

# TALISLANA



Quantrigue

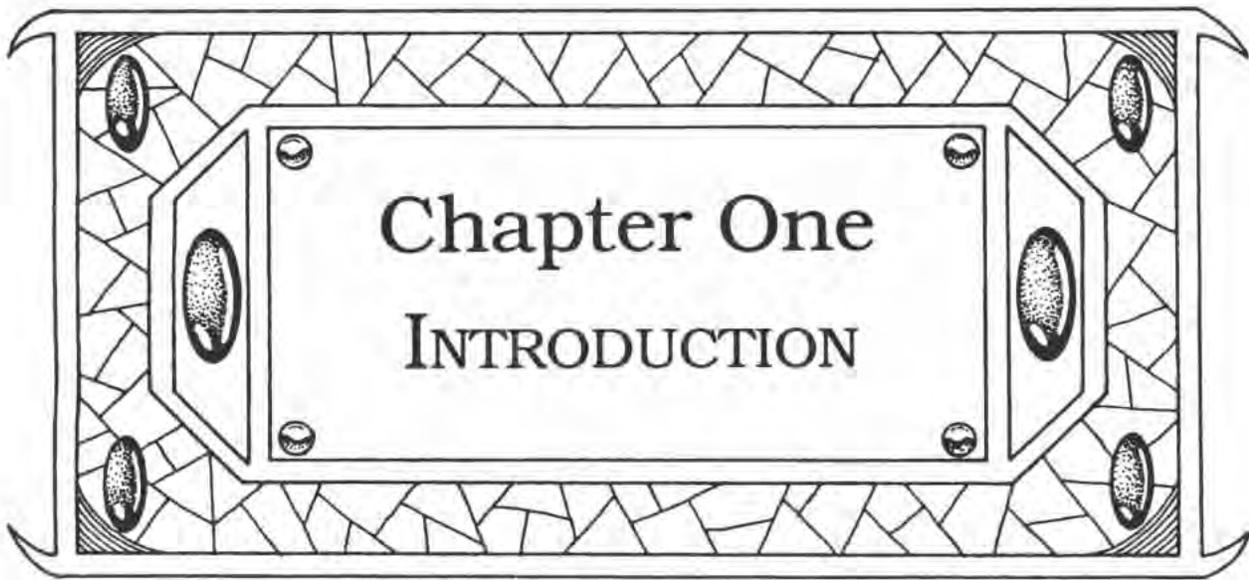
# TALISLANTA

## Quantrigue™

by Stephan Michael Sechi and Tony Herring

An adventure for **Talislanta**





# Chapter One

## INTRODUCTION

This adventure is designed for a group of three to six player characters of 4th–7th level. *Quantrigue* is written with the gamemaster in mind—those new to **Talisanta** will find plenty of tips and hints to keep the game running smoothly. To play this adventure, you need only this book and the third edition *Talisanta Guidebook*.

### GM's Information

To make things as easy as possible for you, details about the rules are presented throughout the text. These details describe how the rules apply to specific situations, enabling you to rely less on your memory of the rules and concentrate more on the action itself. Even so, you should still read this entire adventure before beginning play.

Note that certain page references throughout this book are preceded by "GB," such as "GB p. 80;" these refer to pages in the third edition *Talisanta Guidebook*. All other page references refer to pages in this book.

### Background: The Quan Empire

The Quan Empire is the largest and most powerful of the Eastern Lands of Talisanta (GB p. 23). Its territories extend from the border of Harakin in the north to the jungles of Chana in the south, the Volcanic Hills in the west, and the Far Seas in the east.

For centuries, the empire was controlled by the Quan, a people of barbaric origins who ruled through cunning and coercion. Over the course of time the Quan grew soft, becoming more and more reliant upon the subjugated races who served their every need. Their decline into decadence culminated in the Silent Insurrection of 611 N.A. when the Kang, who had previously been subjects and military protectors

of the Quan, seized the reins of power from their former masters.

The majority of the Quan population now resides in the city of Tian, formerly the capital of the empire. The Quan hierarchy has been retained as a type of puppet government, reduced in status to the level of petty bureaucrats and minor functionaries. Control of the empire is now in the hands of the Kang Warlord Rakshan and his army of followers, the Crimson Horde.

During the last decade, the Kang have taken steps to consolidate their power and extend their sphere of influence. The vast wealth of the empire has been diverted from the hands of the Quan to the Ispasians, who serve as financial advisors to the Kang. Under the direction of the Kang Warlord, the Ispasians have used these resources to build up the Kang military, to improve communications, and to rebuild the empire's infrastructure.

The effect of these adjustments has been to increase the size, strength, and efficiency of the Kang military. Evidence of the growing power of the Kang is visible throughout the empire, and elements of the Crimson Horde are currently deployed on several fronts: against the Saurans in the west, the Chana in the south, the Harakin in the north, and the Mondre Khan in the northeast.

As was the case during the rule of the Quan, the empire's borders are closed to foreigners. Technically speaking, travel permits are still available to those who can afford to pay for this privilege, but the cost is prohibitive: 1,000 gold lumens per person for a three-week visa, plus a 10% tariff on all imported goods. Also, stricter security requirements imposed by the Kang Warlord have made it even more difficult for outsiders to gain access to the empire. When the PCs in this adventure are offered the chance to join the Kang militia, they are also being offered a rare opportunity to see the Quan Empire firsthand and without the need for a travel permit.

## Campaign Style

*Quantrigue* combines elements of the five campaign styles commonly used in the **Talisanta** game: the action and adventure of a mercenary campaign, the intrigue of an epic saga, the diversity of a picaresque campaign, the chance to explore the unknown, and the opportunity to profit through mercantile endeavors. You—the gamemaster—and the players can decide for yourselves which of these elements you want to emphasize during the course of play.

- **Mercenary.** This adventure centers around a lucrative military job offer from an agent of the Kang; this makes it particularly well suited to a mercenary campaign. You should have no difficulty adding this adventure to such a campaign.
- **Epic Saga.** Events taking place near the end of this adventure provide evidence that the course of history in the Quan Empire may be moving toward another curve. If your players want to explore these events further, this scenario can be used as a perfect introduction to an epic saga set in the Eastern Lands.
- **Picaresque.** The picaresque campaign emphasizes travel and adventure over considerations of plot and overall continuity. This adventure takes your players on a tour of the mysterious Quan Empire and gives them all the excitement they can handle.
- **Explorers of the Unknown.** This adventure includes several secrets regarding the various races inhabiting the Quan Empire, about whom little is known outside of the Eastern Lands. While the scenario does not emphasize exploration per se, your players will find plenty of opportunity to expand their horizons.
- **Mercantile.** Although it may not be apparent at first, this adventure offers a unique opportunity for PCs to make valuable trade ties through their association with the Ispasians. If you are running a mercantile campaign, you might want to bring this aspect to light a little sooner.

## Experience Points

During the course of this adventure the PCs are exposed to a tremendous amount of new information, which they must assimilate at a rapid rate. The numerous demands upon the PCs' memories include a crash course in riding a strider, intensive training as a Kang mercenary cavalier, immersion into the Kang culture, a lesson in how to hunt wild striders, and exposure to the Vajra, Mandalan, and Ispasian cultures, to cite just a few. In game terms, the knowledge and skills the PCs acquire during the course of their time in the Quan Empire translate into experience points.

