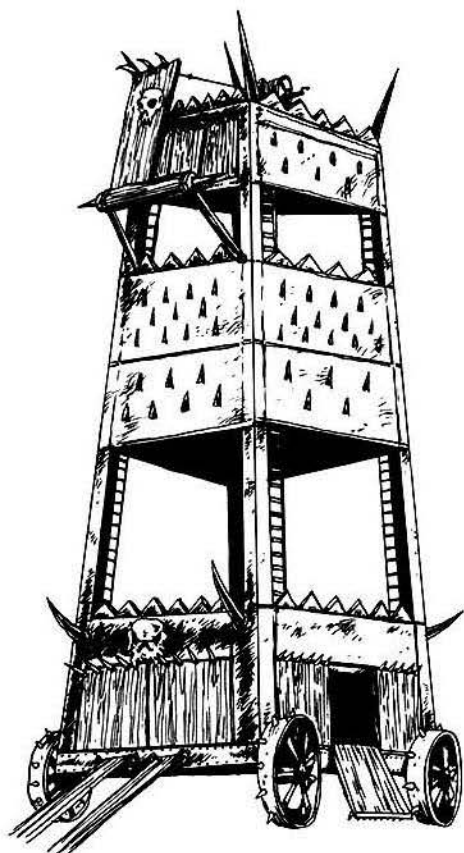


RED-IRON ARMS (Carantheum)

Dracartan smiths say, "If it flies in black, it soars in scarlet." They prefer to make weapons, armor and tools from red iron. Such items cost double the normal price but weigh only half as much. Red iron holds an amazingly fine edge, and can withstand prolonged flexing without breaking. (2 x normal cost)

ROYAL SEQUIN (Djaffa)

This small, highly polished gold coin is presented to every woman who completes the grueling Obsidian Mask Race. It is engraved with the sigil of the Caliph, the day and year of the race, and the recipient's name. It is a crime for any woman to wear a Royal Sequin she has not won herself. (50+ G.L. to collectors; seldom sold)



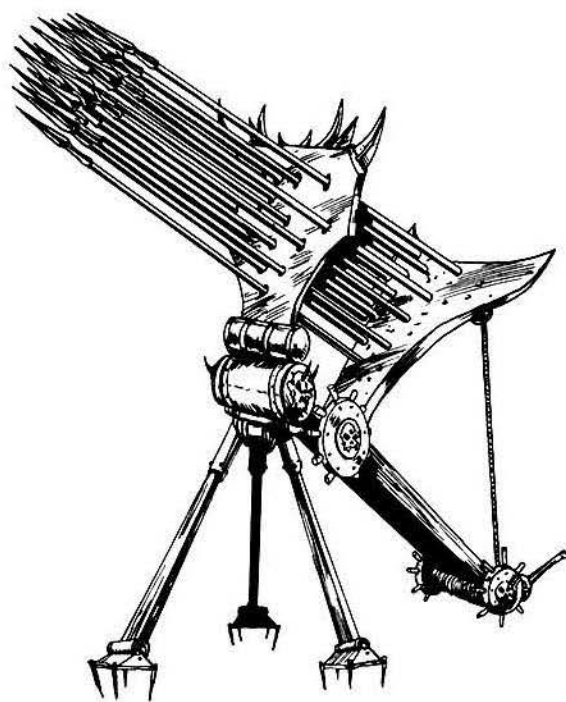
SCOUT SLOOP (Carantheum)

These slender craft ride on half-runners, a single one beneath the bow and a pair astern. A wooden tower projects forward from the forecandle, providing a platform from which soldiers can pour Red Menace or Blue Havoc on their attackers. Some Scout Sloops are also equipped with venting devices in the stern, allowing them to lay down lethal barriers of Yellow Peril. The scout ships are the backbone of the Dracartan navy. Two dozen sailors man the ship's swivel-mounted siege hurlant and four ship-size hurlants. Up to 100 warriors and their mounts can ride within the hull. (35,000 G.L.)

SHADINN BATTLE TOWER (Rajanistan)

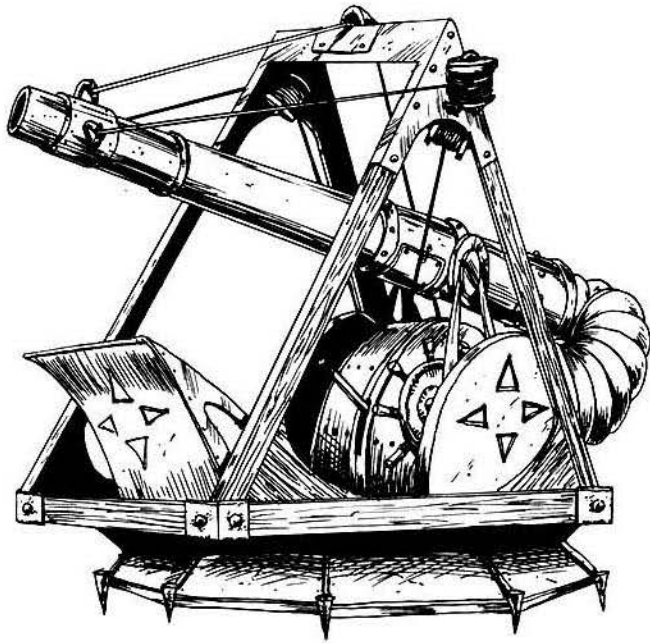
Black-iron-shod Battle Towers are the centerpiece of the vast tribal army of the Shadinn of Rajanistan. Assembled shortly before battle from prefabricated parts and pulled by teams of 20 land-lizards, the towers serve as mobile strongpoints, stocked with siege weaponry and surplus land-lizard mounts. Each is constructed from tough cliff-tree wood taken from the slopes of the Jade Mountains, and plated with black iron (armor value 5). Its wheels are iron-shod but vulnerable, liable to break if heavily used or taken over rough ground.

The lowest level of the tower houses a ballista or springal, or an assault squad of 30 Shadinn warriors. The middle level is for the use of a squad of 25 archers. The top level of the tower has a drawbridge-style ramp which can be lowered onto the top of enemy battlements. Another squad of 20 troops waits here. (3,000 G.L.)



SPRINGAL (Rajanistan)

A siege weapon used by the Shadinn, the Springal consists of a tension-mounted paddle and a pierced rack loaded with javelins. When the device is fired, the paddle springs forward and drives a volley of javelins toward the enemy. The virtue of the weapon is that it is reliable and easy to operate. A similar but smaller weapon, the Demi-Springal, fires volleys of darts rather than javelins. Both are tripod-mounted devices. (500 G.L. for a Springal; 50 G.L. for a Demi-Springal)



THOUSAND-TEETH (Caranthium)

At the heart of this Technomancer-designed artillery piece is a modified wind machine, the same device which provides the breeze to propel the duneships of Dracarta. The operator places a magazine of red-iron darts within the pressurization chamber, and then seals the weapon and engages the engine. Within ten rounds, the Thousand-Teeth is ready to fire. When the lever is depressed, scores of darts spit from the long barrel of the weapon. (5,000 G.L.)

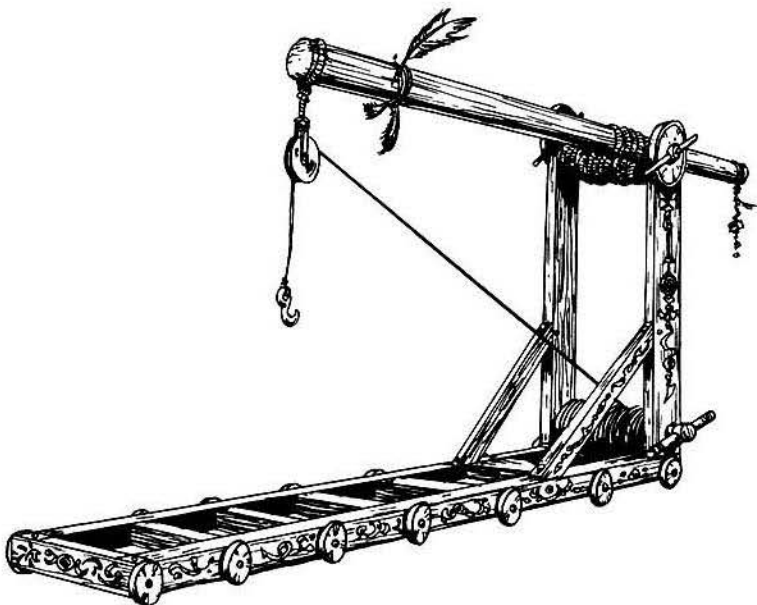
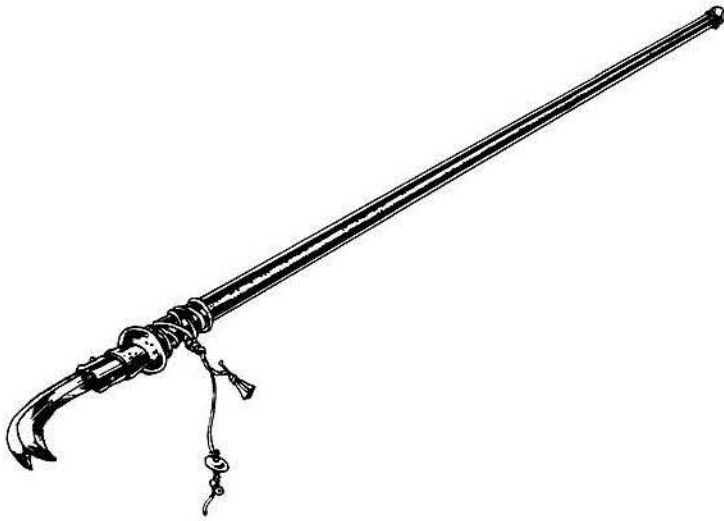
YITEK TRUNCHEON

This multi-purpose implement consists of a 6' black-iron tube with two adjustable prongs at one end. By twisting the prongs, the Truncheon can be transformed into a pickaxe or a shovel. Depressing a catch while whipping the Truncheon in a circle overhead releases the prong-end, which then acts like a grapple, flying toward its destination trailing a light cord. The 50' rope, normally coiled inside the hollow tube, can support up to 300 lbs. The Truncheon is also used by the Yitek as a crowbar or impromptu weapon. (75 G.L.)

YITEK TRUNDLE WINCH

Yitek Tomb-Robbers use Trundle Winches to move coffins and other heavy artifacts. Each consists of a long, narrow, wooden frame to which is affixed a thick pole with a pulley and a locking-winch mechanism. The device moves on small wheels, and can be taken apart so that it can be carried on the back of an aht-ra. A Trundle Winch can support up to 500 lbs.

Because their lives depend upon their tools, the Yitek are very superstitious toward the winches. They talk to them, giving them names – and if a Trundle Winch drops a heavy load, the Yitek believe it to be angry and try to appease it. The tomb-robbers decorate their winches with carvings and bits of bone, believing these ornaments please the spirit of the device. (75 G.L.)



PLAYER'S MATERIAL

EmoND



Aramut Lancer



Aramut Sustainer



Dracartan Dunesailor



Dracartan Expositor



Shadinn Overseer



Vird Spy



Yitek Spiritsinger



Zagir Mountaineer

New Character Types

ARAMUT LANCER

SIZE: 5' 2"-6', 90-190 lbs.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Diabolical facial features, black-brown skin, blood-red eyes, horn-like protrusions on forehead and chin, sparse brown hair on crown and chest, deep-chested build

ATTRIBUTES: STR +1, INT -2, PER +1

HIT POINTS: 12

SPECIAL ABILITIES: None

SKILLS: Mounted combat (aht-ra), primary combat (lance), riding (aht-ra)

EQUIPMENT/POSSESSIONS: Lance, dagger, black-iron partial-plate armor, dark grey clothing (robe, blouse, pantaloons and turban), thigh-length land-lizard boots, aht-ra war mount, personal gear. Blouse and chest plate are painted with a laughing Death's Skull

WEALTH: d10 x 5 silver pieces

COMMENTS: The Lancers are the male warrior-lords of the Aramut. They devote themselves to the service of Death, and spend their lives practicing for combat – especially relishing the chance to fight unbelievers. Lancers are used to being cared for by their servants (the Personal Sustainers), and are helpless at mundane tasks without them.

CAMPAIGN ROLE: Lancers always travel in company with Personal Sustainers, who take care of the non-combat needs of their masters. Non-player-character Lancers are most often found patrolling Zagiran or raiding the Dracartan frontier. A Lancer player character might be on a quest in foreign lands for Death and the Khadun – or, if he has failed on such a mission, he might be traveling at random, too ashamed to return to Raj-anistan.

ARAMUT PERSONAL SUSTAINER

SIZE: 5' 2"-6', 90-190 lbs.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Diabolical facial features, black-brown skin, blood-red eyes, horn-like protrusions on forehead and chin, sparse brown hair on crown and chin, deep-chested build

ATTRIBUTES: CON +1, INT -1, PER +1

HIT POINTS: 12

SPECIAL ABILITIES: None

SKILLS: Combat training, cooking, riding (aht-ra); any three Wilderness skills; any two Trades and Crafts skills

EQUIPMENT/POSSESSIONS: Spear, scimitar, dagger, hide armor, dark grey clothing (robe, blouse, pantaloons), turban [men only], veil, thigh-length [men] or ankle-high [women] land-lizard boots, aht-ra mount (*not war-trained*), cooking pot, snares, pouches and tent roll

WEALTH: d10 x 10 silver pieces

COMMENTS: The Aramut who perform the mundane tasks of survival, thus allowing the warrior-lords to devote their energies solely to the service of Death, are the Sustainers. Those of the highest status are Personal Sustainers, servant-companions of the Lancers. These Aramut travel with their Lancers, gathering and cooking food, caring for aht-ra steeds, pitching tents, etc. **CAMPAIGN ROLE:** Personal Sustainers are ordinarily found wherever there are Lancers (see "Aramut Lancer," above). Every Lancer needs his Personal Sustainer, and every Sustainer serves Death and the Khadun by sustaining a Lancer. Sustainers encountered alone are either encamped, waiting for the return of their Lancers, or hunting for food to feed themselves and their masters.

DRACARTAN DUNESAILOR

SIZE: 6'-7', 120-220 lbs.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Man-like beings with jade skin

ATTRIBUTES: STR +1, DEX +2, PER +2

HIT POINTS: 14

SPECIAL ABILITIES: None

SKILLS: Artillerist, navigator/pilot (duneship), secondary combat, signal, wilderness survival

EQUIPMENT/POSSESSIONS: Linen headdress and short cloak; torc, bracers and leggings of red iron; loincloth, hurlant (with quiver of 20 bolts), trident, dagger, storm crystal, coil of rope (50'), dunesailor tools

WEALTH: d20 x 5 gold lumens' worth of Dracartan pyramids

COMMENTS: Dunesailors begin their careers when they are conscripted (at age 20) to serve a five-year term in the Dracartan military. Some stay with the dune navy when their enlistments expire, hoping to climb in rank, while others leave to crew the merchant duneships of Carantheum. Dunesailors have an abiding thirst for strong drink and a reputation for being sullen.

CAMPAIGN ROLE: If the players are planning to do any dunesailing, a Dunesailor player character is strongly recommended. Discreet non-player-character Dunesailors are also invaluable, due to their knowledge of the desert and their far-flung merchant contacts.

DRACARTAN EXPOSITOR

SIZE: 6'-7', 120-220 lbs.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Man-like beings with jade skin

ATTRIBUTES: INT +1, WILL +1, PER +2

HIT POINTS: 12

SPECIAL ABILITIES: None

SKILLS: Astrology, combat training, lip-reading, magic training, stealth, Thaumaturgic operations; *plus* any two Scholarly Pursuits

EQUIPMENT/POSSESSIONS: Red-iron torc, robes and puffed cap of red linen, staff, pouch of scribe's materials

WEALTH: d20 x 20 gold lumens' worth of mixed coins

COMMENTS: A special class among the Priests of Jamba, the Expositors are devoted to exposing religious fraud wherever it occurs. Like the other priests, they also minister to Carantheum's spiritual needs – Dracartans consult them for weddings, funerals and in daily worship. When between quests, they spend most of their time in contemplation, poring over Astramir's texts and searching the stars for enlightenment, or listening in the temples for the voice of their god. Many wander wastelands and ruins hoping for a message from Jamba.

CAMPAIGN ROLE: Expositors travel the breadth and length of Talislanta on their quests to expose trickery by priestly thieves and extradimensional entities. They are also frequently called upon to defend Carantheum against renegade Thaumaturges and foreign agents. Expositors are excellent as either player or non-player characters.

SHADINN OVERSEER

SIZE: 6' 8"-7' 4", 300-450+ lbs.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Diabolical facial features, brown-grey skin, blood-red eyes, horn-like protrusions on forehead and chin, sparse black hair, clawed feet and hands, powerful build and gigantic stature

ATTRIBUTES: STR +4, DEX -1, CON +2, PER +2

HIT POINTS: 14

SPECIAL ABILITIES: None

SKILLS: Appraise slaves, appraise treasure, miner, mounted combat (land lizard), primary combat, riding (land lizard), tracking

EQUIPMENT/POSSESSIONS: Shadinn battle axe, land-lizard armor, hide shield, leather cape, loose-fitting leather pantaloons, veiled turban, sandals, whip, pouch, combat-trained land-lizard steed (with hide barding, saddle and tent)

WEALTH: d10 x 6 silver pieces

COMMENTS: Shadinn Overseers work in the mines of Shadin-nar, keeping their slaves at their duties until Death calls for them. An Overseer is shamed if his charges gain their freedom, and cannot redeem himself until they are recaptured. All are superstitious and keep many private vows.