If desired, you can elect to award experience points to all PCs at the conclusion of each day of game time, based on such factors as good roleplaying, the extent of a PC's participation in the day's activities, the PC's use of problem-solving skills,

## Non-Player Character Format

Non-player characters are described using the following format:

### Name, Race and Profession, Level

**Languages:** The first language given is the NPC's native or preferred tongue. Note the distinction between High Talislan and Common Talislan (GB p. 110).

**Description:** The term "man" or "woman" refers to characters who belong to one of the races of Men. For non-Men, the terms "male" and "female" are used. The character's age in years is given, along with a general description if that race's life span varies considerably from earth human.

INT	PER
WIL	CHA
STR	DEX
CON	SPD

### Hit Points:

Attacks	CR (Combat Rating)	Damage
Weapon	CR for that weapon	STR bonus included

**Armor:** Type of armor and number of points of damage stopped. Any shield or other protective device is noted here also.

**Field(s) of Magic:** If any.

**Spells per Day:** If any.

Spells	MR (Magic Rating)	Effect
Favored	MR for that spell	Summary of spell effect

Note that magicians can cast all spells from their fields of study, but only the spells that are most likely to come into play are listed here.

**Skills:** Specific proficiencies, when applicable, are given in parentheses.

**Special:** Any special attacks, defenses, or weaknesses.

and so on. For an average or uneventful day, award one experience point. A maximum of two experience points should be reserved for the most active days, or for those PCs who exhibit truly exceptional initiative and roleplaying skills. It is possible not to earn any experience points on a given day, though this should only occur if a PC shows no initiative whatsoever or is forced out of action on that day due to illness or other reasons.

In total, the maximum number of experience points a PC might earn upon completion of this adventure is 40: 2 points per day for a period of 20 days. At the least, the players should earn enough experience points (25) to advance to the next level of ability.

## Mechanics

Unless stated otherwise in the text, a partial success is sufficient for any roll to be counted as successful. To add flavor to the characters' actions, you can embellish the specific results of partial and critical successes.

For simplicity, you may assume that spellcasting NPCs choose to cast their spells at levels equal to their magic ratings. This way, all you have to do is make a straight d20 roll with no modifiers.

To improvise rolls not specifically described in the text, simply choose a skill or attribute that most closely corresponds to the task at hand and have the player roll. Note that an average character with no skill at all has a 50% chance of succeeding at a task with no degree of difficulty modifier. On the other hand, a character with a skill rating of only +1 has an 80% chance of success on the same task. If you don't feel the average character has at least a 50% chance of succeeding at the action in question, assign a negative degree of difficulty modifier as a penalty on the roll.

## Running Combats

A successful combat challenges the players, forcing them to use their wits and the abilities of their characters to overcome seemingly impossible odds. Unfortunately, this text cannot anticipate the

strengths and weaknesses of your players and their characters. For this reason, the number of NPC combatants is variable. Guidelines are presented throughout the text for determining how many opponents the PCs should face, but you must make the final decision based upon how the combat is going.

If the combat is obviously going too easily for the PCs, come up with some ways to make things more challenging for them. Perhaps there are other NPCs nearby who might join in the fight against the party. You might assume the NPCs have magical or alchemical items they can use to escape or escalate the battle. Desperate NPCs might even take a hostage—an NPC bystander or even a PC—to bargain for their escape. Take advantage of the NPCs' knowledge of local terrain; perhaps they flee, only to set up a nearby ambush for pursuing PCs.

Just as a combat can be too easy, it can also become too difficult. If the PCs are about to meet an untimely demise, use your creativity to help them out. Perhaps the NPCs are willing to accept surrender rather than the deaths of the PCs. Other NPCs might also come to the party's aid, surprising their attackers. You might also use Talislanta's chaotic climate to help the PCs; a mysterious fog or black wind could suddenly blow in, providing the party a chance to escape.

## Starting the Adventure

*Quantrigue* has been designed to work well with any existing **Talislanta** campaign. The Ispasian agent who offers a proposition to the PCs at the beginning of this scenario has been sent abroad by the Kang and can appear in any city or large town west of the Quan Empire, or in the empire itself if necessary. You can determine where this adventure begins based on the PCs' location following their last adventure, allowing you to easily integrate this adventure into your ongoing campaign.

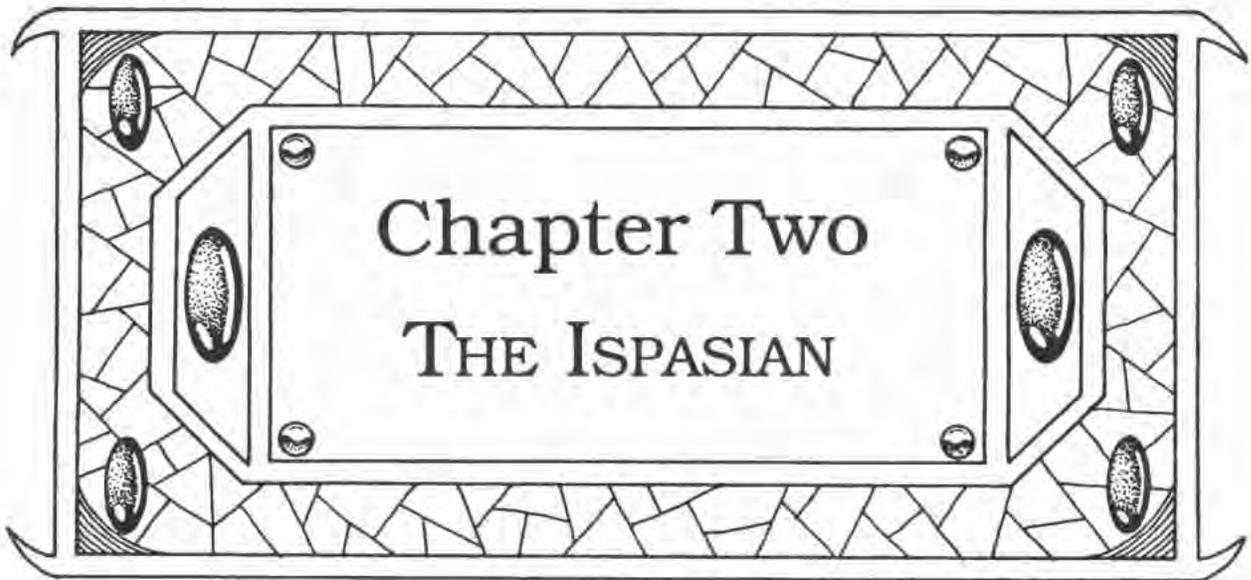
For example, if the PCs finished their last adventure somewhere in the Seven Kingdoms, they might meet up with the Ispasian in the capital city of Cymril. In the Wilderlands, the independent city-states are the most likely choices. If your PCs are in the Western Lands, the opening gambit might take place in Zanth.

If the PCs are already in the Quan Empire on other business, have them meet the Ispasian in a city, at an outpost, or anywhere on the Emperor's Road.

- **GM's Option.** If you suspect that your players cannot be enticed to work for the Kang willingly, you will likely need to modify this adventure. In this case, assume the players' reputations have brought them to the attention of a Kang "recruiter" who tricks or captures them. Eventually, they find themselves enlisted and on their way to the Quan Empire.



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1992



# Chapter Two

## THE ISPASIAN

A tall, slender humanoid dressed in an expensive-looking cloak and gown of jade green silkcloth approaches the PCs. He has the bright yellow skin, hairless pate, and expressionless features of an Ispasian. Executing a formal bow, he addresses the group in a soft voice, speaking fluent High Talislan:

*"My name is Ispal, and I bid you greetings. May I have permission to speak further in your presence?"*

- **GM's Option.** Rather than approaching the PCs as a group, Ispal may confront an individual separated from the party. Choose the character you feel is most likely to accept the Ispasian's offer, then take the player aside and roleplay the encounter with Ispal in private. If the PC accepts, preferably by signing the contract, he or she will be in a position to help you convince the rest of the party to accept as well.

If the PCs do not want to talk to the Ispasian for some reason, Ispal says:

*"Perhaps I have come at a bad time. If you prefer, I will return later and explain why it is so important that we speak."*

He then leaves the party alone, but returns a half-hour later. This same procedure occurs until the characters finally agree to speak with him; Ispal is polite, but very persistent.

When given permission to speak, the Ispasian says:

*"My superiors in the Quan Empire have sent me here for the purpose of recruiting a number of highly skilled individuals whose services they wish to retain. From my sources I have ascertained that you and your companions meet the*

*qualifications and criteria established for this position, and so I have come to offer you a proposition. With your permission, I will explain further."*

### Ispal's Offer

After he has their attention, Ispal elaborates upon his offer to the PCs. Take the time to roleplay the following dialogue and prevent it from becoming a dry monologue. Throughout the dialogue, pause to make eye contact with each of the players. Keep them interested and you'll keep them listening.

*"For the last six months the Kang military has been actively engaged in several large-scale operations, the ultimate goal of which is to ensure the security of the empire. Elements of the Crimson Horde have been deployed against the Harakin to the north, the Mondre Khan in the northeast, the Chana Witchtribes in the south, and the Saurans along the western borderlands.*

*"As I am sure you can imagine, the cost of maintaining military operations on four fronts has been prohibitive. Though the empire is easily among the wealthiest states on the Talislantan continent, its resources are not without limit. In order to meet the demand for troops and supplies, the Ispasian Council wisely advised the Kang military to cut back in other areas. The end result of this policy was to reduce the number of personnel available for the cavaliers, the mounted peacekeeping force assigned to patrol the empire's extensive system of roads. Unfortunately, with fewer cavaliers on patrol, incidents of lawlessness have become increasingly common along the Emperor's Road and in certain rural areas.*

*"The Kang Warlord has deemed this situation intolerable and has taken steps to rectify the matter. In an unprecedented move, and at the urging of the Ispasian Council, he approved plans for the establishment of a corps of mercenary cavaliers whose duty would be to supplement Kang road patrols in certain isolated corners of the empire. This is the first time foreigners have ever been allowed this kind of access to the empire. Such a situation would have been unthinkable while the corrupt Quan government was still in power; this decision reflects the new openness typical of the Kang regime.*

*"Applications are currently being accepted for openings in the mercenary cavaliers. I'm sure you will agree the pay is excellent; 100 gold lumens per day, with an equipment allotment valued at over 700 gold lumens. I can offer you free transportation to the city of Hadran plus additional monetary incentives for excellence in the line of duty. You can enlist for as little as three weeks or as long as a year, and will be allowed to serve together as a group if you so desire."*

Depending on the type of campaign you are running, Ispal offers the following additional enticements. If you and the players have not yet decided on

a campaign style, use the mercenary campaign entry; money, power, and experience are always good motivation for those who haven't chosen any specific goal.

### **Mercenary Campaign**

*"Opportunities for advancement in the mercenary cavaliers are present for those with exceptional ambition and ability. Some of our foreign recruits have gone on to become officers—in one case, a subcommander of the cavaliers. In any event, the money, training, and experience that you will receive can only enhance your future prospects."*

### **Epic Saga**

*"Though I am not at liberty to supply more specific information, I can tell you this: events of great import are currently transpiring in the Quan Empire, and as members of the mercenary cavaliers you will find yourselves at the forefront of the action."*

### **Picaresque**

*"In addition to the financial rewards and free passage to Hadran, you will be given the chance to travel across the Quan Empire and see sights the likes of which few other foreigners have ever before witnessed."*



## Explorers of the Unknown

"This offer also affords you with the rare opportunity to explore the farthest reaches of the Quan Empire, a land that has remained closed to most foreigners for centuries."

## Mercantile Campaign

"Whether you choose to remain with the mercenary cavaliers or not, the contacts you establish during your tour of duty may prove invaluable assets regarding your future plans for trade and commerce."

## In Conclusion

Regardless of the type of campaign, Ispal concludes his pitch as follows:

*"I am prepared to make an immediate payment of 100 gold lumens as a bonus to all who are willing to sign on now and accompany me to Hadran. A windship is standing by, awaiting your decision."*

If any of the PCs want to haggle about money, have them roll versus Haggle. Those without this skill must roll d10+CHA. If anyone beats Ispal's roll of d20+5, Ispal increases the bonus amount to 200 gold lumens. If the PCs lose the roll, Ispal claims he cannot offer more in the way of wages, as this is the fee established for new recruits.

If the PCs will not accept his offer, Ispal bows and says:

*"Perhaps you need some time to reconsider your decision. I will return after a while to speak with you again."*

He does so every half-hour, each time offering some small additional incentive: a bottle of expensive wine, a round of drinks, dinner, and as a last resort, an additional 25 gold lumens apiece. If the PCs still aren't interested, he regretfully informs them that this is the best he can offer and bids them goodbye. Even if this occurs, Ispal remains in the vicinity for some time. If necessary, you can have the characters see Ispal sign up another group of mercenaries, who could then be used to convince the PCs that the Ispasian is offering a good deal. If this option is needed, use the Arimite or Jaka NPCs described on page 11 for this purpose.

If the PCs accept, Ispal asks them to sign a contract specifying the amount they are to be paid and the terms of their enlistment. This document is very straightforward; it indicates that mercenary cavaliers are to be paid 100 g.l. per day with payday at the end of each week, and briefly outlines their responsibilities under the command of the Kang. There is a termination clause allowing the PCs to quit the mercenary cavaliers at the end of their tour of duty, and an option allowing them to re-enlist for up to one additional year. The contract contains no hidden or unspecified clauses.

Once the papers have been signed, Ispal congratulates the PCs and pays them their bonus

money. As soon as possible, he brings them aboard the windship and departs for Hadran.

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## Ispal, Ispasian Mercantilist, 9th Level

**Languages:** Quan +12, High Talislan +12, Common Talislan +3 (for talking with unsavory types).

**Description:** Adult male, age 32, 6'2", 170 pounds. Ispal has lemon-yellow skin, expressionless features, and a slender build. He wears an expensive cloak and gown of jade green silkcloth and a gold tiara into which has been set a fine ruby (300 g.l.). A satchel of green strider hide is slung over one shoulder. Inside is a ledger that serves as a record of his mercantile transactions and a purse containing 500 g.l.; the rest of his money is carried by his Kang bodyguards. Ispal is a typical Ispasian, showing little emotion. He regards his relationship with the PCs as a business transaction. Should they give him any trouble, Ispal does not hesitate to bring up their contract.

INT +3 PER +1  
WIL +2 CHA 0  
STR -2 DEX 0  
CON 0 SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 28

Attacks	CR	Damage
Unarmed	(d10) 0	1

**Armor:** None

**Skills:** Appraise Slaves +9, Appraise Treasure +12, Bribe +9, Diplomacy +9, Haggle +5, Linguistics +9, Litigator +9, Merchant +11.