CAMPAIGN ROLE: Non-player-character Overseers may be met as members of a Rajan border patrol or raid, or as part of a slave-buying expedition in Faradun. They are also sure to be encountered if the adventurers are enslaved in Rajanistan. As player characters, Overseers might be tracking escaped slaves in foreign lands or be shamed self-exiles.

VIRD SPY

SIZE: 5' 6", 90-160 lbs.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Creased and lined skin (generally dusky black), sparse hair (black or brown), blood-red eyes, clawed hands and feet. *However, may have any semblance when magically disguised!*

ATTRIBUTES: INT +1, PER +2

HIT POINTS: 12

SPECIAL ABILITIES: None

SKILLS: Acting, disguise, espionage, secondary combat; any four Thieving skills

EQUIPMENT/POSSESSIONS: Any kind of clothing, waterskin, any two weapons, dagger

WEALTH: d10 x 10 silver pieces

COMMENTS: Virds are employed as spies by the Black Mystic Cult, and are usually disguised through the use of powerful spells. Vird Spies are sent on such missions as information-gathering, theft, assassination, espionage and political intrigue.

CAMPAIGN ROLE: Player characters new to a campaign might secretly be Vird Spies, pretending to be something else – but such a duplicitous role will be difficult to conceal from the other players in the long run.

YITEK SPIRITSINGER

SIZE: 5' 6"-6' 4", 90-170 lbs.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Brown skin and hair, angular features, lean build, faces painted with black and white pigments ("Death's visage")

ATTRIBUTES: DEX +1, INT +3, PER +3, CHA -4

HIT POINTS: 12

SPECIAL ABILITIES: See well in darkness

SKILLS: Inscribe spells, magic training, metaphysical doctrines (the Afterlife), mounted combat (aht-ra), primitive magical talents (Yitek talismans and charms *only*), riding (aht-ra), secondary combat; one of the following: antiquarian lore, arcane

lore, Talislantan history

EQUIPMENT/POSSESSIONS: Cape, loose-fitting garments of woven gauze, black and white facial pigments, pouch and shoulder sack, thieves' tools, dagger, Yitek truncheon, bag of spell bones, batra or tatra steed

WEALTH: d20 x 10 gold lumens' worth of various coins and curios

COMMENTS: Like all Yitek, Spiritsingers seek out and break into tombs in search of artifacts. They also probe the mysteries of Death, and are charged with performing sacrifices of beasts and valuables to appease this grim deity. Their talismans and charms are said to protect tomb-robbers from curses.

CAMPAIGN ROLE: As non-player characters, they may be found skulking in tombs or indulging in lone pilgrimages, and can be useful sources of information concerning curses and artifacts. A Spiritsinger can also be a challenging character for an experienced role-player.

ZAGIR MOUNTAINEER

SIZE: 5' 5"-5' 4", 95-175 lbs.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Diabolical facial features, dark brown skin, blood-red eyes, horn-like protrusions on forehead and chin, sparse black hair on scalp and chin, wiry build

ATTRIBUTES: DEX +1, SPD +2, INT -2, PER +1

HIT POINTS: 12

SPECIAL ABILITIES: None

SKILLS: Mountain climbing, primary combat, sideshow talents (contortion); any five Wilderness skills

EQUIPMENT/POSSESSIONS: Vest of hide armor (land-lizard leather), oversized blouses and pantaloons (in drab browns and greys), turban (men), veil, ankle-high boots, horn short-bow (with quiver of 40 arrows), scimitar, hide half-shield, dagger, pouch, waterskin, climbing tools, coil of rope (20')

WEALTH: d10 x 5 silver pieces

COMMENTS: Small and fast, Zagir Mountaineers serve Rajanistan as archers and skirmishers. They kill their enemies from a distance, closing to sword-point only to finish them off. Zagir trust only the members of their own clan and the word of the Khadun. The Mountaineers prize silence, solitude, and the honor of keeping one's word.

CAMPAIGN ROLE: Zagir are most likely met as non-player characters, either marching with the Rajan army or on solitary hunts in the mountains of Zagiran. The restrictions of their Cult beliefs make them unlikely player characters.

A ROLE PLAYING GUIDE

Role playing – bringing out the unique roles of the characters who inhabit Talislanta – is part of what makes this game different from other fantasy role-playing games. The following tips are offered to help you develop your characters. The notes apply only to "typical" characters – use them as a guide, not as a constraint on your imagination.

ARAMUT

Lancers. Your skill with the lance proves your worthiness to rule your tribe. With such status comes a heavy responsibility – to be ready to serve Death at any time. You must constantly perfect your battle skills until you can effortlessly hit anything in reach of your lance, whether you are on foot or mounted.

Your ignorance of worldly affairs is your secret strength. Leave worrying to the Sustainers, and keep your eye single to the pursuit of the goals assigned you by Death. Do not allow yourself to be distracted by the illusions of love or the comfort of a family – these are not for you.

The Aramut whom you select to be your Personal Sustainer must be unrepachable, for you are dependent upon him (or her) to care for you in a hostile world – preparing your food, tending your weapons and armor, and spending your coins wisely. Nevertheless, always keep a respectful distance between you and your servant, remembering your elevated status as a warrior-lord of Death.

The highest form of battle is the duel. Always seek to pit yourself in individual combat against an enemy whom you esteem as your equal. There is no glory in defeating weaker foes, nor in taking victory through ruse or subterfuge.

Personal Sustainers. To kill the enemy is the job of the Lancers. Your glory is to increase the deaths of unbelievers by caring for the Lancers, freeing them from the tasks of life so that they may concentrate on serving Death. Through such mundane tasks, you hasten the moment of Death's triumph in Talislanta.

Fight in support of your lord, but only when his life is threatened or you are commanded to do so. It is not your portion to wield the lance or fight from the back of an aht-ra, but you can be a powerful aid nevertheless.

Remind yourself daily that you are nothing, and let your Lancer dominate you in all things. Never expect your devotion to your lord to be answered with friendship or love – a gulf of status must separate you forever.

See the "Rajans" entry for further information about this race.

DJAFFIR

When you were a babe, the family wizard crafted your first fetish mask. It is the symbol of your membership in the family and your status within the tribe. You would be uncomfortable without it, for your thoughts and emotions would be visible to everyone.

Your fate is fixed by Destiny, and cannot be altered – trying to thwart it is sacrilege. Your role in life is set by the order in which you are born, whether you are a son or daughter, or whether you were born first or last.

To aid your family, you would brave any danger and pay any debt. Your next loyalty is to the Caliph of all the Djaffir, and your third loyalty is to your sheik. No matter where you journey, the welfare of family, sheik and Caliph are your concern. Return to aid them if the need arises. Do not give your friendship easily, but when you do, your friends become as if they were members of your own family.

You know what it is like to struggle for survival in a hostile land, and have vowed not to forget the accomplishments of your ancestors. Never stay long in one place. Bathe sparingly with precious water – heavy perfumes and strong-smelling lotions are to be preferred.

Your family's aht-ras are worth your love, and you would protect them with your life. When you travel, continually groom your mount to ensure that it remains clean and healthy. Fine animals should be perfumed or adorned with jewelry.

Djaffir Women. If you are a traditional Djaffir female, you believe that you are the property of your husband or father. If you dare to advance any other view, you may be persecuted as a heretic or exiled as an infidel.

DRACARTANS

Your ancestors found the Red Desert a wasteland, and made it into a paradise. Live up to their works. Cherish friends and kinsmen, but put your nation first. Prize the wisdom of the Elders, the justice of the King, and the knowledge of the Thaumaturgists. You revere Jamba even though his mysteries baffle you.

Tradition forbids the classes from mixing. You can be friends only with others of your status. To those of the higher orders, act with deference, addressing them by their full names and titles. Treat those of lower classes as inanimate objects.

Marriages are of sacred importance. If you are male, you are expected to marry before the age of 35. Females who remain single are pitied or even shunned. Marriage outside of your class is prohibited, and relationships with foreigners are discouraged (unless you are a Desert Scout). If you are male, your manhood depends on fathering as many children as possible. If you are female, you have been conditioned to comply with the desires of your husband.

Never abandon a comrade, betray your spouse, quarrel with your parents, or injure your master – solidarity saved your ancestors, and the misfortune of one is the misfortune of all. If you meet a Dracartan in need, help him. Never allow other Dracartans to injure themselves, for self-destructive or foolish acts are selfish and cannot be permitted.

Treat strangers courteously, for their trade makes the nation wealthy. You may embrace your friends in public, but affection for loved ones should be shown by action rather than paraded in words. Cultivate a reserved bearing. Only poets and fools rave about every emotion that stirs them, and only idiots rush to act before they have appraised a situation. Be stoic and taciturn. Think before taking action.

You feel a particular horror of Death – decay and rot are extremely distasteful to you. Spirits are also repulsive, and you may take alarm at unexplained breezes and unexpected noises.

Thaumaturges. If you are a master of Thaumaturgy, guard well your knowledge. If misused, Thaumaturgy could wreak unlimited evil. Remember that it is more than just a science – it is the sacred gift of Jamba.

RAJANIN

As a Rajanin, a member of the ruling tribe of Rajanistan, you must maintain your dignity. Never forgive an insult. Take offense easily. Veil your face whenever you depart from the Holy City, for no one is worthy to look upon you.

Your wits, the magical talismans which you possess, and the fear and paranoia of others are your tools – let them think you a Necromancer, even if you possess no more power than an enchanted talisman. Discard the crude scimitars and spears of the other Rajans in favor of subtler weaponry: daggers, garrotes and poisons. Keep these concealed within your robes, but ever ready.

Remember that your hot-blooded temper must give way to the will of Death. It was once the way of your people to settle disputes with duels. These can now only be fought with the permission of the Necromancer-Priests, for every Rajan may be needed in the service of Death. Unless the priests declare otherwise, submerge your rage against your fellow tribesmen for the greater good.

Torquar. If you are one of the Torquar, you no longer belong to a tribe. The Black Mystic Cult is your family, the holy Khadun is your father, and all Torquar are your brothers in duty to Death. You are Death's special servant, charged with such tasks as finding and removing traitors, torturing infidels, protecting the Necromancers, and venturing to foreign lands as the agents of Death. Subjugate your pride – secrecy and stealth are more valuable. Never reveal that you are Torquar.

See the "Rajans" entry for further information about this race.

RAJANS

Although each Rajan tribe is unique, a common culture and lifestyle has increasingly been imposed on the Aramut, Shadinn, Vird and Zagir tribes by the Black Mystic Cult. Therefore, the information below applies to all of the tribes of Rajanistan.

For those who follow Death, two things are ultimately important: reverence to the Khadun, and pride in knowing Death's truths. The Khadun is Death's living hand, his mortal representative. You would do anything for the Khadun or his representatives, for their wishes are Death's wish. You would eagerly kill or give your life for the Cult.

You know the secret of existence – that this life is but a short interlude before meeting Death, and a time to prove yourself. Skeptics can best be shown the true nature of things by sending them to Death, so that he can explain himself to the fools! Your knowledge makes you superior to the unbelievers. Do not tolerate insult, and avenge yourself on those who attack Death.

Always go armed – your duty to the Khadun demands it. Whether you carry a dagger, strangle-cord or scimitar, constantly be ready to send enemies to Death.

Rajan Women. If you are a woman of Rajanistan, you have few freedoms. Nevertheless, you must strive to maintain your skill in devious killing, for even the act of a female may be necessary in the service of Death. In public, you always wear a veil.

SHADINN

Your people are the true strength of Rajanistan. Make sure your weapons are sharp and your land lizard ready.

Life is duty, and your first responsibility is to the Khadun – whether you fight, work in the smithies, or guard the slaves in the mines. By excelling at your duty, you bring honor to your tribe. Your greatest shame comes when you fail at your assigned tasks. The weight of guilt over past errors and the knowledge that you must atone for your weaknesses refine your character, giving you the determination to soldier on.

The rituals and taboos of your people remind you not to incur the wrath of Death and the failure which follows. Some of the rites and customs are traditions within your family, and others are yours alone. Most are seemingly trivial: not eating with the left hand, always putting on the left sandal before the right, or spitting when the wind shifts. However, they all remind you of your bondage to Death.

See the "Rajans" entry for further information about this race.

VIRDS

Other Rajans ridicule you for being ugly, slow, awkward or inferior. They scorn you for your lack of horns and the fact that you fight on foot. To them, you are only a member of a dull but obedient mongrel race, to be hurled in suicidal assaults at Dracartan fortifications and other perils.

You don't care what they think. The life of a Vird is hard: every day your people face lurking Satada, repel Sauran raids, or drive Kang soldiers back to their accursed empire. You know that you can kill for Death as well as any other Rajan. Others may be cowardly or lax, but never the Virds – you are proud of your brethren who have died bravely against hopeless odds in the service of the Khadun.

Strive to be loyal to the Black Mystic Cult, and be more eager to serve than any other tribesman. Receive every message from Death with ecstasy, and interpret each word literally. Remember that adoration of the Khadun is your duty in life.

Acts of devotion in the service of Death prove your worth. If you could die at the Khadun's order, your happiness would be beyond bound. Wear bright-colored clothing, for it attracts the attention of Death, who can then witness as you send predators and bandits to him. The word of sorcery is the sure key to recognizing Death's favorites, so when you see Necromancy performed, attach yourself to the caster so that Death might bind your fate with his.

If you are male, your wealth is your family, and your wives are the fertile fields from which the riches of children spring. Take as many wives as you can feed, whether you must raid for them or purchase them with fire-gems from the Farad. Neither race nor beauty is an object – if she can bear children, the woman suffices. Only the females of the Za and the other tribes of Rajanistan are forbidden to you. Life is without peace so long as any member of your clan has more wives than you. Money has meaning only because it can be used to procure wives.

See the "Rajans" entry for further information about this race.

YASSAN

You look at machines with love. Fondle their gears and tinker among the mechanisms, and marvel to yourself over the gadgetry. You can always make machinery work better. Take care of your six-fingered hands, because they are your most valuable tools. Wear gloves, and never slip them off except for delicate work. Your worst dread is the torture which Torquar inflict on captured Yassan: crushing their knuckles, which ruins them for their life's work.

Architecture and stonework also intrigue you, and though monuments are less enthralling than clockworkery, you have a keen sense for structural engineering. If others press you to explain Technomancy, take delight in "explaining" far more than they can comprehend, without betraying your secrets. Never ridicule them for their ineptitude, but do not hide the fact that you are superior to them when it comes to mechanics. Expect others to value your expertise, and charge the high fees you deserve.

Love your relatives, and share everything with them – a Displaced People must take care of one another. The good of the Yassan demands that your race expand to new communities, so if you are male, aspire to demonstrate promise and brilliance so that you will be asked to recruit wives and apprentices and start your own Tek.

There is no time for disciplines other than Technomancy. Politics and business bore you. Yassan shirk physical labor. Philosophical abstractions cannot hold your attention. Except for its technological challenges, war is a waste. If you feel inclined to pray or curse, invoke whatever deity the locals worship, but don't become too involved.

Other races cannot understand you, and their interests bore you as well. They find your favorite stories tiresome, and your jokes fall on flat ears. The best company is someone from your own Tek.

YITEK

Crawling over corpses in dismal tombs has helped you to develop a fascination with Death. Bear witness to the inevitability of rot, and to what decay ultimately does to every corpse. Before you rob a tomb, remember to first approach a Spiritsinger and beseech him to appease Death on your behalf.

You are afraid to die. Within the crumbling ruins of a tomb, your tools are often the only things between you and Death – if they let you down, you might end up buried with those you came to rob. Therefore, love your tools – clean them, embellish them, give them names, and appease the spirits within them.

The ancestors of the Yitek watch over you, communicating with you through omens. Watch for anything which might be an sign from the spirit realms, and then warn your companions – when a riding beast stumbles, a cup of wine is spilled, or the wind carries a foul odor, for instance.

It is difficult for you to make friends with those of other races. They find your humor morbid, and grow uncomfortable when you relate tales of corpses you have met and tombs you have defiled. Nevertheless, try to be courteous to all whom you meet.

ZAGIR

The mountains of Zagiran do not tolerate foolishness or error – you cannot blunder about like other Rajans. Mistakes bring the scourge of Death. This grim deity is your constant, silent companion – always watching, ever testing, using the environment to force you to prove your worth. If you fail to overcome a peril, you risk going to Death before he is ready to receive you.

Your bow is your arm, extending your reach beyond that of other Rajans. Swords are only tools with which to finish off your victims. Live with and by your bow, for without it you will starve. The only foe you cannot defeat is one armed with magic – flee from such, and live to give the Necromancers warning of the stranger in the land.

Keep to yourself – your own council is safest. Be self-sufficient, using your skills to best the threats and hazards the mountains test you with. Say little, for there is little need to speak in the mountains. Trust no one – especially Zagir from other clans. The Shadinn and Aramuts are ignorant fools. Only those of your own clan are proven faithful, for you have hunted with them and their blood is yours.

Your relationship with Death is personal. Listen to the Necromancer-Priests and take their teachings to heart. In the solitude of the heights, the puzzles of life become clear to you.

See the "Rajans" entry for further information about this race.

GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

STATISTICS FOR NEW EQUIPMENT

The following material contains statistics and special Game-master notes on new items used in the Desert Kingdoms, including those introduced in the "Weaponry and Equipment" section of this book.

ARMOR indicates a conveyance's overall resistance to damage by attack (ARMOR RATING).

COST is the typical cost of the item in its native area (costs are frequently higher elsewhere). Unless noted otherwise, values are given in gold lumens.