**Special:** None

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## Ispal's Warning

Before the PCs board the windship, or before they enter Hadran if they arrive by any other means, Ispal issues the following warning:

*"Before proceeding any further, I should inform you that, in all important respects, Kang society mirrors its military hierarchy. Members of this rigid society are expected to observe the chain of command at all times and follow the orders of their superiors. Also, kindly note that it is forbidden to carry intoxicating elixirs, powders, or other illicit substances on one's person. Should such items currently be in your possession, it would be best for all concerned if you would divest yourselves of these articles at this time."*

## The Windship Crew

If the PCs began this adventure in the Quan Empire, skip this section and go directly to Chapter Three.

The windship in which the characters travel is a Cymrillian craft hired by Ispal and piloted by a crew of six Cymrillians led by Captain Cyprian. The windship has been hired to deliver Ispal and his charges to Hadran. All windships must dock there, for there is a law prohibiting foreign aerial craft from operating within the territorial boundaries of the Quan Empire.

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### Captain Cyprian, Cymrillian Warrior Mage, 6th Level

**Languages:** High Talisman +7, Archaen +7.

**Description:** Man, age 37, 6'4", 165 pounds. Light green skin and hair. Dressed in a cloak and tight-fitting coveralls of green spinifax, knee-high boots, and gloves. He is armed with a longsword and carries a purse containing 30 gold pentacles (Seven Kingdoms currency worth 5 g.l. apiece) and miscellaneous coins worth 20 gold lumens.

INT +1      PER 0  
WIL +1      CHA 0  
STR +1      DEX 0  
CON 0      SPD +1

**Hit Points:** 22

Attacks	CR	Damage
Longsword	+4	d10+1

**Armor:** None

**Field(s) of Magic:** Wizardry

**Spells per Day:** 6

Spells	MR	Effect
Arcane Barrier	5	Stops 4 pts./level
Arcane Bolt	5	Does d4 damage/level
Levitation	5	Move 100'/round (SPD 0)

**Skills:** Arcane Lore +7, Pilot (Windship) +7, Secondary Combat +4, Secondary Magic +5.

**Special:** Cymrillians possess an insatiable curiosity regarding magic; roll versus WIL to resist the temptation to examine unknown magical items or related phenomena.

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### Windship Crew, Cymrillian Warrior Mages, 3rd Level

**Languages:** High Talisman +4, Archaen +4.

**Description:** Three men and three women, ages 19-30, all between 6'-6'4" in height and 130-160 pounds in weight. All have light green skin and hair and are dressed in cloaks and tight-fitting coveralls of green spinifax, knee-high boots, and gloves. Each is armed with a longsword and carries a purse containing 14 gold pentacles (Seven Kingdoms currency worth 5 g.l.

apiece) and miscellaneous coins worth 5-10 gold lumens.

INT +1      PER 0  
WIL +1      CHA 0  
STR +1      DEX 0  
CON 0      SPD +1

**Hit Points:** 16

Attacks	CR	Damage
Longsword	+2	d10+1

**Armor:** None

**Field(s) of Magic:** Wizardry

**Spells per Day:** 4

Spells	MR	Effect
Arcane Barrier	3	Stops 4 pts./level
Arcane Bolt	3	Does d4 damage/level
Levitation	3	Move 100'/round (SPD 0)

**Skills:** Pilot (Windship) +5, Secondary Combat +2, Secondary Magic +3, Arcane Lore +3.

**Special:** Cymrillians possess an insatiable curiosity regarding magic; roll versus WIL to resist the temptation to examine unknown magical items or related phenomena.

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### Ispal's Bodyguards

Three Kang attired in ceremonial battle armor are also aboard the windship. They are members of the elite Red Dragons. These fierce-looking warriors serve as Ispal's bodyguards and have little or nothing to say to the PCs.

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### Krask, Kutorn, and Kelta, Kang Warriors, 4th Level

**Languages:** Quan +4.

**Description:** Two males and one female, all adults and about 6'4", 200-220 pounds. Leathery red skin, brutal features, white eyes without pupils, long black hair worn in queues and confined with spiked silver bands. All are dressed in full suits of ornate, red-lacquered Kang battle armor and are armed with Kang falchions (GB p. 175), twin daggers, and heavy crossbows. Each carries 500 g.l. of Ispal's money in a stiff leather belt pouch.

### Cultural Note: The Red Dragons

The Red Dragons are the elite branch of the Kang military, which is known as the Crimson Horde. Most Red Dragons begin training in the ranks of the Kang heavy cavalry, gaining recognition through their expertise in combat. A few originate from such branches of the military as the tracker, cavalier, and armored divisions, though appointments of this sort are generally quite rare.

It is not possible to apply for admittance into the Red Dragons. Instead, individuals are chosen solely on the basis of merit, with particular emphasis placed on courage in battle and combat skill. As is the case throughout Kang society, the Red Dragons do not bother to discriminate based upon gender.

According to the Kang high command, no Red Dragon division has ever retreated or surrendered

once committed to battle. For this reason, Red Dragons are accorded great respect by their countryfolk, so much that in the chain of command the Kang consider Red Dragons superior to others of equal rank. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Kang Warlord, supreme commander of the Crimson Horde, has always been chosen from the ranks of the Red Dragons.

The following are the minimum qualifications for entrance into this elite force:

- Physical Size: 6'4" or greater.
- Strength: +4 or greater.
- Primary Combat: +5 or greater.
- Kanquan: +5 or greater.
- Mounted Combat: +5 or greater.
- Command: +3 or greater.
- Weapon Proficiencies: Kang falchion, heavy crossbow, and dagger.

INT 0      PER 0  
 WIL 0      CHA 0  
 STR +4     DEX +2  
 CON +2     SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 23

Attacks	CR	Damage
Falchion	+6	d10+4
Crossbow	+6	d10
Dagger	+6	d6+4
Kanquan	+6	special (GB p. 108)

**Armor:** Kang battle armor, 5 points.

**Skills:** Command +4, Kanquan +6, Mounted Combat +6, Primary Combat +6.

**Special:** Kang are aggressive and hot-tempered. If insulted or provoked, they find it difficult to restrain themselves (roll versus WIL or challenge the offending party to a duel).

### Other Passengers (Optional)

If you wish, you may add other NPC passengers to the windship. Statistics for a pair of Arimite knife-fighters and a trio of Jaka manhunters are provided below. If you include them, assume they have also been recruited by Ispal under a contract very similar to that of the player characters.

### Telek and Yerul, Arimite Knife-Fighters, 5th Level

**Languages:** Common Talislan +5.

**Description:** Men, ages 21 and 23, 5'8" and 6'2", 155 and 170 pounds. Swarthy complexions, black hair, dark eyes, hatchetlike features. They wear fur vests, leather breeches, hide boots, and armbands and earrings of black iron. Each carries four throwing knives, a scimitar, a pouch with 100 gold lumens, and an iron flask of chakos.

INT 0      PER 0  
 WIL 0      CHA 0  
 STR +1     DEX +3  
 CON +2     SPD +1

**Hit Points:** 22

Attacks	CR	Damage
Scimitar	+6	d10+1
Thrown knife*	+8	d4+1

\*Can throw two per round with no penalty using Arimite Knife-Fighting skill.

**Armor:** Leather, 1 point.

**Skills:** Arimite Knife-Fighting +8, Hunter/Gatherer +5, Mountain Climbing +8, Mounted Combat +8, Secondary Combat +6.

**Special:** Arimites are a dour, moody folk who find no joy in song, dance, or revelry. They drink heavily, favoring chakos, a bitter, metallic-tasting liquor. Due perhaps to the reputation of the Revenant Cult, Arimites are regarded in many lands as a race of cutthroats, an assessment many other peoples consider quite accurate. Arimite knife-fighters are highly regarded as mercenaries and are considered unsurpassed in terms of skill and ferocity.