CREW applies only to siege weapons, and is the number of people required to prepare the weapon for firing.

DAM. is the amount of injury in hit points which a weapon causes. For conveyances, the Damage Rating is the amount of injury which the vehicle can sustain before being destroyed – if it takes half this amount, it is useless and must be repaired.

STR is the minimum strength required to employ the weapon.

RANGE applies only to missile weapons, and indicates the effective range of the weapon in feet. Maximum range is twice the effective range.

WT is the weapon's weight, given in pounds.

WEAPONS

TYPE	DAM.	WT.	STR	COST
Aramut Lance	d8*	6	0	1
Capture-Spear	d6**	4	0	1
Pole-Lasso	***	10	0	2
Shadinn Battle Axe	d12	20	+4	20
Spiritstaff	d8****	5	-1	500†
Torquar Weapons	+1††	varies	varies	†††
Yitek Truncheon	d10††††	10	0	75

* Due to the length of their weapon, Lancers always strike first in combat, regardless of SPD. When used from a mount, the momentum and mass of the steed add to the user's strength – double the damage done by the lance. Damage of 10 points or more knocks man-sized (under 400 lbs.) targets to the ground, even if they're mounted. If a lance does 12+ points of damage, it breaks.

** When attempting to catch someone, a "Hit" result snags the target. The barbs do d4 damage in every round in which the victim struggles. Escape requires a successful STR or DEX Roll

*** A pole-lasso entangles those it hits, inflicting d4 points of suffocation damage per round until the victim is cut free or escapes (requires a DEX Roll)

**** Plus one point per level of the bound spirit (if any). The spirit's energy attack can also strike as a ghostly beam (20' range)

† Cost is for an "empty" staff (without a spirit)

†† The Torquar prefer to use weapons with jagged edges, even

though these edges make the weapons weaker – on a "Combat Mishap" result, they break. Torquar weapons do an extra point of damage against unarmored targets.

††† 1.5 x normal cost for the weapon

†††† -2 penalty on all *Action Table* rolls, due to its awkwardness

SIEGE WEAPONS

TYPE	DAM	RANGE	CREW	COST
Chain-Hurlant*	d10**	500	1	3,500***
Demi-Springal****	d4†	100 ††	2	50 †††
Springal Δ	d8†	100 †††	3	500 ΔΔ
Thousand-Teeth ΔΔΔ	d6†	300∅	1	5,000 ∅∅

* Weapon holds 50 bolts in its magazine. Takes d8 x 4 turns to reload (d4 x 4 turns if the artillerist has an assistant). Fires 3 times per round. Breaks on a natural roll of 1 or 2

** d10 for a red-iron bolt; 3 x d8 for a thaumaturgic bolt

*** Red-iron bolts cost 1 G.L. apiece; thaumaturgic bolts, 125 G.L. apiece

**** Holds 20 darts. Each crewmen can reload d8 darts per turn.

† Per hit – see the volley rules, below

†† Affects an area 20' by 20'

††† Darts cost 1 S.P. apiece

Δ Holds 20 javelins. Each crewmen can reload d4 javelins per turn

ΔΔ Javelins cost 1 G.L. apiece

ΔΔΔ Must pressurize for 10 rounds before each shot. One shot per magazine

∅ Attacks everything within a cone 50' across at the base

∅∅ A magazine of 50 darts costs 25 G.L. A Storm Crystal (charges the weapon for d20 shots) costs 25 G.L.

CONVEYANCES

TYPE	ARMOR	DAM. RATING	COST*
Dune Escort	4	00	20,000
Great War Duneship	6	700	75,000
Hurlant Barge	7	190	25,000
Land Barge	2	50	10,000
Merchant Duneship	4	200	25,000
Mining Duneship	3	200	35,000
Rajan War Chariot	8	50	1,500
Scout Sloop	5	400	35,000
Shadinn War Tower	7	150	3,000

* Duneship prices do not include the costs of wind funnels and weaponry

OPTIONAL RULES

The Gamemaster is free to add any of these new or expanded rules to his Talisantan campaign.

BEASTHANDLERS AND TRACKING

The ability of seasoned Djaffir Beasthandlers to distinguish between the footprints of aht-ra in their herds is uncanny. Even when tracking unfamiliar aht-ras, the nomads can generally determine the sex of a beast, and whether or not it has a rider.

The secret of the Beasthandler lies in knowing what to look for. The size of the footprint specifies the breed of aht-ra (the more humps it has, the larger the tracks). The depth of the print indicates whether the aht-ra carries a rider or baggage, and thus its sex – females are used for riding because they have a gentler gait, and males are employed as burden beasts because they can carry greater loads. Finally, the rider's mission is betrayed by the pattern of the footprints – stolen aht-ra being hurried home by bandits make different tracks from those of heavily laden caravans or a grazing herd.

DUNESAILING

Dunesailors need to have the "dunesailing" specialty with the navigator/pilot skill in order to pilot ships safely on the desert. Characters who are experienced in sea-sailing, but not specifically in dunesailing, receive a -4 penalty to their navigator/pilot skill rolls when sailing the sands.

Dunesailing skill rolls are required for dangerous maneuvers, such as jumping troughs (10 feet maximum), crossing the soft lee side of a dune, turning sharply (more than 10 degrees per 500'), or running aground (duneships can sail only where there is sand). A "Mishap" on the ActionTable may result in the following catastrophes:

Die Roll (d6) Mishap

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1-2 | The ship tips over, and must be pulled upright. This requires at least 100 men with ropes, or Yassan equipment. |
| 3-4 | The Wind Funnel explodes, causing 4 x d6 damage to anyone within 10'. It cannot be repaired. |
| 5-6 | The ship pitches into the air, then crashes down on its runners. All passengers take 2 x d6 damage. There is a 5-in-10 chance that the ship's hull shatters. |

NATURAL HYBRIDIZATION

Djaffir Beasthandlers are masters of this art, which is a specialization within the Naturalism skill. Upon attaining the fifth level, Beasthandlers may attempt to crossbreed related species in the hope of creating a hybrid. The process is similar to sorcerous hybridization, but does not involve magic and takes considerably longer.

The rules of hybridization are:

- 1) A male of one species and a female from another must be acquired.
- 2) A concoction of water, habara resin and root, and mochan leaves (the exact formula is a Djaffir secret) must be fed to the

animals for d10 days. This makes the beasts excitable and extremely fertile.

- 3) The animals are encouraged to mate. There is a 9-in-10 chance of the female becoming impregnated. If she is, she typically gives birth in d4 x d4 months.

To determine the results of hybridization:

- 1) Roll versus Naturalism skill on the Action Table to determine if the hybrid survives birth. The Gamemaster may add a penalty (up to -10), depending on how dissimilar the parents are.

- 2) The parent animal with the highest attribute total (adding together all attribute bonuses and penalties) is the *primary parent*, and the other is the *secondary parent*. To determine the hybrid's attribute ratings, hit points, form of attack, special abilities, size, armor and gender, roll d20 for each and consult the following table.

Die Roll Result

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 1 | Unfavorable/unexpected attribute or characteristic (Gamemaster's choice) |
| 2-4 | Same as secondary parent's |
| 5-13 | Average of parents (if this is a roll for gender, the hybrid is sterile; for special abilities, the hybrid possesses some abilities of both parents) |
| 14-19 | Same as primary parent's |
| 20 | Favorable/unexpected attribute or characteristic (Gamemaster's choice) |

SAND AND STORMS

Fierce winds whip across Djaffa and Rajanistan, stirring up monstrous dust and sandstorms. Carantheum does not have storms like these, but the menace of sand laceration cannot be underestimated.

Sand Laceration. Breezes in Carantheum drive individual grains of sand, lacerating exposed skin for d4 points of damage per hour. Heavy clothing protects against this threat.

Duststorms. Dust is very fine sand. It quickly coats skin, belongings and animals, and no amount of water seems to wash away the scarlet grit from one's throat and hair. Duststorms occur more frequently than sandstorms, since even moderate winds can transport the fine particles. The sudden appearance of a duststorm on the horizon is a terrifying sight. Taking the form of a colossal cloud as much as 10,000 feet high and 6 to 12 miles in diameter, the tempest of swirling dust is so dense that the suns are unable to penetrate it.

Creatures in the whirlwind must cover nose and mouth or asphyxiate on the choking dust, suffering 2 points of damage per round. The fetish masks of Djaffir nomads protect them from this danger, and specialized membranes in the nostrils of aht-ra serve the same purpose. Fortunately, duststorms seldom last longer than d10 x 6 minutes.

Sandstorms. Unlike duststorms, sandstorms form only when there are high winds. As accelerating air currents pick up dust particles first, sandstorms are often preceded by duststorms.

As the storm begins, narrow tendrils of sand move an inch or so above the ground. Within minutes the tendrils join, forming a sheet of accelerating sand. As the wind increases, the height of the sand sheet rapidly rises – sometimes six feet or more above the ground. Because riders sit higher than six feet, they are often able to avoid the worst effects of wind-blown sand. Hills and rocks that rise above the sand sheet may also afford shelter. In the fiercest of storms, however, the stinging sand forms towering cylinders from which no one is safe.

Unprotected creatures receive one point of damage per round from the blasting sand. Thick clothing which completely covers the body, or a hide thick enough to take the damage, provides protection. Beings not gifted with protective eyelids (like those of the aht-ra) are totally blind during a sandstorm.

The vision of individuals wearing fetish masks or other forms of eye protection is reduced to 20 feet. Victims of a storm also sustain d4 points of damage per hour due to dehydration, unless they can drink a quart of water hourly. Sandstorms persist for d4 x 2 hours. Travelers sometimes stumble upon the dried, cracked mummies of sandstorm victims.

TOMB TRAPS

The following are common traps encountered in Red Desert crypts and tombs. The Gamemaster should feel free to add his own ideas, as tomb-robbers are always discovering new menaces. He should also assign a level to each trap, which acts as a penalty to all Traps skill rolls. In the listing below, *Detect* reveals how to discover the trap, and *Disarm* explains how to deactivate or avoid the trap.

About Pressure Plates: Many traps involve pressure plates, a special type of tile on the tomb floor. A successful Traps skill roll reveals a pressure plate. It can then be disconnected with a second successful Traps roll – on a failure, the plate sets off its trap. Plates typically require 75 lbs. of pressure, and cannot easily be depressed by a long pole or similar object.

CHUTE TRAPS: Designed to capture and kill their victims, the prime component of these menaces is a hidden trapdoor – it may be as small as 3' x 3' or as large as 10' x 10'. When the victims step on the door, it revolves about a central axle, dumping them into a pit or down a shaft. Those who succeed at a DEX Roll are able to avoid the plunge.

Typical shafts are d4 x 10 feet long, and have inwardly sloping walls with long metal spikes protruding from the sides and floor. For every 10' fallen, victims suffer d10 points of damage. Trapdoors often lock into place after being triggered, preventing their victims from climbing out.

Detect: vs. Traps skill, to spot the trapdoor.

Disarm: Most chute traps have a pull-ring or lever hidden nearby. Tugging or twisting the control locks the trapdoor in its "safe" position. A successful Traps skill roll is required to locate and correctly trigger the lock.

CONDUIT TRAPS: When a pressure plate is depressed, Red Menace or some other deadly substance rains down from small, concealed holes overhead. Success at a DEX Roll, modified by a penalty reflecting the number of outlets above, indicates that a victim was able to avoid whatever was dripped. However, conduit traps are often set to rain over the entire length of a corridor (an added penalty to the DEX Roll), or may drip something unavoidable (such as Yellow Peril or another heavy gas).

Detect: vs. PER, to notice the drip holes (modified by the difficulty of seeing the ceiling – conduit traps are usually placed in very tall rooms).

Disarm: Plug each individual hole (easily done, once they are located).

MAIMING TRAPS: These traps consist of concealed spikes or nails which thrust outward when a pressure plate is set off. A successful SPD Roll indicates that the victim was able to avoid some of the force of the blow, taking only half damage. Most spike traps do d10 damage.

Detect: By tapping the walls and floors, then making a roll vs. PER to detect the hollow space where the trap is concealed.

Disarm: Open the trap and jam the spike.

SLIDING WALL TRAPS: When a pressure plate or other trigger is set off, a heavy stone slab slides across an exit. Anyone in the path of the portal who fails a SPD Roll is crushed to death. Typical slabs have an *Armor Rating* of 6, and a *Damage Rating* of 50.

Detect: vs. Traps skill, to locate the concealed slab

Disarm: The slab may be jammed, but its weight makes such measures temporary at best: d4 rounds (d10 if the jamming item is made of enchanted metal; indefinitely if it is of adamant). Individuals with a combined STR of 9+ may hold the door if all succeed at a STR Roll, but failure means they may be crushed by the slab.

VOLLEY FIRE

Several of the new siege weapons introduced in this book – the springal, demi-springal, and the thousand-teeth – fire many shots simultaneously. This allows them to strike many targets, although each victim is unlikely to be hit more than once.

When firing at a small number of targets, roll once for each creature in the area of fire, starting from one side of the target area and working toward the other side. Consult the table below to see how many hits are scored, based on the size of the target (Man-Sized, Mount-Sized, etc.). If a "Critical Mishap" occurs, the weapon breaks and no further shots may be resolved.

Combat Result	Man-Sized	Mount-Sized	Very Large *
"Hit (1/2 Damage)"	–	1	2
"Hit"	1	2	4
"Critical Hit"	2	3	8

* such as dragons, ogriphants and siege machines

If there are more targets in the hit area than the number of projectiles fired by the weapon, only roll once on the *Action Table*. If the roll is not a "Miss" or "Critical Mishap," the number of targets hit is equal to half the number rolled (round down). However, the number of hits cannot exceed the number of projectiles fired. For example, a die roll of 11 indicates that 5 targets have been hit.

SECRETS OF TALISLANTA

If you are not a Gamemaster, *do not read* this material! It reveals secret information about the Black Mystic Cult and the Thaumaturges of Carantheum.

THE BLACK MYSTIC CULT

All of the tribesmen of Rajanistan are members of the Black Mystic Cult. However, the Cult has three important divisions: the **Followers of Urmaan**, or common believers; the **Necromancer-Priests**, who guard the mysteries of Death; and the **Torquar**, who are specially charged to enforce Death's will.

The Necromancers trained by Urmaan rode the forefront of the Death-Cult movement, establishing themselves as priests and leaders. Today they rule Rajanistan, with the Khadun at their head. Being a Death-Priest is one of the rare positions in Rajan society which is open to both men and women. There are two orders among the Death-Mages: Necromancers and Necromancer-Priests.

The Necromancers

Pure Necromancers dwell within the Black Mystic Tower in Irdan, where they concentrate their energies on the study of Necromantic magic. Only the best mages of the kingdom are rewarded with this honor. They are the only Rajans who are allowed to conduct Necromantic experiments, assisted by their apprentices and the wizards of the Torquar. The Khadun must approve every exercise, as his coffers supply the funds – this helps to ensure that the Necromancers do their utmost to please their ruler.

What distinguishes the Necromancers from the Necromancer-Priests and the wizards of the Torquar is that they have mastered the rite of creating the mystical *Third Eye*. The spell manifests itself as an actual lidless eye on the mage's forehead or the forehead of his Death-mask. The mystic eye is capable of seeing invisible and spirit presences up to 100' away. However, its gaze is blocked by solid objects, like normal vision.

The *Spell of the Third Eye* was derived from knowledge revealed by Urmaan. It can only be performed in the Inner Sanctum of the Temple of Death, and requires four Necromancers to enact.

The Necromancers assist, defend and advise the Khadun, who has always been selected from among their number. Every Khadun has the right to select his successor, a Necromancer whom he personally trains in the disciplines of the most secret Necromantic magics. The Necromancers recognize the importance of a clear and uncontested succession, and have never disputed the appointment of the successor when a Khadun "disappears" (as they all do at the end of their reigns).

Necromancer-Priests

Less-talented Necromancers are sent into the land to serve the Khadun as religious leaders. Each has two Torquar bodyguards to protect him. The Necromancer-Priests live among the tribesmen they teach, performing protective rites and minor enchantments, exhorting the people to greater loyalty to the Khadun, and drilling into them the doctrines of Death and the rewards of the afterlife.

The Death-Priests also have the responsibility to maintain discipline among the tribes. Disobedience of Cult orders, disrespect toward the Khadun, or insubordination by clan or tribal chieftains are crimes which are swiftly dealt with once suspected. The Necromancer-Priest is prosecutor, judge, and jury, and may send victims to the Living Death of the Torquar with only a word.

Experienced Necromancer-Priests usually petition the Khadun to be readmitted to the Tower of Irdan, which requires that they pass the Test of the Third Eye. If they cannot master that spell, the Khadun may elevate priests who distinguish themselves in the service of the Death to posts as his advisors.

The Khadun may deny the petition, however, if he believes that the mage has real talent in controlling and manipulating the Followers of Urmaan. Such priests eventually reach the rank of Legate of Death, being the representative of the Khadun to an entire tribe, just as the Khadun is the avatar of Death to the kingdom.

The Torquar

The guards, assassins and torturers who protect the Black Mystic Cult and its interests are known as the Torquar. Assassins and wizards are recruited from among the Rajanins. Shadinn serve as executioners, and bodyguards to the Necromancers. Torquar must be totally removed from their former lives, and are forbidden to even think of their former families and friends. Their only clan is the Torquar.

Executioners. These Torquar guard the Necromancers and the Necromancer-Priests, acting as protectors and servants. Whenever a Necromancer travels beyond Irdan, he does so in the company of Executioners. Each must be closely guarded against the enemies of the Black Mystic Cult, for the Necromancers are the great strength of Rajanistan. Those guards who perform well are rotated to positions of honor guarding the Temple of Death, or to the ultimate honor of guarding the Khadun.

Their effectiveness is largely due to their suspicious natures. Torquar Executioners are fanatic about passwords. The correct words must be spoken in order to enter the Temple of Death or the Tower of Irdan, and coming into the presence of the Khadun requires an intricate exchange of countersigns. If the correct responses are not given, the intruders are interrogated by the Wizards of the Torquar – and incorrect responses in the presence of the Khadun are met with instant death. Signs and countersigns are changed regularly, and each guard is given only those required by his post.

Torturers. The role of the Torturers of the Torquar is to maintain the Khadun's rule through fear, when loyalty and faithfulness waver. They may be from any tribe except the Virds, though Rajanins and Shadinn predominate. The art of Rajan torture concentrates on keeping the subject in pain at all times, varying the location and intensity to keep the victim from becoming accustomed to it.

Torture is always inflicted for a reason – to gain information from a subject, to punish a victim for transgressions, or to inflict a lingering death. Those tortured are seldom allowed to die quickly, for being guilty of torture means they are not worthy of being sent quickly to Death.

Besides conventional torture tools and the magic of the Torquar Wizards, many Torturers keep Paradracs, the small, clever reptilians that live among Crested Dragons. The creatures make excellent pets for the Torturers, since they are capable of understanding the Rajanin language and enjoy torture as much as their masters. Feeding them is little trouble, for they dine on their victims – and there are always Necromancer dragon-steeds which need to have parasites devoured.

Assassins. These agents of the Torquar extend the reach of the Black Mystic Cult far beyond the borders of Rajanistan, spying on Death's enemies and assassinating those whom the Khadun marks. Terror is one of the grim deity's most effective weapons. Therefore, Assassins may be sent to start fires, poison beasts, or destroying valuables as well as to conduct assassinations.

Torquar Assassins are known and feared throughout the Desert Kingdoms. They are trained to use multiple methods, so that individual agents cannot be identified by the manner in which they conduct their crimes. While most prefer to use the *dakhar*, Torquar Assassins are adept at many weapons and poisons, and the use of a variety of venomous animals. Unlike other Rajans, Assassins are specially forbidden from dying prematurely in the service of Death – they strive to remain unsuspected even after an execution, and to return to Rajanistan in order to serve again.

The Khadun requires information about many neighbor-states, and has his agents in Carantheum, Maruk, Danuvia, Hadj, Djaffa and Farad. It is rumored that carefully-placed Torquar Assassins are in countries as far away as Gao-Din and the Seven Kingdoms.

Wizards. Rajanin mages of the Torquar serve as the officers of this arm of the Cult. As commanders of guards, they are responsible for setting passwords and interrogating prisoners. As the chief torturers, they determine the schemes of punishment and decide when to ask questions. As masters of the assassins, they select those who perform each mission, and report their discoveries directly to the Necromancers. The mages are known for their sadism and devotion to Death.

The Wizards of the Torquar are eager to loan their services to the Necromancers, scheming to gain influence by being close to powerful figures. The Necromancers in turn find the Wizards

helpful, as the Torquar mages practice all of the general fields of magic except Necromancy (which is forbidden)..

The Chief Wizard of the Torquar reports directly to the Khadun, and through him, the ruler puts into action his most secret plans in foreign lands.

Informants and Vird Spies. Not every Rajan spy in a foreign land is a member of the Torquar. The wizards of the Torquar are often sent to distant places to mastermind espionage rings, with assassins and other Torquar to assist them. However, much of the actual work is performed by those better suited to the tasks – magically-disguised Vird spies, and local informants.

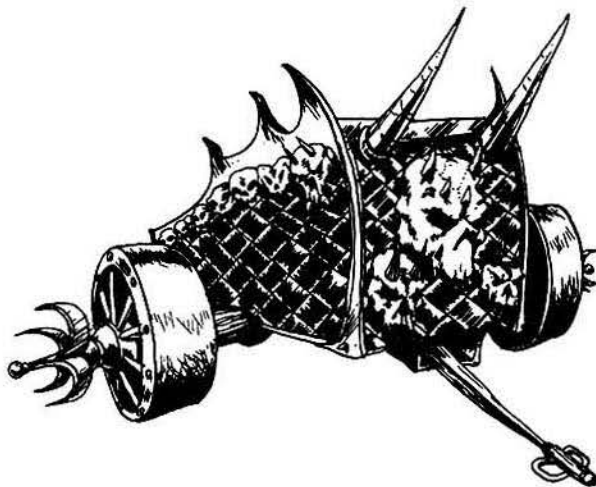
Vird Spies are carefully trained in the culture and customs of the people they are sent to live among. Their duties range from assisting assassins and gathering information to committing minor acts of terrorism. Although the Black Mystic Cult often uses Virds as spies, they are *never* considered Torquar.

THE CULT OF THE IRON VEIL

Dracartans prize solidarity, and their politics lack the factionalism of most lands. Citizens unilaterally obey the King, and he has traditionally respected his office. However, certain Dracartan monarchs chafed against the "Test Of Ancients" and the 12-year limit to their term. For instance, the tyrant Sados attempted a coup in favor of hereditary monarchy in the year 215. The Council of Elders had him imprisoned and eventually entombed him in liquid jade. The memory of this incident deters political intrigue in Carantheum.

What is not commonly known is that Sados founded a secret society to support his coup. This cabal – *the Iron Veil* – survived its master's downfall. Most of its members are Thaumaturges interested in the Thaumaturgic processes supposedly used by the Necromancer-Kings of the lost Empire of Quaran. A few, like Sados himself, are actually reincarnations of Quaran sorcerers.

The Veil no longer indulges in political conspiracy, but devotes its time to perilous magical studies. Their arts are strictly illegal. Members meet secretly in each other's laboratories, or in the ruins of ancient tombs.



ADVENTURES IN THE DESERT

The adventures which follow are an excellent way to introduce *TALISLANTA* players to the Desert Kingdoms. "The Obsidian Mask Race" involves a traditional Djaffir contest, complicated in this case by Rajan intrigues. The second adventure, "The Hand of Urmaan," allows hardy explorers to learn the fate of the founder of Rajanistan. "With Water, Life" – the third scenario – allows adventurers to discover the secrets of the Forgotten City, and may be played as a sequel to "The Hand of Urmaan." The adventure ideas at the end of this section are provided as inspiration for Gamemasters who want to design their own adventure scenarios.

THE OBSIDIAN MASK RACE

The adventurers are secretly hired by Muliesan, Grand Wazir of the Djaffir, to protect the Caliph from supernatural danger during the Race of the Obsidian Mask, the aht-ra marathon which determines who reigns as Calipheesse. The wazir's suspicions are warranted – a dark pact between the current Calipheesse and Rajanistan's Black Mystic Cult is about to culminate with an assassination attempt on the Caliph and a transdimensional encounter amid the desert sands.

The Obsidian Mask Race is an adventure for 3-5 characters of levels 2-6. Parties should contain at least one mage and one female character. Statistics for NPCs are given at the end. The adventure begins at the tent city of El Aran in Djaffa.

The Race for the Mask

The Obsidian Mask is one of the greatest artifacts of the Djaffir, and is the signifying mark of the Calipheesse. Tradition relates that one year a sandstorm of supernatural intensity trapped and threatened to kill all of the Djaffir at El Aran. Kalia, a young maiden, bravely saddled her father's swiftest ontra and rode into the storm, hoping to make it to Al Ashad and beseech the Caliph and his wizards for aid.

Kalia encountered many perils along her journey, finally meeting with the author of them all, the sand demon Nocilis. He tried to tempt and trick her with illusions and deceptions, but Kalia was too wise. She finally trapped the demon beneath her own inverted fetish mask. Before Kalia would release him, she had him swear an oath to free her people from the sandstorm.

Nocilis kept his word, but swore that he would not be defeated by a mere girl. He presented Kalia with a mask of pure obsidian, polished mirror-bright so that as the face mirrors the soul, her face would mirror all others – showing her to be greater than any she met. The sand demon then instructed her to finish her ride to Al Ashad and to tell the Caliph that she was to be his chief wife. Nocilis would see to it that no sand demon would ever trouble a party containing she who rightfully wore the Mask of Obsidian.

All happened as the sand demon had said. Kalia became the first Calipheesse of the Djaffir, and was much beloved (especially by her husband, who had an unreasoning fear of sand demons ever after).

Following her death, the Caliph proclaimed that only the swiftest and cleverest of women was fit to be Calipheesse and wear Nocilis' Mask. He proclaimed an aht-ra race from El Aran to Al Ashad, the winner of which would be his new Calipheesse.

Rules of the Race

The Obsidian Mask Race is held whenever there is a vacancy among the Caliph's 77 wives, and thus may occur at intervals of anywhere from weeks to years, depending on the amount of illness and murder present in the harem. All of the Caliph's wives must compete in the contest (unless indisposed or with child) or lose their station in the harem. Any other unmarried woman is welcome to compete as well, whether Djaffir or not, so long as she belongs to the race of Men.

At Al Ashad, the end of the journey, the racers are received by the Caliph and his wazirs. The first to arrive becomes the Calipheesse, receiving the Obsidian Mask and the chief place of honor within the harem. Successive winners win lesser positions in the harem until the full quorum of 77 is filled.

A member of the Caliph's harem who does not place in the race receives 25 aht-ra as dowry, and is bestowed – along with her children – upon a man whom the Caliph wishes to especially favor. Such women, especially those possessing Jewels of Honor, are known as the "Bountiful Aht-ra." They are highly esteemed by Djaffir men.

A race may result in an almost complete change in the members of the Caliph's harem. This is certainly an advantage for the Caliph, since his eldest wives are constantly replaced by younger, more athletic women.

Competitors in the race must ride aht-ra, the swift ontra variety being most prized. Participants may not attack their fellow racers – either physically or magically – but trickery is allowed. Several Calipheesses who violated these rules have had their masking ceremonies marred by murder accusations, followed by trials, convictions and expulsions from the harem . . . followed by another Mask Race, the Caliph being short a wife.

The Meeting With Muliesan

The adventurers are approached by agents of Muliesan, the chief advisor of the Caliph, and invited to come to a well-guarded tent at the outskirts of El Aran.

In grand Djaffir sand-tale style, Muliesan relates the *Legend of Saramassa*. Almost 50 years ago, Saramassa – a maiden of the Djaffir – won the Race of the Obsidian Mask, only to die of heat exhaustion before she could be rewarded with the Obsidian Mask. With her last breath, Saramassa swore she would return to claim her prize after seven by seven cycles of the moons.

It is now 49 years since that fateful time, and various oracles have prophesied great danger to the Caliph if an Obsidian Mask Race is held this year. One of the Caliph's wives has died, however, and a new race must be held. Muliesan fears that the ghost of Saramassa will return to claim her prize, then spirit off the Caliph to be her companion in the Grey Sphere. The wazir wishes to hire the adventurers to protect the Caliph.

Over dates and spiced mochan, Muliesan begins the bargaining for the adventurers' services. Play the Grand Wazir as shrewdly as possible – his haggling skill rating is +6, and he proclaims at least once, "What! Do you mean to beggar me? I'm only a poor old man – not the King of Kasmir!" As a minimum price (or as a magnanimous gift, if the adventurers completely bungle the

bargaining), Muliesan offers each party member one ontra gelding, as well as complete desert gear and an enchanted ceremonial dagger (+1) for luck. At the maximum, Muliesan promises all of the above, plus 10,000 G.L. (in the form of brilliantine gemstones) to be delivered the day after the race is complete.

Once the bargaining is over, the Grand Wazir confides his greatest anxiety: "How does one see what is invisible?" Spirits are said to be invisible. Muliesan has heard that Rajan Necromancers can converse with the spirits of dead, and that the Spiritsingers of the Yitek have some knowledge in these matters, but he does not trust them.

If any of the characters are female, he suggests they take part in the race in order to watch for ghostly riders, while their male companions ride on the flank as escorts. Muliesan believes that the characters must find some method of detecting the presence of spirits, in order to stop Saramassa from fulfilling her oath. He sends them to speak with Zinda, the Story-Spinner of El Aran.

Preparing for the Race

The tent city of El Aran is all bustle as maidens ready themselves for the race. Aht-ra trading goes on at a pace and price usually unheard of as families attempt to get the finest and fastest for their daughters. The player characters are each approached at least three times by Djaffir attempting to buy the ontra given them by the wazir. Incautious adventurers who stray too far from the populated areas of the oasis may run into serious trouble – El Aran is the oasis of bandits, after all, and daggers are cheaper than an ontra's cost in coins.

A section of the oasis is roped off for the private use of the Caliphesse and the harem. They are too busy preparing for the race to receive visitors, though someone with enough bribes and bluster might be able to get through. If anyone mentions the legend of Saramassa to the Caliphesse, she dismisses it as a foolish superstition, then makes a warding against evil and changes the subject.

The Caliphesse's Secret. Rhana, the present Caliphesse, knows that her status and wealth depend on her possession of the Obsidian Mask. However, if the Caliph were to die or disappear before the next Obsidian Mask Race is completed, her four-year-old son would most likely become Caliph, and she would be his Regent until his sixteenth birthday. Rhana has therefore entered into a pact with agents of Rajanistan. Through her aid, Torquar assassins will infiltrate Al Ashad and attempt to kill the Caliph before the end of the Obsidian Mask Race.

As a diversion, Rajan Necromancers will lay spells in the desert. While skeptical regarding the legend of Saramassa, they intend to see the maiden's oath fulfilled regardless – they hope to summon the spirits of all those who have perished in past Obsidian Mask Races. The appearance of scores of ghostly racers should prove a sufficient distraction to allow the assassins to complete their mission unimpeded.

The Story-Spinner

An old blind woman, Zinda, sits in a corner of the bazaar at El Aran, unattended except by a few scruffy children. In her hands she sifts colored sand, the mark of a Djaffir sand-taler. She calls to passersby to hear – for only the price of a Dracartan Pyramid – the tale of *Kalia and the Sand Demon*, or the *Tragedy of Saramassa*, or any of a dozen popular tales. Player characters who take this opportunity learn all of the pertinent legends.

Anyone who asks Zinda specifically about the ghostly racers learns the following scrap of folklore: Sixty miles south of El Aran, west of the path the racers will take, two stone pillars support a balancing rock. This formation is known as the Desert Gateway, and legend has it that Ghost Winds issue from between the pillars. Ghost racers have been seen in its vicinity.

If anyone asks how one can see invisible spirits, Zinda relates the following: A fence made of skeletons and bones surrounds a lush oasis not shown on any map. This is the wandering Oasis of Paccinira, an evil mirage. It reveals itself only to those whose thirst is great, but they must on no account drink – the waters are instant death. An ancient date palm, the only living thing at the oasis, stands directly over the poison pool. One fruit from this tree – and no more, Zinda cautions – is said to allow one to see spiritforms.

Characters who listen raptly have their pockets picked clean by the grubby children while the Story-Spinner tells her tale. Zinda and her grandchildren split the profits later.

The Oasis of Paccinira. At least one party member must forgo all water in order to see this mirage. The desert heat dehydrates its victims. All characters without sufficient water must pass a CON Roll hourly to avoid heat-stroke. Those who fail the roll suffer d8 points of damage, and collapse if their hit points fall below 5. A day's rest and double water-rations restore half the lost hit points.

The oasis is poison, exactly as Zinda said. It is also the residence of two ghosts. One owns a magic silkcloth veil, identical in power to a *Cloak of Deception*, which she uses to disguise herself as an attractive female of the same race as one of the player characters. She attempts to persuade the adventurers to bathe in the pool (which causes instant death). If anyone asks about the bones nearby or mentions the Legend of Paccinira, she replies that this is the Oasis of Varalisse, whose waters are the antidote to the waters of Paccinira. The bones belong to those who didn't reach the antidote in time, she says.

The disguised ghost splashes poison water at any who attack her, causing d4 points of damage per hit. If seriously threatened, she plunges into the pool and enters the ghosts' underwater den (joining her companion).

Later – perhaps when the player characters climb the palm to get the magic dates – both ghosts emerge from a concealed exit and attack. The male shakes the palm tree, forcing climbers to succeed at a DEX Roll to avoid falling into the pool. The ghosts also try to pull victims into the water (roll STR versus STR).

The dates have the magical effect Zinda reported, lasting for d6 hours. However, they are also a cumulative toxin. For every date partaken of by a character, the Gamemaster must make a secret CON Roll (with a -1 penalty for each date eaten, regardless of time elapsed). A result of "Failure" indicates that seizures, violent delirium and a high fever (-10 penalties to DEX and INT) begin in d4 hours, lasting for d4 days. A "Mishap" brings on death in d10 hours.

The Race Begins

In the predawn light, the racers gather on the southern edge of El Aran. Djaffir Wizards walk up and down the rows, inspecting the entrants and their steeds. All who meet their approval have a golden double sun stamped on the brow of their mask – previous entrants have these symbols repainted. At the crack of dawn, the day's race begins.

If any of the players have thought to enter their characters in the race, they now embark on the fabled ride to Al Ashad. Their player-character companions might wish to ride on the flanks as escorts, or prowl the desert on independent investigations. The Gamemaster may want to improvise these encounters during travel in the desert:

Duststorm! The inky blackness of the desert storm (see the "Optional Rules" section of this book for more information) separates the racers, and may divide the player characters from one another. Sand Mantas also prowl during the storm, tricked by the darkness into crawling from beneath the sand.