### Jailat, Jasya, and Jasaak, Jaka Manhunters, 4th Level

**Languages:** Sign +3, Common Talislan +3.

**Description:** Two females and one male, ages 15, 17, and 25, 5'8"-6', 120-180 pounds. These three look like a cross between wolf and panther with black fur and silver-gray manes. They wear vests, loincloths, and boots of tundra beast hide, luck talismans on neck thongs (50 g.l.), backpacks, pouches, and wrist bracers. Each carries a short bow with a quiver of 20 arrows, a longsword, a knife, and 20 feet of rope.

INT -1      PER +5  
 WIL 0      CHA -2  
 STR +1     DEX +3  
 CON 0      SPD +3

**Hit Points:** 18

Attacks	CR	Damage
Shortbow	+6	d8
Knife	+6	d6+1
Longsword	+6	d10+1

**Armor:** Leather, 1 point.

**Skills:** Ambush +3, Camouflage +3, Hunter/Gatherer +10, Secondary Combat +6, Set/Detect Snares +8/+10, Stalking +11, Stealth +11, Tracking (by scent) +10, Waylay +8.

**Special:** Land on feet after falls of up to 30 feet, natural stealth ability (+3 on stealth-related rolls), night vision, and sixth sense. Jaka have a superstitious dread of magic and wear primitive talismans to protect themselves from "the evil eye" (+1 on all magic resistance rolls versus curses and black magic). These items work only for their Jaka makers.

## The Windship Voyage

The party's location at the start of this adventure determines the length and specifics of the windship voyage. If you have time, you can play out the windship voyage as a separate adventure in itself. A list of optional encounters and events, none especially integral to the plot of this adventure, has been provided for your convenience. Otherwise, you may simply state that the trip was fairly uneventful and proceed directly to Chapter Three.

### Flying

If the PCs have little or no experience with windships, describe what it's like to be on a vessel of this sort as it climbs upward into the clouds: sails billowing in the breeze, timbers creaking, and the entire vessel rocking gently to and fro. This could be very frightening to those who have a fear of heights, or exciting to those who don't. Explain what the terrain looks like from a thousand feet up, adding such details as are appropriate to the surroundings.

### Rough Weather

Strong winds buffet the ship. Have the PCs roll versus CON or suffer a bout of skysickness—extreme nausea followed by vertigo, lasting for about an hour.

The Kang, who have grown accustomed to flying in recent weeks, find it amusing if any of the mercenaries become ill.

### Ravengers

A group of these pestiferous airborne scavengers get a whiff of the provisions stored aboard the windship and follow the vessel for miles, attempting to steal or scrounge bits of food. They are exceedingly persistent, fleeing if attacked but returning time and again. The most courageous may try to damage the sails and rigging with their claws or hide underneath the hull and try to pry or gnaw their way into the hold. The more obnoxious sorts rain stones, debris, and offal down upon the passengers in order to distract or frustrate them. As many as 20 ravengers could harass the ship; use as many as necessary to keep things from getting boring.

### Ravengers, 1st Level

**Description:** Winged humanoid reptiles, 6'-6'8" tall, 140-175 pounds. See GB p. 266 for more info.

INT 0 PER 0  
WIL 0 CHA 0  
STR 0 DEX 0  
CON 0 SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 10

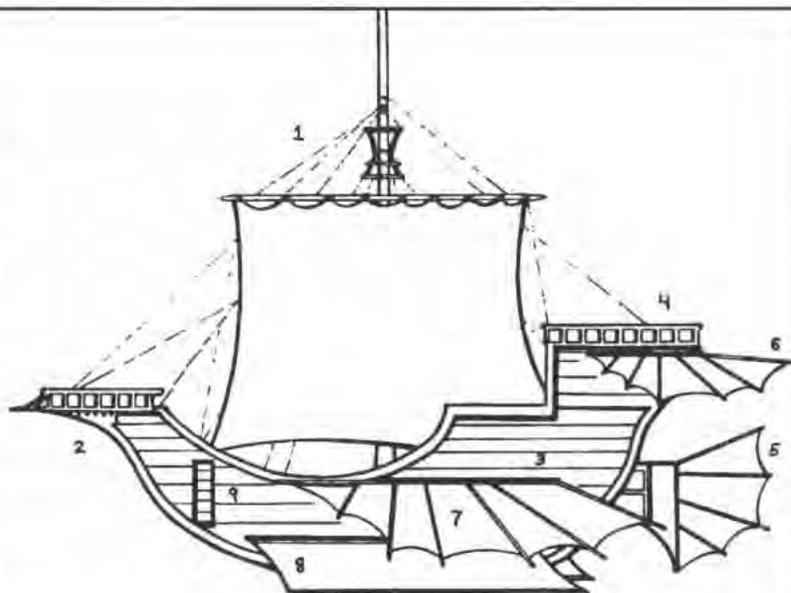
Attacks	CR	Damage
Bite	+1	d6
Claws	+1	d8

**Armor:** Hide, 1 point.

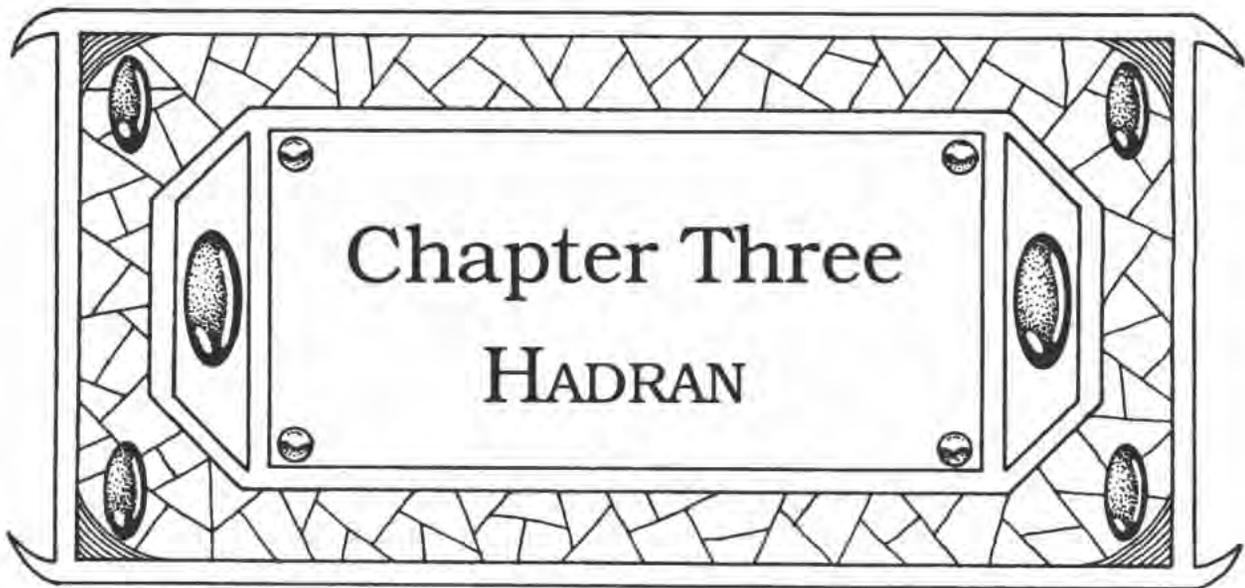
**Special:** Ability to thrive in practically any environment, heat or cold does only half damage, flight.