Illusion of the Sands. As a Kharakhan War Wagon trundles through the Zura, a sand demon conceals it with an illusion. The Giants, seeing the racers coming toward them, interpret this as an attack and open fire – but will the player characters realize their danger in time? (Note that this will *not* happen to a party which includes the wearer of the Obsidian Mask.)

Desert Music. In the early evening, delicate melodies drift over the dunes, and investigating characters find a group of travelers camped on the lee side. However, the music does not come from the strangers, but from Bodorian Crabs which have emerged from the sands and climbed the sides of their wagon. With the least disturbance, the crabs loose their poison spines in all directions.

The Desert Gateway

If the adventurers listen to Zinda, they should think to investigate this portion of the desert. If they don't, the Gamemaster should make other arrangements – perhaps a ghost rider might lead the player characters here.

Approaching adventurers hear the echo of a strange, child-like voice: "See the terrifying Necromancers! Thrill to their tedious incantations! Wonder at how they survive inside their iron masks!"

"Do you wish to meet Death so soon, little sardonicus?" interrupts a deep voice.

"No, master . . ." comes the hushed reply.

Three Rajan Necromancers – Mectar, Lalbathar and Trincrase – are performing a ritual at the Desert Gateway, aided by a slave sardonicus, Mathrazius. The mages are painting symbols on the rocks with fresh blood, while the sardonicus taunts them. The stones mark a natural weakness between the primal plane and the Grey Sphere, giving a +7 bonus to *Action Table* rolls when summoning spiritforms. A Rajan War Chariot nearby holds several sacks of food, a few bottles of palm wine (a Rajan vintage), and a large chest containing Necromantic supplies.

The Rajans are preoccupied (-5 to PER Rolls) and can be surprised if the party is careful. The sardonicus is more likely to notice the party, but he will do all in his power to help them – signaling to move silently, pointing out the best dunes from which to fire arrows, and covering their noise with his loud complaints. The fanatic Necromancers attempt to destroy any who discover them, fighting to the death.

As a dying action, Mectar produces a Necrophage Hand (see the "Arcanum" section of this book) and orders it to throttle the sardonicus. Mathrazius screams in terror and begs to be saved. If the characters do nothing, the Hand reaches the sardonicus' jar in two rounds, has the lid off on the third, and throttles Mathrazius starting on the fourth round.

Next to the sardonicus' jar is a Necrophage Head. It laughs at the sardonicus' plight, and when Mathrazius offers to answer three free questions for the adventurers, the Head warns that the sardonicus has already answered his questions today and only wants to invoke the Curse of the Fourth Question. Mathrazius replies that the curse only applies to the fourth question from the same master. (He's right.) He swears that if the characters will allow him to go free, he will tell all that he knows regarding "the dead Necromancers and their connection with the Djaffir!"

What the Sardonicus Knows. If the party accepts his bargain and frees the sardonicus, Mathrazius tells them this:

"Mind you, this is all hearsay and mind-reading, but the Necromancers of Rajan were operating as agents of the Khadun. He ordered that the legend of Saramassa be made real, and the Death-mages were attempting to contact Saramassa and remind her of her dying oath.

"However, I believe this was only part of a larger plot. Three Torquar companions of the Necromancers now wait in Al Ashad, and I believe the disturbance caused by the arrival of the ghostly racer was to be the cover for their nefarious actions."

If asked to reveal more, Mathrazius can only remember a name: "Iranna? Vrana? This was their Djaffir accomplice, said to be a woman of extraordinary comeliness. More I cannot tell you." (He refers to Rhana, the Caliphesse of Djaffa.)

Having said this, the sardonicus attempts to fly away. If the party keeps him prisoner, he answers questions specifically and grudgingly – and only three per day, unless the adventurers wish to fall prey to the Curse of the Fourth Question. The Necrophage Head says the bottle-imp is lying, and tells what it calls "the real truth" (a collection of subtle lies).

Ghost Riders

At the midpoint of the Mask Race, two maidens are far in the lead, racing neck and neck. Minutes behind them is Rhana the Caliphesse, and minutes behind her is a knot of five racers. (The Gamemaster should insert a player character among these front runners, if any are participating in the race.)

As the suns reach their zenith, a Ghost Wind whistles through the desert. If the Rajan Necromancers succeeded in their ritual, scores of ghost maidens now appear, visible as smoke-like shapes. If not, there are only 15 spirit-racers, and they are invisible (except to those able to perceive invisible/astral presences). In either case, the racers' cries are audible, urging their *aht-ra* to go faster.

One ghost maiden – Saramassa of the legend – outraces the others and overtakes Rhana, unless someone interferes. After a brief scuffle, the spiritform unseats the Caliphesse, takes the Obsidian Mask, and puts it in place of her own. With a shimmer of magic, the Mask's powers disguise Saramassa with the form of the Caliphesse. She takes the Caliphesse's onra and races on to Al Ashad.

The other ghost racers join the pack, but fade back from whence they came after d20 x 4 minutes. Rhana, meanwhile, wanders away into the dunes, in shock and babbling incomprehensibly. The shame of losing her fetish mask must be born by her husband, who is virtually certain to cast her out of his harem. The Caliphesse's plans have come undone. Further, she may die of exposure if someone does not come to her rescue – but she will not be grateful for such aid.

The End of the Race

At Al Ashad, preparations are frantically underway for the evening arrival of the racers, 16 hours or so after their departure from El Aran. Gamblers and spectators from as far as Farad and Ispasia are present, as well as Hadj and Carantheum. The Caliph, the Grand Wazir, and a retinue of Djaffir Wizards oversee last-minute preparations, while cooks prepare the traditional Feast of the Harem in honor of the racers.

Mathrazius was correct – Torquar Assassins have been ordered to kill the Caliph, and the conjuration of the ghosts was intended to distract the Djaffir. Disguised as desert peddlers, the Rajans wait to see if the spirit-maidens will arrive.

It is customary for the sheiks of the Djaffir to bring gifts to the Caliph during the running of the Obsidian Mask Race. Those who cannot attend send presents. Each of the Torquar bears a sinister gift: One has a Necrophage Hand, hidden in a bolt of Mandalan silkcloth. Another carries a hand-carved crystal goblet, enchanted so that it releases a fatal dose of alkahest when filled with any liquid. The third bears a *Black Urn of Malnagar* (see the *SORCERER'S GUIDE* for a description, or substitute another malefic magic item), but the assassin will use it only if her companions fail.

The conclusion of the adventure may differ, depending on the actions of the player characters and the desires of the GM:

If the Ghost Maiden is Stopped: The Djaffir maiden Ibrahimia, a newcomer to the race, takes first place.

If the Caliph is dead, the race is declared invalid. Rhana's son is eventually acknowledged as the new Caliph. If his mother was not unmasked, she seizes power as regent and looks for scapegoats to blame the assassination on – probably the player characters. Muliesan is also arrested (his spells can take both himself and the party to safety, if he desires). If Rhana was unmasked, however, Muliesan becomes the boy's regent.

The Khadun's plan is not fulfilled with the death of the Caliph. The assassins next plan to kill the sole heir. If they accomplish this, Djaffa would have neither Caliph nor rightful successor. Rival sheiks would claim the rulership, and the kingdom would be in civil war within weeks. In such a situation, Muliesan would pay a fortune if anyone could rescue the Caliph or his son from the Grey Sphere.

If the Caliph survives the adventure, the adventurers and Muliesan are given the place of honor at the Feast of the Harem, for their successful role in thwarting the Rajans. The men are offered the daughters of prestigious Djaffir in marriage, dowries included. Women (and characters not of the race of Men) are given 10 gelded aht-ra and 5,000 G.L. each, in addition to Muliesan's arranged payments. If Rhana remains unexposed, she keeps silent and bides her time.

If Saramassa Steals the Mask: The ghost maiden rides into first place wearing the appearance of the Caliphess. *If the Caliph was killed by the Rajans*, Saramassa returns to the Grey Sphere with Rhana's young son, who would be the next Caliph of the Djaffir and therefore her rightful husband.

If the Caliph is alive, there are two possibilities:

- Saramassa carries the Caliph off to the Grey Sphere. Rhana's son is eventually declared the new ruler, although there is trouble with rebels who do not acknowledge the death of his father. Muliesan attempts to force the adventurers to rescue the Ca-

liph, refusing to pay them what he promised until the Caliph is restored to Djaffa.

- Through the magic of the sand demon's mask, Saramassa's desires, and the kind heart of the Gamemaster, Saramassa becomes a woman of flesh and blood once again. The Caliph is overjoyed at the miracle, and takes Saramassa as his Caliphess. If the party helped produce this happy ending, they are given places of honor at the Feast of the Harem, along with appropriate riches and eternal gratitude. Rhana, if alive, later makes a pathetic attempt on Saramassa's life, for which she is declared Unmasked and outcast from Djaffa, along with her son.

So long as nothing happens to the Caliph, the Grand Wazir considers the party's mission a success and pays them the full fee agreed upon. Parties which do not succeed are not paid more than the aht-ra, and particularly inept adventurers have these confiscated – and may even be banished from Djaffa.

Cast

Al Jahuhd, Caliph of Djaffa. Djaffir Merchant/Bandit. Fourth level. 6', 160 lbs.

STR 0, DEX +1, CON +1, SPD 0, INT +3, WILL -1, PER +1, CHA +2

Combat Rating +3. 20 hit points. Curved daggers (2), d6. Scimitar, d8. Leather mask, linen robes and headdress

Skills: Appraise treasure, caravan master, con, High Talisman (language), merchant/trader, mounted combat, oratory, riding (aht-ra), secondary combat

The current Caliph of the Djaffir makes a nice figurehead – indeed, he's surprisingly unaffected by his immense wealth and elevated status. Unfortunately, statecraft is not something he's good at, and he has no clue about Rhana's intrigues.

Mectar, Lalbathar and Trincrase. Rajan Necromancers. Eighth level. 6' 3", 145 lbs.

STR -1, DEX 0, CON -2, SPD 0, INT +5, WILL +3, PER -1, CHA 0

Combat Rating +2. 26 hit points. The only weapons they carry are jagged-edged torture knives, d6+1 (see "Torquar Weapons" on the Weapons Table in the "Optional Rules" section of this book)

Magic Rating +11. They know all of the basic spells and cantrips, plus the Necromantic spells listed in the "Arcanum" section of this book. Lalbathar carries a *Rod of Unending Torment* (see the *SORCERER'S GUIDE*, or substitute a similar artifact)

Skills: Combat training, concoct elixirs, concoct poisons, cult rituals, enchant items, inscribe spells, Low Talisman (language), metaphysical doctrines (spirit realm), primary magic, primitive magical talents (masks only), torture

The Black Mystic Cult has sent some of its finest Necromancers into the desert to bring back the wandering spirits of Mask Racers who have died tragically. Confident in their magical powers, the mages ordered their Torquar assistants onward to Al Ashad, and are now vulnerable to a surprise attack by the adventurers.

Rhana, Caliphess of the Djaffir. Djaffir Merchant/Bandit. Seventh level. 5' 8", 120 lbs.

STR 0, DEX +2, CON +1, SPD 0, INT +2, WILL 0, PER 0, CHA +2
Combat Rating +4. 26 hit points. Curved dagger, d6. Cloak, robes and headdress of light linen cloth, boots of soft aht-ra hide, waterskin

Magic Rating 0. However, Rhana wears the Obsidian Mask at all times (see below for its powers)

Skills: Acting, appraise treasure, beast trainer, dance, espionage, High and Low Talislan (languages), merchant/trader, mounted combat, riding (aht-ra), secondary combat, seduce, wilderness survival (desert)

Rhana is proud, especially of the fact that she has won the Mask Race three times.

Saramassa the Ghost Maiden. Disembodied Spirit (Djaffir Merchant/Bandit). Tenth level. 5' 6", 100 lbs.

STR -, DEX +2, CON -, SPD +2, INT +3, WILL +1, PER -1, CHA +1

Combat Rating +10. 16 hit points. Energy bolt, d20 (once per round). Dressed as a Mask Racer (see Rhana's description)

Magic Rating 0. However, Disembodied Spirits are non-corporeal, and only silver or enchanted weapons (and extradimensional entities) can harm them

Skills: Appraise treasure, beast trainer, cooking, knife-throwing, merchant/trader, mounted combat, riding (aht-ra), secondary combat

Saramassa was small and athletic in life, a superb aht-ra racer. Though now a ghost, she is determined to enjoy her afterlife and has sworn to be Caliphesse.

Other Ghost Riders. The other ghost maidens are 5th level spiritforms - +5 Combat Rating, d10 energy bolt damage, 11 hit points.

Torquar Assassins. Rajan Assassins (Torquar) disguised as Djaffir Merchant/Bandits. Fifth level. 5' 6", 135 lbs.

STR +1, DEX +2, CON 0, SPD +3, INT 0, WILL 0, PER +2, CHA -1

Combat Rating +5. 20 hit points. Curved daggers (2), d6. Horn short-bow (quiver of 20 arrows), d8. Wearing the masks and cloaks of Djaffir

Skills: Assassinate, concoct poisons, hide, interrogate, Low Talislan (language), Nomadic Tongue (Djaffir language), secondary combat, stalk, tail, torture, tracking, wilderness survival (desert)

Sent to kill the Caliph, the Assassins are fanatics who have no doubt that Death will aid them. They expect to strike during the confusion caused by the arrival of the ghost racers. Their fall-back plan is to present diabolical gifts to the Caliph.

The Ghosts of Paccinira. There are two of these.

SIZE: 7' 6" 160 lbs.

ATTRIBUTES: STR +6, DEX -5, CON 0, SPD +2, INT +5, WILL +3, PER +4, CHA 0

LEVEL: 8

ATTACKS/DAMAGE: Slashing claws - d8+6

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Night vision, detect invisible/astral presences, harmed only by silver/magical weapons. The female possesses a magic silkcloth veil which she uses to disguise herself as an attractive member of the victim's race.

ARMOR: Unarmored

HIT POINTS: 25

HABITAT: The Oasis of Paccinira

COMMENTS: Possessed of a diabolical, and often insane, intelligence, Ghosts prey upon living creatures of all sorts. Their feeding habits are grisly by any standards: they use their long, razor-sharp claws to decapitate their victims, then feast upon the slain creatures' internal organs. They reek of the charnel pit, and have shriveled, nightmarish features. These Ghosts have become tolerant of sunlight, but still prefer shade to the direct light of the twin suns.

The Obsidian Mask: The Mask of Obsidian is a wondrous artifact, both due to its magic and its cultural importance. Black volcanic glass polished to become a mirror, the Mask is ornamented with silvering and colored swirls. It molds itself to the wearer, showing only the stylized face of a beautiful woman - purported to be that of Kalia, the first Caliphesse. The eyes of the Mask are silvered lenses, reflective to the outside world but transparent from within.

Magically, the Mask has several powers. First, it is ultimately reflective, possessing a continuously operating variant of *Cascal's Spell of Reflective Aura*. It protects against all spells of illusion, hallucinations, and radiant or prismatic light. Spells directed against the aura are reflected back upon the caster/attacker. Note that the wearer cannot detect illusions - rather, illusions cannot be cast on the wearer.

Second, the wearer may also cast spells of *Illusion* and *Deception* at the tenth level of ability, 3 times per day. The *Deception Spell*, somewhat similar to the *Veil of Deception* spell listed in the *SORCERER'S GUIDE*, allows the caster to disguise her features, voice and costume to resemble those of another person for d8 hours. The disguise is detected by a successful PER Roll, but the spell level acts as a penalty to the roll.

Third, and perhaps most wondrous of all, the Mask commands the respect of the sand demons, who never attack the wearer of the Obsidian Mask or her companions - this explaining the lack of sand-demon attacks whenever the Caliphesse has ridden in the Mask Race. Some sages incorrectly attribute to the Obsidian Mask the ability to summon and bind sand demons, though it does give a +3 bonus in dealings with these creatures.

Despite its demonic source, there is no known curse on the Obsidian Mask.

THE HAND OF URMAAN

North of Irdan, at the foot of the Jade Mountains, is a grotesque monument known as the Hand of Urmaan. Towering 150 feet above its surroundings, the monument is a gigantic obsidian hand, its claw-tipped fingers appearing to grasp for the sky. The carving is flawless, though scholars argue about the technique used to create it – some claim that the sculpture was fashioned by an artist-mage of the Forgotten Age, since no tool marks are evident.

The land around the Hand is arid and barren, largely stress-cracked stone. Fissures radiate outward from the monument. The fractured rock is prone to sudden movement, opening sinkholes without warning. The treacherous heights of the Jade Mountains overlook the monument, shedding slides of gravel upon the unfortunate. The Hand is named after the first Rajan necromancer, Urmaan, and marks the area where he spent a year in seclusion, returning with the secrets of Necromancy. Dracartan scholars maintain that a hidden library of the ancients must lie somewhere nearby.

Urmaan taught that the Hand symbolized Death reaching from the Underworld to grasp his victims, and the monument is therefore considered one of the Black Mystic Cult's most holy sites. The Khadun has declared the area forbidden to all save the Black Mystic Cult. The Torquar enforce this ban – Shadinn Executioners watch from hidden crag-top outposts, raining boulders down on those who enter the area. If the intruders are not numerous, the guards descend from their posts to hunt down the interlopers individually.

What the Cult Knows: Since Urmaan's death, the Black Mystic Cult has repeatedly sent explorers to search for the repository of information which Urmaan supposedly discovered. Descending a cave in the nearby mountains, the Rajans recently discovered a network of partially flooded caverns, including at least one subterranean lake and several steam vents. However, survivors of the survey team also told of snake-like creatures which boiled up from the black depths to drive the party back to the surface. Virds and Zagir have since identified these guardians as their old foes: the Satada.

The Caverns of Death

A network of caverns does exist in the mountains southeast of the Hand, and there is at least one entrance other than that known to the Rajans. The chambers were formed through volcanic action, and are generally cylindrical in shape. Some are awash with water that has entered through cracks from the surface. Many of the deeper caverns are lit by phosphorescent fungus, providing a dim blue light to travel by. Elsewhere, explorers need torches or other illumination in order to see in the pitch-darkness.

Explorers should also bring rations, although the phosphorescent fungus is edible. (It has a strong vinegar taste – a successful WILL Roll is required to eat the stuff.) The only potable water drips from the walls – the rest is heavily tainted with sulfur. (Those who drink the poisoned water must make a CON Roll an hour later. If they fail, they are subject to d4 hours of sulfur-induced nausea and diarrhea, during which they have a -2 penalty to all Action Table rolls.)

Exploring the caverns is a task fraught with difficulty:

Crevices and Cracks. Crevices are so narrow that most explorers find it difficult to wriggle through, much less bring equipment (and bulky armor) with them. At the Gamemaster's option, the

obstacles may include horizontal crevices (characters must crawl through), vertical crevices (characters must squeeze through sideways) and bottlenecks (characters may become stuck). Cracks are so narrow that only whisps and similar-sized creatures can pass.

Slick Passages. These tunnels are warm and moist, perfect conditions for breeding the fungus which clings to all surfaces. In a sloping passage, slick fungus can be especially hazardous.

Steam Vents. A geyser erupts within this chamber, either constantly or periodically (every d6 x 10 minutes). The steam can be heard rumbling up the tube for d6 rounds before it reaches the cave, giving the adventurers a chance to escape or scramble for cover. Those caught unprotected receive d6 damage from scalding vapor (no protection from armor) and are knocked down. All others take one point of heat damage.

Vertical Shafts. Some tunnels pitch downward so steeply that they are nearly vertical. Mountain-climbing skill, assisted by ropes and tackle, is needed to move up or down these shafts.

Wet and Flooded Tunnels. Most of the deepest passages are flooded, impassable unless the adventurers can breathe water. Others are only partially flooded – cataracts, swift currents and hidden obstacles all threaten explorers.

If the Gamemaster doesn't desire to create his own map of the caverns, a random underworld may be created while the player characters explore the depths. Roll d8 three times for each cavern, to determine its size and type, then roll twice for each unexplored exit to determine its direction and angle. For tunnels, crevices and cracks, the number of exits is also an indication of the length of the tunnel or crevice. The Gamemaster interprets all results, deciding when tunnels connect to previously explored areas and ignoring impossible configurations.

Caverns of Death Table

Die Roll	Size*	Type**	Direction	Angle
1 or less	Crack	Standard	Straight	Slopes Up
2	Crevice	Standard	Straight	Level
3	Tunnel	Standard	Right	Level
4	Tunnel	Slick	Right	Slopes Down
5	Cavern	Vertical	Right	Slopes Down
6	Cavern	Wet	Left	Slopes Down
7	Large Cavern	Steam Vent	Left	Slopes Down
8 or more	Vast Cavern	Flooded	Left	Slopes Down

* to determine if the cavern is lit by phosphorescent fungus, roll once more – if the roll is less than or equal to the chamber's level, there is light.

** add the cavern's level to the roll. The original cavern is level 0, the next deeper level is +1, and so forth.

The Gamemaster may introduce encounters with subterranean flora and fauna at his discretion. Appropriate entities include blind cave skalanx, crag spiders, scavenger slimes, and vaspas (in their lair). Quakes should occur at least once per exploration, probably sealing off some passages (or opening others).

The Satada patrol the outermost caverns (a normal party consists of d4 soldiers). Their torches provide warning for alert adventurers. The Satada welcome the arrival of visitors – their normal rations consist of dried fish or kra, and fresh meat is a great treat. Inner, drier chambers are used by the Satada for lodging. These beings also infest the portion of the Under-

ground Highway, which runs the length of Rajanistan's mountain range.

Urmaan's Sanctum

If the adventurers are fortunate or the Gamemaster is kind, they may reach the area they seek: Urmaan's former sanctum. The key to finding the secret chamber is the **Juncture**, a lit chamber where eight tunnels meet. A pyramidal altar of ancient construction marks the exact center of the room. The Satada believe this rune-carved structure to be holy, and bring their honored dead here for their final rest. Ten Satada guards-of-honor lurk near the entrances, armed with capture-bows and swords. Anyone approaching the Juncture is attacked, unless he hisses the correct password (in Sauran, of course).

If intruders enter this chamber and the Satada know of it, they send an alert echoing throughout the subterranean passages. Once they have gathered in strength, the Satada will attack in waves with mindless ferocity until those who have intruded upon their holy chamber are their prisoners.

One of the branching passages from the Juncture is a dead-end. Careful explorers (-4 penalty to PER Roll) spot a hand-shaped cavity in the wall, ten feet from the end of the tunnel. Pressing a living hand into the opening causes a secret portal at the end of the tunnel to open. Seconds later, the door closes swiftly and violently (3 x d10 damage to anyone caught in the doorway, unless he succeeds at a DEX Roll to escape).

Secret of the Necromancer

Beyond the secret door is a series of small chambers, plentifully lit by the clinging fungus. There is a dried-fungus bed in one room, a pure-water spring in another, and a fire pit in a third chamber. One room is devoted solely to an inscription in ancient Rajanin. The words are *Urmaan's Warning* – an inscription which the Black Mystic Cult would do anything to read.

Urmaan's inscription tells of his trek through these caves and his narrow escapes (though he makes no mention of the Satada which now plague the passages), and his discovery of a cavern studded with heat-forged gems of all kinds. On one wall, carved of blackest obsidian, was the semblance of a face in slumber – but the distance from forehead to chin was 200 feet or more.

"I thought that the diamonds and gems were the greatest treasure I could ever find," reads the inscription, "and so I hastened to gather up my fortune. When I had taken my fill, I spoke to the face in jest, thanking it for the gems. To my great surprise and fear, the giant effigy answered!"

Forbidding Urmaan to run, the face identified itself as the colossus Manurm, imprisoned beneath the mountains aeons ago by his enemies. The colossus nearly escaped once, when some great disturbance shook the world – Manurm managed to free one of his hands. He continues to try to escape, but remains held fast by his mountainous prison.

According to Urmaan's record, Manurm made a pact with the Rajan – he would impart great knowledge if the mortal would return with those of his kind and unearth Manurm from his rock prison. Urmaan agreed and stayed for a year, learning secrets of dark magic. But when the Rajan learned all he wanted, he left with his knowledge and riches, leaving a diamond-scratched journal behind as a warning to others who might follow.

Manurm wasn't pleased. He cast a spell, summoning Urmaan to appear before him. Then, with a mighty effort, the colossus reached forth its hand. . . and the founder of Rajanistan died like an insect, crushed beneath a massive stone finger.

Manurm

From the sanctum chambers, a small tunnel leads downward to the great chamber spoken of in *Urmaan's Warning*. There is a second passage which leads here from the Juncture cavern, but unlike the sanctum tunnel, it ends in the middle of a vertical wall – a 100-foot sheer drop to the cavern floor.

Manurm's obsidian face spans the entire length and height of one wall. His features are in repose – the eyes are closed, and the mouth is relaxed as if in slumber. While the face is man-like, it is not like any race which the adventurers should know (although a close comparison could be made to the Monoliths of Garganta).

Urmaan's Warning relates this of Manurm: "The ancient colossus was one of those elemental forces which came to Talislanta while the world was a primordial stone, venting its volcanic wrath at the sky. He roamed the world, calling it home for eons. Then came others who battled and defeated the colossus, casting him into the depths. If ever freed, Manurm would turn Talislanta into a volcanic wasteland, as it was when the colossus was young."

If the Gamemaster is unwilling to introduce the overwhelming power and influence of Manurm to his campaign, the best solution is to keep the colossus deep in slumber – only the occasional nightmare and attendant tremor hint at his true strength. Otherwise:

The Colossus Awakes. Manurm has incredible power, and can virtually do anything the Gamemaster wishes *except* escape from his prison unaided. He could destroy attacking Satada with a single spell, and teach the adventurers incredible magics. Manurm still plans his release and conquest of the world. The tasks he might ask the adventurers to perform could include:

- Excavating portions of the mountains, so that the colossus can break free.
- Seeking out Manurm's ancient enemies, so that the colossus might know what his foes are up to.
- Taking a message from the colossus to another of his brethren (or his cousins, the Monoliths of Garganta), to ask for their help in escaping his prison.
- Wreaking vengeance on the Black Mystic Cult, which still profits from Urmaan's stolen knowledge.

Manurm will be careful not to make the same mistake he made with Urmaan – he will try to bind the characters' souls through magic, so that the colossus can control them. If the adventurers anger him, the colossus is likely to lose his temper. This is dangerous, for Manurm's tantrums cause massive earthquakes, and the adventurers are hundreds of feet underground . . .

WITH WATER, LIFE

It is Zar – the time of the Septenarial Concordance, the days of evil fortune and the god Death, and something strange is happening in the deep desert. The adventurers are about to be approached by a Dracartan Expositor who needs help exposing what he thinks is just another Rajan Cult fraud. As the player characters struggle against crooked Priests of Jamba, Rajan agents and spirits of the desert, they may learn the *ultimate* secret of Urmaan the Necromancer.

With Water, Life is an adventure for 3-8 characters of levels 3-8. Besides the usual assortment of fighters and mages, characters with Thieving (espionage) and Wilderness skills are recommended. The Gamemaster may adjust the number and level of adversaries to match the skill and experience of his players' characters.

Although the opening scenes of this adventure are keyed to the map of Nadan (see the "Cities of Talislanta" section), they could easily be transferred to any other Dracartan city.

Enter an Expositor

As the adventurers go about their business – buying supplies, sight-seeing, enjoying a tavern – a red-robed Dracartan suddenly lurches toward them through the crowd. "I must speak with you," he stage-whispers. The stranger identifies himself as Lyrām the Upright, a Priest of Jamba. If he can get the adventurers alone, the cleric launches into his story:

"I am an Expositor, and it is my mission to bring to light those who prey on others' faith. However, my superiors conspire against me. I implore your aid.

"While scouting in the desert with my brethren, I came upon a party of Rajans to the north of the Oasis of the Star. We captured those whom we were not forced to slay. They boasted that a miracle was coming, that 'Urmaan shall shortly fulfill his promise,' and that Carantheum would soon fall.

"I reported my discoveries to my temple, but my superiors have ordered me not to investigate further. My suspicions are that the Khadun of Rajanistan plans some great deception, one that will whip his followers into a frenzy, and then will come war. As a Dracartan and an Expositor, I must investigate. Will you aid me?"

The cleric has been unable to obtain Dracartan allies, and has turned to the player characters out of desperation (and perhaps due to the adventurers' reputation, if they have any). Lyrām completely overlooks payment. He expects the adventurers to act based on moral outrage. If they insist on funds, the priest sadly explains that he has only d10 x 10 G.L. to his name.

Enemies in Carantheum

Although Lyrām knows that the Priests of Jamba have turned against him, he doesn't realize the full truth: Kurginan, his immediate superior, is actually a Vird Spy (see the "Secrets" section of this book). Alerted to the fact that Lyrām knows something about what is going on in the deep desert, the Vird intends to destroy the meddler. He does not have time to do this himself, but using his contacts as a Priest of Jamba, he has denounced Lyrām as an Incarnator (see the "Naturalist's Compendium" section) to one of the Elders of Carantheum.

Sentinels working for the Elder intend to arrest the Expositor.

While meeting with Lyrām, any adventurer who succeeds at a PER Roll notices a pair of Sentinels watching him – shortly afterward, one of the pair departs (to bring reinforcements). From here on, the Sentinels link the player characters with Lyrām, whether or not they accept his proposition.

Search for the Truth

Further events in the adventure depend on what the players decide to do, and how they react to being followed by Dracartan Sentinels. Whenever Lyrām or one of the player characters appear undisguised on the streets, there is a two-in-six chance every half hour that a pair of searching Sentinels spot them. If this happens, one will tail while the other goes for reinforcements (d6 Sentinels).

If faced with arrest, Lyrām responds with a muttered threat, but otherwise follows the adventurers' lead. The party must immediately decide what to do. If they surrender, see "Arrested!" below. If they resist, the Sentinels fight until several are wounded, then flee to get more reinforcements – the characters must lose themselves in the city, or be overcome by sheer numbers.

Lyrām will not leave the city until he gathers further information about the Rajan threat. He might lead or send the player characters into any of the following encounters:

The Blowing Grain (cartography shop): Lyrām needs Saulid's advice, as the Dracartan is a master of desert cartography – "Where could the Rajan pilgrims have been heading? Are there any sites holy to Death in the Red Desert?"

For 10 G.L., Saulid provides his best guess: the Forgotten City. He will also sell information about the city for 20 G.L. or so, but refuses to let the adventurers see his map. A course for the ruins is available at his usual rate, and astute characters (on a successful INT Roll) notice that Saulid has the plot already figured. (Kurginan previously hired the cartographer to chart it, which Saulid reveals if bribed.)

The Extra Thumb (tavern): Adventurers may obtain the following clues from the barkeep and patrons:

1) "They say the constabulary is looking for Lyrām the Upright. Heard he's a reincarnated Quaran sorcerer. Poor man. Thought he was a good priest, until now."

2) "Looking for work? I hear Orlor the Fat is looking to hire someone handy with a sword."

3) "Did you hear about the ship that the Sentinels impounded? Belonged to a Priest of Jamba, but they say he fell from Jamba's grace, if you know what I mean."

4) "There's a big scandal among the Priests of Jamba. One of them's been convicted of being a reincarnated Quaranian, and now one of their leaders is sailing east to arrest others."

5) "The Sentinels are all over the city. Looking for some hirewords working for a diabolist, I hear."

6) "It's the Year of the Kra, I tell you. The Septenarial Concordance, the days of evil fortune and Zar. It's when the stormclouds gather in the desert, and the Great Kra rises to judge us all. That's what the Paradoxist priest told me."

The Shop of Laru (importer): Once Lyrām knows his destination, his contacts tell him to check with Laru, the Sindra merchant who specializes in Forgotten City artifacts. Laru has the following relics in his shop:

- A brush-like device with several protruding wires. "It's either the key to an arcane lock, or a healing device," speculates the Sindra. (10 G.L.)

- A stone engraved with illustrations of several animals, including known species (ogronts, Crested Dragons and Ectomorphs) and several extinct creatures (a three-legged predator and a spherical herbivore with tentacles). (20 G.L.)

- A fossilized leg of a Land Lizard, with an ivory grip. (15 G.L.)

The Sindra also recommends that they contact Adar Gurtu, the Technomancer (see below).

Pyramid of Nadan (temple of Jamba): Lyrar dares not go himself, but sends the player characters to seek an interview with Artenar, the High Prelate. Artenar agrees to secretly meet with the party, although "as befits my creed, I would prefer to listen rather than speak." He is an old friend of Lyrar's, and wants to know the Expositor's version of recent events.

The High Prelate says that both Lyrar and Kurginan have always been faithful priests, and he cannot understand their falling out. Kurginan has volunteered to investigate further cases of priests possessed by Quaranian Incarnators, and has set sail into the desert. Artenar thinks Lyrar should surrender himself for trial, but will not betray his old friend.

Redoubt of the Thaumaturges: A young messenger approaches the adventurers, asking them to report to the Thaumaturgists' Gate in order to receive a special aid from Astra the Clean, a well-regarded but reclusive Thaumaturge.

The guards are bluff and unhelpful, but they do hand over a note and a book. The hand-scribed message reads: "The Necromancy has grown continually stronger, and coincides with disturbances in the Essences of Wind. These bizzarrities originate most certainly in the ruins known as the Forgotten City. May Jamba prosper our cause." There is no signature.

The manuscript is a treatise by Astra, *Harmonies of the Many Realms*, and contains a chapter titled "The Horn of the Forgotten City." It recounts a legend of a place where all directions are shifted. "To go up, one walks around the crest clockwise; to go down, one walks counter-clockwise. To go clockwise one goes up; and to go counterclockwise, one goes down."

The book then speculates where the horn might be located: "It might actually be an elevation only in astral space, or perhaps it might appear to be flat as viewed from our perspective. In this case, all of our attention to heights has been misplaced." (Astra is wrong – the Horn is a height in both dimensions. The reason no explorer has previously found the Horn is that no one has ever searched the ruins in the month of Zar, when the Horn is at its full potential.)

The book ends with a brief note that the Horn's warpage into astral space might be invaluable to entities seeking a way to journey between worlds on the plane of Primus, and could be the source of the plague of Incarnators in the Red Desert.

Market: A Dracartan master merchant named Orlor the Fat reclines in luxury in his inner shop, planning new caravans and indulging in secret Compact business. The adventurers may learn from several sources that Orlor is looking for hireswords. He offers 100 G.L. for expenses, plus a finder's fee of 500 G.L. to anyone who can locate a functioning spring in the Sanctuary Mountains. Unfortunately, the very astute merchant will also recognize his applicants as the foreigners the Sentinels are

searching for. He may summon the city guards unless the player characters convince him it is to his profit not to.

Adar Gurtu, Restorer (Technomancer's Shop): The Yassan breaks his usual melancholia to talk with enthusiasm about the Forgotten City. He has received some fine artifacts from there, and will gladly advise anyone who dares to explore the region. The Technomancer can describe the general layout of the city, warning that it is a site where spectres find their way into this plane.