### Windships

The windships of the Cymrilians and the Phantasian dream merchants are wondrous crafts that sail upon the winds as sea vessels ply the waters. Necessarily constructed of lightweight materials, the ships are unfortunately somewhat fragile, and require almost constant maintenance and repair. Extreme weather conditions are a particular source of concern to windship astrogationists. Freezing rain or sleet can cause a ship to ice up, often with disastrous results; high winds can do damage to the sails or blow the vessel hopelessly off course. Lightning is perhaps the greatest hazard to these ships, which are also subject to the depredations of wind demons and other avian predators.



- 1) The ship's sails and rigging are usually made of gossamer, though spinifax is sometimes substituted.
- 2) Span-oak is preferred for the hull, mast, and other structures. The hull is lacquered to reduce drag. Windships are not particularly seaworthy; though the vessels can be landed in water in an emergency, they have a tendency to become waterlogged within just a few hours.
- 3) Windships are kept aloft by devices known as levitationals, which are installed below deck. The levitationals operate according to the principles of sympathetic magic, and are occasionally unreliable and difficult to control. Although the levitationals provide lift, windships are sail-driven craft; becalmed, a windship can only hover, and will usually drift to some extent.
- 4) In most windships, the controlling and steering mechanisms are located in the aftcastle. These include a lever to regulate altitude via the levitationals, a tiller or wheel affixed to the rudder, and numerous winch-locks used to adjust the sails. A second lever is employed to raise and lower the gangplank.
- 5) The ship's rudder has a webbed sail-fin and is of some use in steering the vessel.
- 6) The aft wing provides a measure of stability and helps keep the windship on its designated course.
- 7) The port and starboard wings provide lift on takeoff and help stabilize the ship while in flight.
- 8) The keel struts enable the windship to land on solid ground without damaging the hull. It is debatable whether the struts contribute to the ship's stability while airborne.
- 9) The gangplank is fashioned so that it fits unobtrusively into the hull. It is used for boarding and for loading cargo onto the windship.



# Chapter Three

## HADRAN

Hadran, familiarly called the Gateway to the Quan Empire, is a fortress constructed of marbled green and black stone quarried from the nearby Jade Mountains. It is the largest military installation in the Quan Empire, housing thousands of Kang troops, strider mounts, tarkuses, and support personnel. The fortress overlooks a bridge spanning a yawning chasm. The outer walls slope upward to a height of over 60 feet and are said to be able to withstand even the awesome assault of fully grown land dragons. Eighty-foot war towers plated with red iron alloy are built into the walls at intervals of 100 feet. The west gates, positioned at the eastern end of the bridge, stand 40 feet tall and are made of red iron. Those seeking access to the empire from the west must enter Hadran through these gates, which are guarded day and night by heavily armed contingents of Red Dragons.

The population of Hadran is a mix of many different racial types. Indigenous races include:

- **Ispasians:** A tall, narrowly built people with bright yellow skin and expressionless features. Since the fall of the Quan, the Ispasians have taken on a more important role in the empire. The Nazdakk, Merchant-King of the Ispasians, sits at the left hand of the Kang Warlord. He acts as his chief advisor on all issues related to trade, commerce, food distribution, tariffs, tolls, the requisition and supply of troops, and a hundred other civilian concerns. The Ispasians handle all of the Kang's financial concerns quite efficiently.
- **Kang:** A warlike folk with fierce, angular features and fiery red, leathery skin. Kang speak in harsh, guttural voices and tend to be highly aggressive and domineering by nature. They view life as an ongoing battle and have created a society modeled after the military chain of command. Kang are subservient to all individuals of higher rank than themselves, and tend to be verbally abusive and condescending when dealing with those of lower rank. Foreigners, with no rank per se, typically fall into this category unless they have earned *khir*, or honor in battle, which entitles them to a degree of respect, though not necessarily obedience (see p. 17 for an explanation of *khir*.) Due to the influence of the Kang, Shonan is now regarded as the capital of the empire.
- **Mandalans:** An unimposing folk with golden skin, almond-shaped eyes, and placid features. Under the Kang, the Mandalans continue to be virtual slaves of the empire. They are employed in a variety of positions, including scribe, artificer, farmer, laborer, servant, and gardener. Mandalans obey the commands of their Kang masters without question, never showing signs of overt emotion. Yet, although they may seem extremely passive by nature, these people possess great inner strength and force of will.
- **Quan:** A sallow-skinned race of former barbarians now grown soft and corpulent. While they ruled the empire, the Quan were known for their haughty demeanor, gluttonous appetites, and lack of morality. After their fall from power, many thousands of Quan were executed for "crimes against the empire," their corpulent bodies used as fodder for the Kang war beasts. Hundreds of others chose to commit suicide, ordering their servants to kill them. The rest were allowed to live and to retain their posts as petty bureaucrats, minor officials, and the like. All are no more than puppets of the Kang, whom they have come to fear. The great majority of Quan reside in the old capital of Tian. Once marvelous beyond description, the capital has since fallen into a sad state of disrepair and is now little more than a refuge for the deposed ruling family and their kinfolk.

### Cultural Note: Kang Greetings

Kang always salute upon meeting or leaving other Kang. If the individual saluting is of lower rank, he or she is expected to lower his or her head as a sign of respect for a superior. Civilian personnel, who have no military status and thus no rank, are expected to bow their heads before Kang of any rank. Thus, even such an influential person as the Nazdakk of Ispasia must bow his head when meeting a Kang of any rank.

- **Sunra:** An aquatic race of medium stature; the graceful forms of these beings are covered with fine, silvery scales. The Sunra are an egalitarian people who shun crass materialism in favor of cooperation and sharing. They have a great love of the sea and revere moonfish as avatars of their elemental deity. They serve the empire as sea farmers, fishermen, sailors, and navigators. Kang law expressly forbids the Sunra to sail beyond the confines of the Inland Sea unless accompanied by a contingent of armed Kang guards.
- **Vajra:** A squat, heavy-limbed race of beings whose bodies are covered with overlapping orange-brown plates. The Vajra are a humorless race of subterraneans who live in underground tunnel complexes and revere the earth goddess Terra. They are industrious folk and are employed as miners, engineers, excavators, and so forth. Vajra serve the empire only out of concern for the survival of their offspring, whom the Kang take hostage while the young are still in the hibernating stage.
- **Other Races:** Foreign peoples who may be encountered in Hadran include Orgovian traders, Djaffir merchants, Farad procurers and mongers, Bodor musicians, Thiasian performers, and the occasional mercenary or bounty hunter from the west. None of these are found in any great numbers except the Djaffir, who have done business with the empire for many years.

## Arrival

If the PCs are arriving by windship, they will notice during their descent that there are Kang artillerymen positioned on the towers with their weapons trained on the vessel. A sentinel on the wall hails the ship. Captain Cyprian identifies himself and his vessel and the windship is allowed to land. The vessel touches down in an enclosed docking area and is immediately surrounded by a platoon of Red Dragons, who escort the ship's passengers through the fortress's inner gates.

If the characters arrive by road, they will be hailed and asked for identification by the Kang before they are allowed to pass through the main gates. In both cases, they are subjected to inspection by security forces of the Red Dragons. As they approach the inspection point, Ispal tells the characters:

*"We must stop here so the guards can inspect our possessions and check for authorization. Offer no resistance and comply with all orders. The Red Dragons stationed at the gates are not known for their patience."*

The guards in charge of inspection block the entranceway. A sergeant offers a Kang salute, striking his chestplate with his right hand, fist clenched and head bowed. The Kang who have come along with the PCs return the salute and Ispal bows. The PCs are expected to bow their heads only; since they have not yet been inducted into the mercenary cavaliers, they are not considered military personnel.