The Docks: Lyrar's duneship, the *Investigator*, is tethered at the city docks. He knows that his former crew has been transferred to other duties by the temple (which is why he needs the adventurers' help), but he does not know that five Sentinels have boarded the ship and wait to arrest him. When any adventurer approaches, the Gamemaster should secretly make a PER Roll – if the roll is successful, the character notices suspicious marks in the sand or some other clue.

Arrested!

If the adventurers are captured by the Sentinels, the captives are imprisoned in a dungeon beneath the Citadel. They are searched, but adventurers can retain palm-sized objects by succeeding at a Swipe roll on the *Action Table*. The prison cell is 30 feet by 15 feet, with walls thickly plated with red iron. Air and light come through slots on the door. The only furniture is a red-iron basin of water. A single guard stands outside the cell, but there are dozens of others throughout the dungeon.

There are three additional prisoners, Yassan brothers accused of pilfering from a food-merchant. The sullen Technomancers have been without work for months, and are bitter about anti-Yassan bigotry among the Dracartans. They might assault Lyrar unless the adventurers dissuade them.

The Sentinels plan to interrogate Lyrar and his friends once Kurginan returns from his journey. However, the Vird Spy has no intention of letting Lyrar live. Other spies, disguised as Sentinels, plan on executing the prisoners after nightfall.

The Assault. Before midnight, the adventurers are awakened by the noise of their cell being unlocked. "These are the ones we want," says a Sentinel, pointing to the player characters. The cell's guard stands near the entrance, examining the papers given to him for the transfer of the prisoners, while two other Sentinels advance into the room.

The three new arrivals are actually Vird Spies, magically disguised as Dracartans. They plan to knock out the guard, quietly execute the prisoners (including the Yassan), then escape. The leader suddenly hits the guard from behind, knocking him out, and then the trio attack the unarmed prisoners. "Kill the Yassan trash as well," one of them orders. The Virds are unfamiliar with Dracartan weapons, so apply a -2 penalty to their *Combat Rating*.

The Virds have underestimated their opposition, and the prisoners should easily wrest their weapons from them and subdue them. The Yassan help in this, and are available (as non-player characters) to take the worst of the wounds. If the players need help, let the Dracartan guard regain consciousness and stumble to the Yassan-designed alarm. When he cranks the handle, this device shrieks, providing a one-in-six chance per round of a new guard arriving to aid the characters.

Afterward. The Dracartans are troubled by this obvious sign of something going on right under their noses, especially if any of

the Virds are captured and identified. Artenar the High Prelate is now able to step forward, vindicating Lyrar and casting suspicions on the missing Kurginan. The confused authorities do nothing to prevent Lyrar from setting sail in pursuit.

Into the Desert

After the fight in the prison, or when Lyrar has enough information to proceed, the party should begin the journey to the Forgotten City. Kurginan is somewhere ahead of them in his own duneship, and sooner or later they will spot his ship's sandtrack. Surprisingly, bone-white clouds pock the sky, a very uncommon occurrence in the Red Desert. There are no set encounters during the trip to the Forgotten City, although the Gamemaster might want to improvise the following events:

Boarders! A band of Za and their greymanes burrow into the sand, waiting to spring an ambush. The boldest of their number wield grappling hooks, hoping to reel themselves on board the swift duneship while their comrades sweep the decks with accurate barbed arrow fire. The adventurers must feed extra storm crystals into the funnel in order to escape their attackers.

The Runner Cracks. Breaking a path through the uncruised sands is difficult, and the *Investigator* breaks a runner. Repairs are easily made, but the ship's load must be lightened and strong backs are needed to lug the new runner into place. There will be many chances for Bodorian Crabs and other predators to strike.

Unwanted Visitor. While the duneship has slowed for night cruising, an Ectomorph climbs on board. The long-legged intruder shuffles about the ship, looking for a lone victim – sentries might find a trail of glue marking its path.

By the time the adventurers arrive in the ruined city, the clouds have grown dark and ominous.

The Forgotten City

From a distance, the party sees the Forgotten City as an array of irregular dark towers beneath the growing mass of clouds. Kurginan's sandtrack leads almost to the Jade Gate (see below), and the adventurers can find his duneship abandoned behind a dune, just out of sight of the city. Rajans chanting in front of the gate are eager to fight any visitors. The adventurers should arrive at dusk.

One cannot consider the Forgotten City a ruin. Its towers stand unbroken, its storerooms are stocked, and someone (or some *thing*) occasionally replaces what looters steal. Only the sand in the streets and the profound silence mark this settlement as abandoned.

Artifacts in the Forgotten City come in a bewildering variety, and seem as new as the day they were made. A few are recognizable as products of other Talislantan civilizations – Mandalan murals, Danuvian swords, and gowns of Dhuna spider-silk. Others have no analog in the known world, and scholars have difficulty identifying their function. Scholars cannot even conjecture theories about what people once lived here.

What no one knows is that the Forgotten City belongs to the Andatar, a race of spirits who dwell in the Gray Sphere. They are Disembodied Spirits (see the *SORCERER'S GUIDE*), but are not deceased – rather, they haven't been born yet. When the Creator could not provide bodies for these souls, they had to await the creation on the plane of Primus of a new world.

In the meantime, the Andatar have been given custody of this tiny portion of the material world. Here they have erected buildings, and gather all of those possessions which they wish to have in the day when they become mortal. It takes tremendous effort for the spirits to move stone or transport a stolen item, but they have spent millenia waiting. This city has stood since the dawn of time.

The Andatar are not the only inhabitants, although they are the only permanent ones. Desert predators nest here, and Satada raiding parties are tolerated by the spiritforms – since the barbarians never steal anything, and drive away others who might.

Occasionally the Andatar discourage intruders and replace stolen possessions, and sometimes they install traps to guard their belongings. Being eager to learn about current affairs in the Omniverse and to hear what it's like to be alive, they sometimes manifest themselves to mortals, but the spirits are forbidden by the Creator from explaining who they are.

Prominent features of the ruined city:

1) Marble Wall: The Forgotten City's wall is 40 feet in height, and 20 feet wide. A runic tracery of pure silver runs through its smooth exterior.

2) Jade Gate: Dracartan scholars mistakenly think this city was built by Jamba, since the color of its main gate matches their natural skin tone. The 20-foot-tall doors present a bit of a mystery, since the only handles are great loops near the top, and no hinges are visible. The truth is that the Andatar expect to have a moat around their city someday, and this great "door" is actually a drawbridge.

For a description of a possible encounter here, see "Pilgrim Welcome" below.

3) Palace of the Domes: This strange palace, with its roof of interlapping, brightly painted domes, contains a warren of spherical chambers, each with a featureless stone slab levitating in the center. Concealed cabinets contain a plethora of strange artifacts, some of which are poisonous or toxic to man-like life.

The Andatar built this place as a healing academy, to be used in case the Creator gives them crippled or deformed bodies. If they happen to be born imperfect, the spirits want to be able to cure themselves. The artifacts, from scores of worlds and dimensions, include bandages, knives, mechanical limbs and arcane healing devices, much of it intended for races unknown on Talislanta.

Most of the supplies are trapped, hidden, or missing. Volatile medicinals of alchemical origin make the Palace of the Domes especially hazardous. Other dangerous substances have leached into the air, and may affect intruders.

4) The Serpentine Cathedral: No living engineer could duplicate the undulating, fantastic architecture of this "cathedral." Several dozen towers curve in a sinuous, asymmetrical design, forming a barrier around a central fortress-like building of glowing stone. There are no apparent doorways, and windows appear only in the upper stories.

The Andatar revere this place as their sanctum, a combination of palace, fortress and library. They know that like all infants, they will lose all memory of their spirit existence when they are born. Therefore, the innermost chambers of this structure contain texts, written on plates of precious metal or parchments of shaved gemstone, where they have secreted lore gathered from

throughout the Omniverse. Extradimensional entities, lured here by the spirits, are imprisoned within as guards.

5) Grand Horn: This ridge of rose-colored stone rises in tiers above the spires of the Forgotten City. A few walkways lead up it, flanked by exquisite statuary and the domes of shrines. Each level is separated from the next by a vertical barrier, and contains shrines and monuments built by the Andatar representing the ways in which they might someday receive bodies.

The lowest contour is carved with reliefs showing the lives of animals, and contains new information even for experienced naturalists. (Use this to remind the adventurers about the life cycle of the Ectomorph, including egg-laying and the role of rain in the hatching.) The second level depicts plant life. The highest levels share the theme of females of all species giving birth. Their expressions reveal not pain, but ecstasy. A dry stone basin is nestled within the summit.

This hill is actually a warp in the Primal dimension. The Grand Horn curves into the Gray Sphere, providing a gateway through which the Andatar can come or go from this world. Other extradimensional entities occasionally use the Horn to enter Talislanta as well.

For a description of a possible encounter here, see "The Curved Earth" below. However, do not proceed with this scene before the "Spectral Aid" encounter.

6) Other Structures. The rest of the Forgotten City is filled with homes, shops, public plazas and other necessary structures of a functioning city. They are not as well protected as the other buildings detailed in this key – explorers might actually pilfer from them and live to tell about it. However, Araq and predators infest many of these shelters.

Pilgrim Welcome

"Blades rain blood.

Blood reigns as king.

Rain, Reign.

Rain, Reign."

– Chant of the Rajans at Jade Gate

Seventy Rajan pilgrims camp outside the Gate, hoping to witness a miracle. They are part of a movement, ruthlessly suppressed within Rajanistan, which sensed this event through divination and waits for the return of Urmaan. They survived a march from Irdan in which hundreds died at the hands of their fellow Rajans, "tasting the sweet agony of Death."

If anyone approaches these Rajans, their leader – a defrocked Torquar – presses forward. He would prefer to slay the strangers outright, but a strange prophecy hinders his actions. It has been foretold that powerful Rajan will come to the city, a mysterious priest in the guise of a foreign race. When Urmaan comes, the pilgrims expect his vengeance to obliterate Carantheum, and if the destruction is indiscriminate, they may need a protector to save them. This "Watchman" is late, and the pilgrims are eager for his leadership and protection. Could the newcomers bring the person they seek?

The Torquar is not subtle with his questions. If the party cannot provide a "Watchman," the pilgrims murmur about making offerings to Death. The Rajans attack as a disorganized rab-

ble, without strategy. However, they are weak from their trials in the desert – any pilgrim who receives a wound must succeed at a CON Roll, or collapse. When enough have been slaughtered, the Rajans flee into the desert. (Later, at the Gamemaster's discretion, they may follow the adventurers into the city and cause trouble.)

Spectral Aid

As the player characters explore the city, they should be looking for one of two things: the priest Kurginan, or a place which might be the Horn. As it turns out, finding one means finding the other – Kurginan is wandering on top of the Horn, and may be spotted by characters with sharp eyesight (and a successful PER Roll, with appropriate modifiers for distance).

Before the player characters can reach the hill and confront Kurginan, the citizens of this strange city will reveal themselves. The spirits were compelled to aid Urmaan in his plot to be reborn, and now wish to atone by aiding the characters.

At a time and place of the Gamemaster's choosing, a crowd of spiritforms gathers across the path of the party. Their leader, an Andatar named Bosora, attempts to launch into the following speech. (Note that Lyrar, like most Dracartans, is extremely intolerant of spiritforms and may attack unless restrained.)

"We apologize for the problems our actions have caused your mortal kind. You must now listen carefully, or all your struggles will have been in vain. Urmaan the Necromancer has indeed returned to your world, and rests now in the cradle above the Grand Horn, waiting to be born. The rains will surely come at any time now, driven by Death's unfailing hand. You must stop this. We dare not interfere further, and we beg your forgiveness for the part we were compelled to play."

Bosora assumes that the adventurers know more about what is going on than they probably do, and gives no further clues (unless the Gamemaster is charitable).

The Full Truth. Urmaan used his powers in the Gray Sphere to force the Andatar to help him return to Talislanta, where he entered a mortal body. The spirits tricked him, however – the "body" they gave him was an Ectomorph's egg, which could not hatch until moistened by rainfall. Not to be undone, Death himself has sent rain to bring Urmaan back to mortality.

The Curved Earth

As this encounter begins, the winds blow more violently, and heat lightning stabs down randomly from the clouds. It should be close to midnight.

Kurginan beat the party to the Forgotten City, and has probably been here for several days. Sent as an agent of the Khadun, the Vird's mission is to obtain the new-born child or, if this is impossible, send him back to Death. The Rajans expect Urmaan to be born in Rajan form, and know nothing about the trickery involving the Ectomorph egg.

The Vird also knows nothing about the extradimensional nature of the Horn. After blundering past the first tier, he has continually retraced his steps around the hill, and is becoming increasingly frustrated and irrational.

Climbing the Horn. In order to confront Kurginan, the player characters must learn how to move about here. Directions are not what they seem, and it is impossible to travel in a straight line. Going "up" merely takes one in a clockwise circle around the hill. "Down" sends a traveler counter-clockwise. Converse-

ly, one can climb by walking in what appears to be a clockwise circle, and descend by going counter-clockwise.

The slopes between tiers are vertical, but since explorers must ascend by walking in a circle, they never face the problem of scaling the heights. As the Gamemaster, let the characters figure this out themselves. Do not tell them how their characters are moving – simply listen to what they say they are doing, then describe the result. Characters who watch others climb the Horn will be unable to perceive what is happening, and will feel as if their eyes are being "twisted."

The curvature of the dimensions around the Grand Horn renders missile weapons and ranged spells impractical – they affect random locations on the Horn, sometimes without passing through the space in-between. For similar reasons, dropped objects do not roll downhill.

Confronting Kurginan. When the party approaches, Kurginan slowly turns to face them, waiting to see what he can gain from this event. He retains his Dracartan disguise, wearing the red robes of a Priest of Jamba and the slightly incongruous head-dress of a Desert Scout. He wears da-khar on his hands.

If the party questions the spy, he responds tersely. Kurginan freely admits that Urmaan waits somewhere on the crest of this structure. "Do you think that *you* can conquer him? Don't fool yourselves. And without such control, can you imagine what he might plunge you into? A reincarnated Necromage, with the full knowledge of Death? The only way to save all of us is for you to let me take control of the child."

The Vird follows the adventurers up the Grand Horn, either by coming to an agreement with them or by mimicking their movements. If they attack him, he flees for the moment, but stealthily returns later.

Fighting on the Horn. Should the adventurers think to avoid problems with the spy by killing him now, they may be in for more than they bargained. One of the purposes of the Grand Horn is to allow movement between dimensions, and one of the ways to trigger it into action is to swiftly draw an ornate metal rod and make specific ritual motions. (This secret can be learned by studying various murals throughout the ruins.)

When any metal weapon of significant length is drawn or swung, the Horn begins to quake, and continues to do so until the weapon is motionless for two or more turns. (Fortunately for Kurginan, his da-khar do *not* activate the Horn.) The shaking forces all characters to make DEX Rolls every round to stay on their feet.

Further, there is a two-in-six chance per round that a character swinging a metal weapon will disappear for d10 rounds, then reappear on a lower tier or within several hundred yards of the Horn. (This is the charitable result. If the players are persistent in waving weapons on the Horn, the Gamemaster should feel free to teleport them elsewhere in the Omniverse.)

Midnight on the Horn of Birthing

A stone basin tops the Grand Horn. At the center, a dry well-shaft plunges into the hill. Urmaan's egg sits on a ledge two feet down, cradled in a mound of powdered rock.

The Gamemaster decides whether or not the adventurers are in time to prevent Urmaan from hatching. If he feels that the players have played well up until now, or if he feels that the reincarnated Necromancer would be too great a foe for them to

face, the rains may be delayed. Otherwise – for instance, if the party wasted time fighting Kurginan earlier – he may let the waters flow.

Before the Rains: Kurginan (if he is alive at this point in the adventure) will try to grab the egg and escape in his duneship, using a Spell of Concealment to evade his enemies. He will place the egg inside a waterproof pouch, believing the Khadun can perfect an enchantment to give Urmaan a Rajan form.

The egg weighs 20 pounds, and is roughly two feet long. Its shell is resilient and can withstand fire. It has an Armor Rating of 7, and is destroyed after taking 10 points of damage.

When It Rains: At midnight, thunder rumbles and sheets of rain sweep the Red Desert from the Forgotten City to the Sanctuary Mountains. Even a drop of water will cause the egg to hatch. The moistened eggshell peels away, and its contents arcanelly blossom into the form of the Ectomorph. The reincarnated Necromancer slays madly, intending to destroy everyone as a sacrifice of gratitude to Death.



Aftermath

If the party prevails against Urmaan, they can return in triumph. They will be summoned for an audience with the King of Carantheum, and are virtually certain of receiving permission to buy a duneship from the royal yards (if they ask). The Priests of Jamba may call on them again, and the Academy in Dracarta will be eager to have them lecture about the secrets of the Forgotten City (if they learned any).

And if they fail . . . Urmaan stalks the land once more!

Cast

Kurginan, Priest of Jamba. Vird Spy. Ninth level. 6', 160 lbs. Magically disguised as a Dracartan. STR 0, DEX +1, CON -1, SPD 0, INT +2, WILL +1, PER +2, CHA 0

Combat Rating 5. 27 hit points. Two da-khar, d4. Hurlant, d12, may fire every other round. Chain mail armor under robes. (Note that Kurginan is too weak to use the hurlant well. At the Gamemaster's discretion, the da-khar are specially loaded with venomwood resin in each finger. Whenever Kurginan hits in combat, roll d4 to see how many fingers successfully inject venom. Each finger contains 2 doses.)