The Kang conduct a thorough inspection of the characters' belongings and persons. If any contraband is found, it is confiscated at once. Ispal carries authorization for all members of the party and there is no trouble as long as the PCs comply with the guards.

## Inside the Fortress

The PCs and Ispal are escorted by a dozen Red Dragons, who lead them along a cavernous hall flanked by rows of towering stone columns decorated with images of roaring dragons. Ispal says quietly:

*"We are to appear before Subcommander Kuata for your initial briefing. Remember: you must observe respect for the chain of command at all times."*

The characters are led up a spiral stairway that winds its way to the uppermost floor of the subcommander's war tower. Passing through a pair of great red iron portals, they arrive in a circular chamber at the opposite end of which is a table of polished green jade. Seated at the table is a female Kang dressed in brilliant gold ceremonial battle armor and a crimson cloak. At her feet is a pet tarkus, a frightful creature that glowers at the PCs as they enter. A group of five military advisors stands nearby, positioned about a map of the fortress hanging on the wall. They are a severe and imposing group.

The Red Dragons who have escorted the PCs come to a halt and salute with heads bowed. Ispal again bows, and the party is expected to do so as well. The Red Dragons then take positions to either side of the door, standing stiffly at attention. Ispal takes a step forward and speaks:

*"Subcommander Kuata, I am Representative Ispal. I have brought a group of prospective applicants for the mercenary cavaliers, as per the instructions of the Kang high command. The applicants have been enlisted and are prepared for your interview."*

Kuata ignores him and addresses the PCs:

*"Who among you possesses the greatest skill in combat?"*

The characters must decide the answer to this question and choose one of their number as the group's best fighter. When they have done so, Kuata rises, removes her cloak, and goes to stand before the PCs. She motions with a mailed fist to her guards, who hand her a pair of ceremonial Kang falchions. Kuata then tosses one of the swords to the PC champion. Have the player roll versus DEX to see whether or not the character can catch the weapon. If



the weapon is dropped, all the Kang in the room except Kuata sneer and laugh under their breath.

The twelve Red Dragons then form a wide ring around the two combatants. Beating their swords against their chest plates, the warriors pound out a steady rhythm. Above the rising noise, Kuata says:

*"Defend yourself."*

She then launches a vicious attack against the PC. Have the player roll versus PER to see if the character is prepared. Unless the player rolls a critical success, give the initiative to Kuata. Her CR with this weapon is a deadly +12. However, she always strikes to subdue; all blows are delivered with the flat of her blade, causing only half actual damage. Her objective is not to kill the PC, but merely to test how he or she reacts under pressure.

If the PC is not proficient in the use of the Kang falchion, apply the standard non-proficiency penalty: the player must use a d10 instead of a d20 for all combat rolls.

If the PC takes three hits from Kuata and remains standing, the subcommander signals the Red Dragons, who stop beating their chest plates and intervene between the two combatants. The contest is over, and Kuata says:

*"You are to be commended for your ruggedness, if not your skill."*

If Kuata subdues the PC and renders him or her unconscious, she says to the guards:

*"The test is over. Remove the body from my chambers."*

If the PC manages to score one or more hits against Kuata, she may opt to use two attacks at +7 CR or three attacks at +2 CR per round, as required to achieve the desired result.

Since Kuata is wearing +3 battle armor, it is doubtful that she will sustain serious injury in this fight. In the unlikely event that this occurs, her pet tarkus jumps on the PC and drags him or her to the ground, ending the duel.

Once the tarkus has latched onto the PC, Kuata calls off her pet and says:

*"You exhibit a considerable degree of skill, for which you are to be commended."*

During the fight, if any of the other PCs try to help their comrade, Ispal warns them not to interfere. If they persist, the twelve Red Dragons and the trained tarkus all attack the PCs. Use the statistics given for Ispal's bodyguards on pages 10-11 to represent the Red Dragons. After a couple of rounds of this, Kuata calls off the battle, saying:

*"I commend you for coming to the aid of your comrade, but you must learn discipline and restraint if you are to excel as cavaliers."*

Regardless of the outcome, Kuata concludes by saying:

*"I hereby judge the applicants suitable for positions in the mercenary cavaliers. Ispal, bring them to the requisitioner and make sure they receive the proper equipment. Then take them to the southwest barracks so they can get settled."*

To the PCs, she says:

*"I congratulate you on your acceptance into the mercenary cavaliers and wish you a successful tour of duty."*

At this point, Kuata returns to her duties. The characters are now official members of the mercenary cavaliers.

Ispal seems pleased as he leads the PCs from Kuata's chambers, followed by a half-dozen Red Dragons. Depending upon how well the PC who fought Kuata did, he or she may have earned or lost a considerable amount of *khir* as a result of this last encounter. This becomes visible in the degree of respect—or lack thereof—accorded the PCs by their Red Dragon escorts.

If a PC was badly injured in the fight with Kuata, Ispal offers to take the victim to the Kang infirmary before going to the requisitioners. If not, you can skip the infirmary and proceed to page 17, "The Requisitioners."

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### Kuata, Kang Warrior, 10th Level

**Languages:** Quan +10, High Talisman +5.

**Description:** Female, age 33, 6'4", 220 pounds. Leathery red skin, brutal features, white eyes without pupils, long black hair worn in queue and confined with spiked silver bands. Kuata wears a full suit of enchanted, gold-lacquered Kang battle armor and is armed with a Kang falchion and twin daggers.

INT 0      PER 0  
WIL 0      CHA 0  
STR +4     DEX +2  
CON +2     SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 35

Attacks	CR	Damage
Falchion	+12	d10+4
Dagger	+12	d6+4
Kanquan	+12	special (GB p. 108)

**Armor:** +3 Kang battle armor, 8 points.

**Skills:** Command +10, Kanquan +12, Mounted Combat +12, Primary Combat +12.

**Special:** Kang are aggressive and hot-tempered. If insulted or provoked, Kang find it difficult to restrain themselves; roll versus WIL or challenge the offending party to a duel.

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### Kirjin, Tarkus, 5th Level

**Languages:** None, though it obeys Kuata's simple commands.

**Description:** A tarkus is a terrible quadrupedal

carnivore 7'-8' in length and weighing 450-500 pounds. Its body resembles a cross between mangonel lizard, raknid, and tundraeast. Overlapping plates of bone protect the head, neck, and upper torso, and a thick coat of fur covers the tarkus's limbs and underside. See GB p. 257 for more details.

INT -6      PER +6  
WIL +4      CHA 0  
STR +6      DEX 0  
CON 0      SPD +6

**Hit Points:** 30

Attacks	CR	Damage
Bite	+5	d8
Claws	+5	d8

**Armor:** Exoskeletal plates, 5 points; limbs and underside, 1 point.

**Special:** Track prey by scent, night vision, can run as swiftly as a graymane for distances of up to one mile.

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## The Kang Infirmary

The infirmary is a dreary facility located on a subterranean level of the fortress. The stone-walled chamber is furnished with a number of wooden cots and illuminated by racks of iron lanterns. Here, the Kang chirurgeons practice their art, such as it is. Their attitude reflects the Kang's cultural inability to admit to weakness of any sort. Accordingly, it is the duty of the chirurgeons to get the injured back to active duty as soon as possible, no matter what. To this end, broken bones are set and bound in place with iron straps, deep lacerations are sewn shut with strider gut, damaged limbs are amputated and replaced with crude iron prosthetics, and so forth. The repairs, though generally functional, are never completed with any attention to aesthetics. As a result, badly scarred or disfigured Kang are quite common throughout the empire.