Magic Rating 4. Knows only these spells: *Divination*, *Eldritch Power*, *Illusion*, *Influence*, *Metamorphosis*. Has a black-iron ring enchanted with the *Spell of Concealment*.

Skills: Acting, concoct poisons, disguise, espionage, forgery, interrogate, secondary combat, secondary magic, stealth, tailing, torture

A Vird Spy – disguised as a Dracartan by the Black Mystic Cult – has taken the place of Kurginan, a Priest of Jamba. His resemblance to the dead man is perfect, due to the powerful magic of the spell known as the *Dirge of the Face-Stealer* (see the "Arcanum" section of this book for further information). Divinations have revealed that Urmaan, the founder of Rajanistan, is about to return to Talislanta.

The Khadun is eager to greet his reincarnated master, but has ruthlessly suppressed the few Rajans who have learned of Urmaan's return for fear they would betray the secret to the Dracartans in their excitement. Kurginan's orders are simple: Get Urmaan, but if he cannot be obtained, slay him to prevent others from enslaving him. Other agents have been sent, including Torquar, but only the fanatic Vird Spy has been successful.

Lynam the Upright. Dracartan Expositor. Sixth level. 6' 7", 140 lbs. STR +3, DEX 0, CON 0, SPD 0, INT +1, WILL +1, PER +2, CHA -1

Combat Rating 2. 22 hit points. Greatsword, d12+3; 2 daggers, d6+3. Chain mail armor under robes. Other equipment: Red-iron torc, robes and puffed cap of red linen, staff, pouch of scribe's materials

Magic Rating 2. Knows all of the Minor Enchantments, as well as these spells: *Revelment*, *Eldritch Power*, *Mystic Power* (shield only). Lynam carries one vial each of neutralizing powder, incendiary powder and morphius powder.

Skills: Astrology, combat training, hide, interrogate, lip-reading, magic training, metaphysical doctrines, stealth, Talislantan culture, Thaumaturgic operations, wilderness survival (Red Desert)

Lynam was traumatized at a young age, when he learned that his older brother was possessed by a Quaranian Incarnator (Ran-Gor the Torturer). The brother was exiled beyond Carantheum, but Lynam remains fearful of all spirits, and particularly fears someday meeting his lost "brother."

His parents gave young Lynam into the custody of the Expositors, hoping that the priests would be able to calm their child and teach him a useful skill. In time, Lynam adopted the clerical lifestyle, and has matured into a fine cleric. Responding to his restlessness, his superiors assigned him to the duneship *Investigant*, where his duty is to patrol the Red Desert, exposing false prophets wherever he can.

Lynam is convinced that Urmaan's return from Death is a fraud concocted by the Khadun, and will not believe otherwise until the culmination of the adventure. His paranoia about spirits – hearing them in every breeze, blaming them for every accident – may prejudice the player characters against the Andatar.

Minor Characters. The Andatar (Disembodied Spirits), Dracartan Sentinels (Desert Scouts), Vird Spies, Yassan prisoners (Technomancers) and Rajan pilgrims (Desert Warriors) are all first-level characters, without exceptional skills or abilities.

The Investigant. A typical Dracartan merchant ship, the *Investigant* is 75' long and 26' wide. The vessel is single-masted with a square-rigged sail and a double set of wind funnels. The ship is highly maneuverable and capable of long voyages, but must avoid shallow sand. She's fast for a merchant ship (90 miles/day on an established track, 35 miles/day on virgin sand). She requires a crew of 5 dunesailors and a pilot/navigator. Her cargo capacity is 85 tons and 10 passengers and crew.

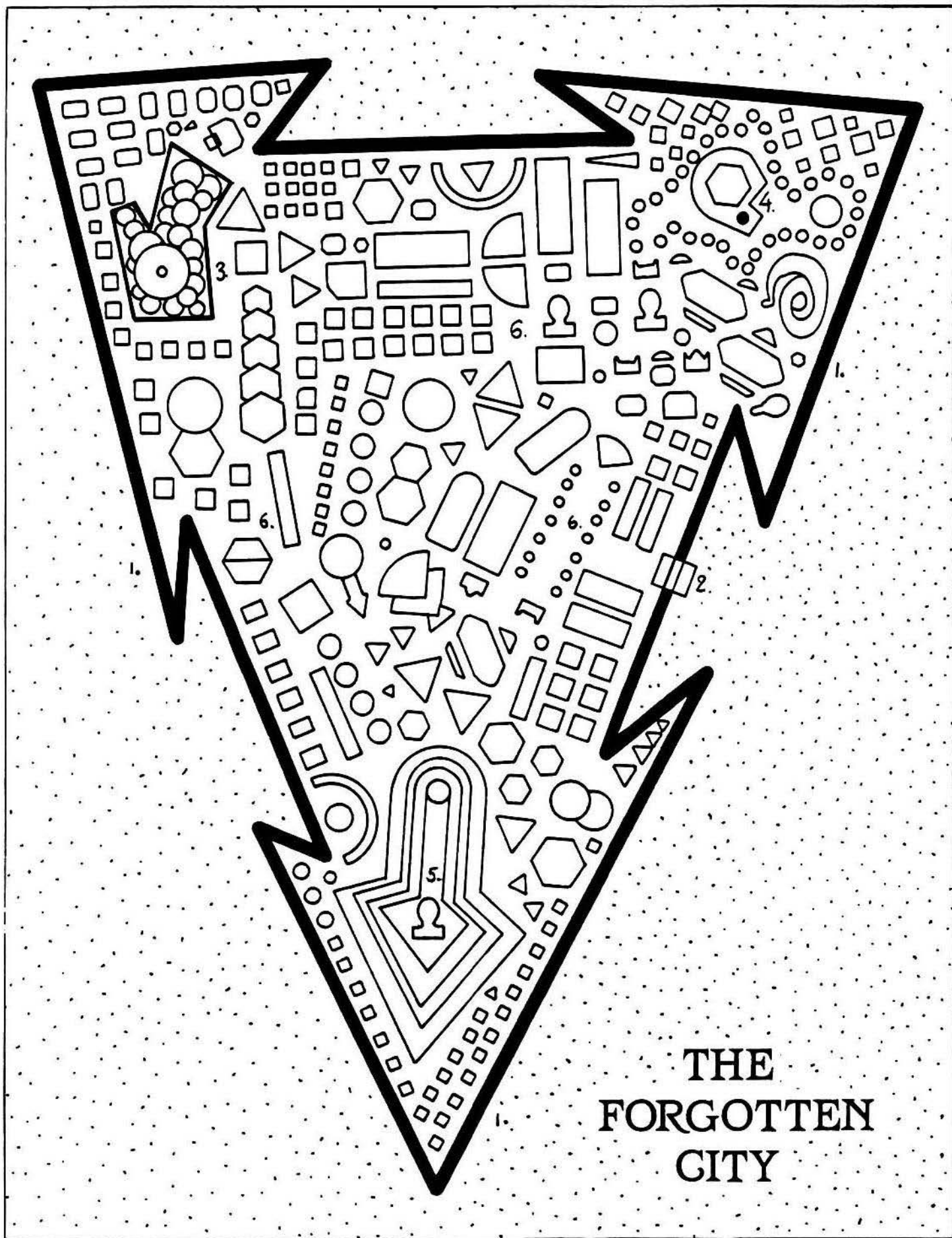
Urmaan in Ectomorph Form

(For complete Ectomorph stats, refer to the "Naturalist's Compendium" section of this book. Urmaan differs only in that he does reduced damage with his attacks – sting, d10; only d6 kicks per round. He attacks as a tenth-level Ectomorph, has 30 hit points, is 20' across, 4' tall, and weighs 250 lbs.)

A newly-hatched Ectomorph would gladly eat its mother, and since it is born fully developed, it is capable of doing exactly that. Driven by such primal urges, Urmaan has a hunger to slay all that he sees. Unless the Gamemaster wishes otherwise, this hunger prevents the Necromancer from thinking to use his magical abilities (*Magic Rating 15*, knows all primary spells plus those of the Black Mystic Cult).

Urmaan has finally found his way back to Talislanta. His spirit followers captured the leaders of the Andatar, the spirit-people of the Forgotten City, and tortured them until they agreed to arrange passage to the material world for the Necromancer. Urmaan planned to enter the body of an unborn Rajan child, and then enjoy the ecstasy of being born once more into the world. The Andatar exacted revenge on the Rajan by sending him into the egg of an Ectomorph, a desert predator whose eggs hatch only when touched by rare desert rains.

Urmaan might have waited millennia for his egg to hatch. However, the god Death smiled on him – as the adventure begins, stormclouds gather over Carantheum.



THE FORGOTTEN CITY

Other Adventures in the Desert Kingdoms

The following ideas can be used by Gamemasters to create their own adventures in Carantheum, Djaffa or Rajanistan.

Carantheum

Crypt Hunt. When Yitek Tomb Robbers desecrate the labyrinthine crypt of a wealthy Dracartan family, the party is hired to enter the tomb and exterminate the invaders. In plundering the burial site, however, the Yitek accidentally ruptured the enchantment of the Pole Star – instead of protecting the spirits of the dead, it now attracts disembodied spiritforms. Incarnators roam the tomb, and the most powerful (including a Quaranian Wizard-King named Chthoros) now occupy Yitek bodies.

The Prodigal Mage. The adventurers receive an elegantly penned message from Nostos, a Pharesian professor at the Lyceum Arcanum. He wants them to find and (if necessary) rescue his son Ensha, who took a sabbatical from his magical studies to journey to Dracarta, and hasn't been heard from since reaching the city. The teacher-mage gives them a golden sphere which allows them to communicate with the young mage if he is within one mile.

When the adventurers arrive in Dracarta, they learn – by spying and collecting rumors – that somebody has stolen a manuscript from the Academy of Thaumaturgy. Until the document is found, the Caduceus Mutada has ordered all of the students confined within the Academy.

Ensha did indeed steal the missing treatise, which is entitled *Considerations of the Essences of Illusionary Objects*. The magical formulae are of limited use to non-Thaumaturges, but the document was written by Astramir himself and is a treasure of Carantheum. Ensha was unable to escape with his prize, and is trapped inside the Academy along with the Dracartan students and professors.

Breaking into the Academy is tremendously dangerous, due to its sorcerous defenses and alert protectors. However, Ensha has a plan. Knowing that the Dracartans wish to avoid an incident between their nation and the Seven Kingdoms, the young mage says he wants to return the document in exchange for a safe departure. However, Ensha secretly intends to betray the rescuers, leaving the Dracartans with a forgery.

Djaffa

Beziela's Babies. The Caliph is furious! His favorite aht-ra has been kidnapped. What's more, Beziela is pregnant . . . with twins! If she is not properly cared for, the mare and the calves could die during the birthing. Even worse, this theft endangers the Djaffir aht-ra monopoly. The adventurers must track down Beziela and steal her from her captors. The prime suspects are the Kasmir and the Rajans – or could the two be *cooperating* against Djaffa?

Desert Rescue. Drawn by the sound of battle, a Djaffir tribe rescues the adventurers from certain death. In return, the sheik requests the party to travel with him to his destination, so that no premature word of his caravan and its goods might leak out. The Djaffir chieftain treats them warmly, admiring the bravery they demonstrated in the face of doom – he even adopts one of the player characters as his son.

When a large caravan approaches, however, it becomes obvious that these Djaffir are bandits, not merchants. And the merchant wagons belong to an old patron of the adventurers! What can they do? Whom will they serve?

Into the Maelstrom. While traveling through the desert, the party encounters a Yitek who is half-mad from sunstroke. Presenting a strange blue crystal as evidence, the stranger claims to have come from the ruined city of El Hasa. If the party will accompany him, the Yitek swears they will find further crystals and other treasures. Will the players believe a half-mad tomb-robber? Can the Yitek be trusted? Or could the stranger be a Spiritsinger driven insane by drugs and Death?

Lost Caravan. While in the tent city of Al Ashad, the adventurers are approached by Dakhil, an appraiser of artifacts. He says that a caravan from the Volcanic Hills is long overdue, and that a Maruk Oracle has told him to find the riches in the northern Zuara. Dakhil knows that the caravan was transporting an immense firegem, a gift to the Caliph from a Sauran tribe. What he doesn't know is that the gem was stolen from the Quan, and that a decimated Kang legion (very far from home) and a Sauran war party are also looking for the lost caravan. And is the caravan truly "lost," or has something more sinister occurred?

Rajanistan

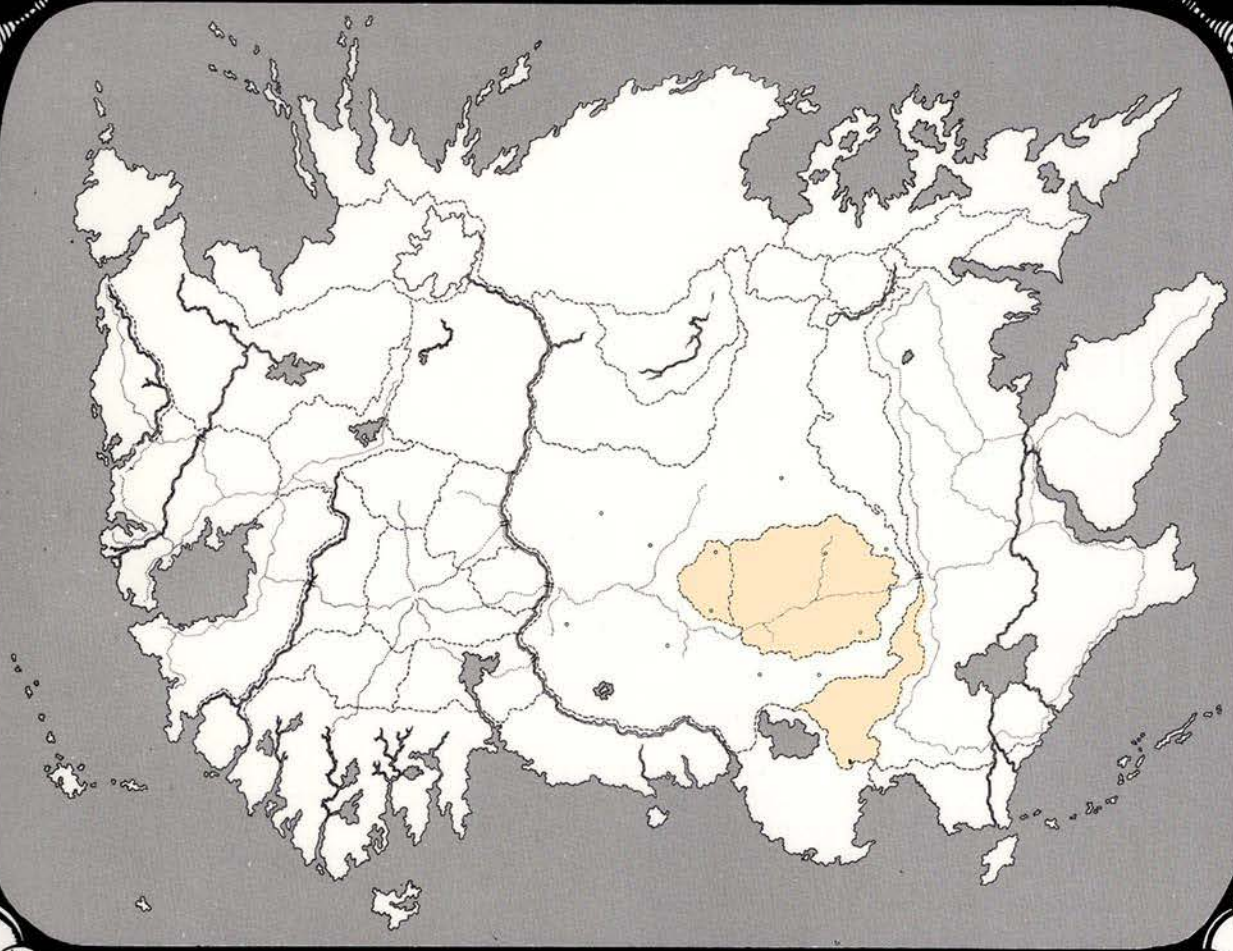
Captives for the Khadun. Each year, on the anniversary of the First Massacre at Dracarta (the 7th of Jhang), each of the tribes of Rajanistan must present the Khadun with a Dracartan prisoner for ceremonial torture and execution. Tribesmen begin looking for Dracartan caravans and duneships months ahead of time, eager for the honor of having their captive chosen for Death by the Khadun. Important Dracartans are most likely to be selected, but this almost always requires the raiders to cross the Za-infested sands of Sharna or Ashann and enter the City of Dracarta itself.

The Lure of Gold. The Djaffir merchant Elimn invites the adventurers to come along with him and "pull the Shadinn's beards" – making a profit at the same time, of course. The adventurers must dodge Rajan patrols and sentinel dragons, while clandestinely gathering gold from the JadeMountains during the spring melts. Elimn intends to wait until a fortune has been collected, then head secretly back with the gold to Djaffa, betraying the adventurers to Shadinn justice. . .

The Shape of Death. Entering Rajanistan as the bodyguards of a Farad Monopolist, the player characters receive a unique view of this otherwise closed country. Unfortunately for them, a spy has come to Irdan. Using his shape-changing ability, the Manra mercenary disguises himself in order to infiltrate the Temple of Death complex and gather information to sell to Dracarta. One of the adventurers sees him transform.

Will the character inform the Khadun? Will he accost the spy – or does he accidentally attack the *real* Rajan and not the spy? If the Manra isn't caught, he will at last impersonate the Farad Monopolist and attempt to escape the country in the protection of the player characters!

THE CYCLOPEDIA
TALISLANTA
VOLUME VI
THE DESERT KINGDOMS



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