### Treatment by Kang Chirurgeon

Roll versus Healer (d20+skill)

Degree of Difficulty: -1 per negative hit point of the patient; a PC with -5 hit points means the chirurgeon rolls with a -5 penalty.

Mishap	Patient dies.*
Failure	Patient suffers additional d8 damage.
Partial Success	25% of lost hit points restored with permanent, disfiguring scars.
Full Success	50% of lost hit points restored with slightly disfiguring scars.
Critical Success	75% of lost hit points restored with no scarring.

\*The Kang blame the death not on the chirurgeon's incompetence, but on the deceased PC's weakness.

### Cultural Note: *Khír*

Of great importance to all Kang is the concept of earning *khír*, a term meaning "honor in battle." *Khír* may be earned for any act of valor, from defeating an opponent to exhibiting courage in the face of overwhelming odds. It is possible to earn *khír* in a losing cause, but only if the individual is able to retain his or her honor. *Khír* entitles the possessor to a degree of respect, though not necessarily obedience. Kang who lose *khír* are usually demoted in rank and must prove their courage in order to regain lost status. The concept of *khír* has no relevance to the empire's other indigenous races.

To make this adventure more interesting, you may wish to keep track of how much *khír* the PCs are able to earn or lose over the course of their time spent among the Kang. The following two tables provide an idea of how you can do this. The first table indicates the amount of points of *khír* earned or lost as a result of various actions.

**Table 1: Earning and Losing *Khír***

Action	<i>Khír</i>
Defeated in combat by an equal:	-5
Defeated in combat by an inferior:	-10
Cowardice in battle:	-20
Retreat or surrender in battle:	-50
Victory over a lesser opponent*:	+5
Victory over an equal opponent:	+10
Victory over a superior opponent:	+20
Victory over overwhelming odds:	+50-100
Sacrificing one's life in battle:**	+200

\*Note that the term "opponent" may mean any obstacle the individual is required to overcome in life.  
\*\*Awarded posthumously.

The second table illustrates how the Kang regard individuals based on the amount of *khír* they have earned.

Keep in mind that the point system for *khír* is just a device used to express a somewhat abstract concept; Kang do not refer to *khír* in terms of points. Also note that there is a maximum *khír* rating for non-Kang, and that it is more difficult for Kang to gain acknowledgment than it is for non-Kang. The former stricture reflects the generally low regard in which Kang hold all other races. The latter reflects the high expectations required of Kang in the aggressive, competitive society in which they live.

**Table 2: *Khír* Totals as Viewed by Kang**

Total Points	Status among Kang*
-50 or lower	Outcast, pariah, shunned by the Kang
-20-49	Coward; may redeem self through individual combat
-1-19	Disgraced; can redeem self by valorous actions
0	Non-combatant, foreigner, low-class Kang
+5	Trained but untested Kang warrior or promising foreigner
+10-20	Promising Kang warrior, respected foreigner
+21-49	Respected Kang warrior, valorous foreigner
+50-99	Valorous Kang warrior, heroic foreigner (maximum for non-Kang)
+100-199	Kang hero
+200-300	Dead Kang hero or living legend
+300 or more	Mythic hero (living or dead)

\*In the eyes of the Kang only, each +/-25 points of *khír* can be considered equivalent to a +1/-1 bonus or penalty to the individual's CHA. Bonuses and penalties of this sort are temporary and should not be added to a character's permanent stats.

If a PC is attended to by a Kang churgeon, roll versus the churgeon's Healer skill on the table on the previous page to determine the result of the treatment.

### Kudun, Kang Warrior (Chirurgeon), 7th Level

**Languages:** Quan +7.

**Description:** Male, age 53, 6'3", 200 pounds. Leathery red skin, brutal features, white eyes without pupils, long black hair worn in queue and confined with spiked silver bands. Kudun wears leather and partial plate armor, knee-high boots, iron bracers, and a red cloak. A pair of intertwined dragons done in *kanjiko* (see p. 19) is visible on his right forearm.

INT 0	PER 0
WIL 0	CHA 0
STR +4	DEX +2
CON +2	SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 29

Attacks	CR	Damage
Broadsword	+9	d10+4
Dagger	+9	d6+4
Kanquan	+9	special (GB p. 108)

**Armor:** Leather and partial plate, 3 points.

**Skills:** Command +7, Healer +3, Kanquan +9, Mounted Combat +9, Primary Combat +9.

**Special:** Kang are aggressive and hot-tempered. If insulted or provoked, Kang find it difficult to restrain themselves; roll versus WIL or challenge the offending party to a duel.

## The Requisitioners

The requisitioners' quarters are located in a separate building adjacent to a large consulate surrounded by a stone wall. The consulate is a place reserved for use by the Ispasians who work at Hadran. The requisitioners' quarters is a large, well-maintained warehouse complex fully stocked with all sorts of arms, equipment, and supplies, all stored and catalogued in orderly fashion. The Ispasians own and oversee these facilities, though most of the day-to-day operations and menial work are carried out by Mandalan underlings.

Soon after their arrival, the PCs are outfitted with gloves, boots, vests, and breeches of black strider hide. They also receive scarlet cloaks and red iron armbands stamped with the seal of the mercenary cavaliers, a warrior mounted on a rearing strider. In addition they are given heavy crossbows, sheaths of 12 quarrels, boot daggers, longswords with scabbards, bedrolls, backpacks, tinderboxes, 20 feet of rope each, lanterns, and one flask each of lamp oil.

Ispal then shows them to the southwest barracks, where they will be staying while in Hadran; both male and female party members are escorted to the same large room. The accommodations are spartan: wooden bunks, a chamberpot, and hooks on the wall for their cloaks and bags.

Ispal tells the characters:

*"To celebrate your good fortune, you and the other new recruits will be treated to a traditional Kang feast this evening. I have some business to attend to and will be staying at the consulate along with the other Ispasians. However, I shall return to get you in an hour."*

This said, Ispal takes his leave of the PCs and heads for the Ispasian consulate. The PCs are instructed to get into uniform, after which they may spend time resting, talking about the day's events, or whatever else they choose to do.

After about twenty minutes, some of the other new recruits arrive at the barracks. Use the stats for the Arimites and Jaka on page 11 for the first two groups. A third group, a bunch of swarthy-skinned warriors in desert attire, is the last to arrive. These individuals, who are Vird deserters from the Rajan army, are clearly not the type for socializing. Spitting on the floor, they look sidewise at the PCs and mutter obnoxious remarks under their breath, cursing them in the Rajanin tongue.

Any of the PCs who speak Rajanin hear:



*"Vir-Shan, have you ever seen such ugly creatures? This one smells like an ahtra's rump, and has a face to match!"*

Vir-Shan, the leader of the Virds, concurs. If the PCs do not understand Rajanin, he translates for them in Common Talislan:

*"My friend says he has never seen such ugly creatures as you."*

The Virds are in a foul mood and spoiling for a fight. If they succeed in goading the PCs into a brawl, it is broken up in a round or two by the Arimite and Jaka recruits, who say:

*"The guards are coming. Stop your fighting, or we will all be disciplined!"*

Six Kang guards arrive on the scene a moment later. With them are Ispal and three other Ispasian representatives. The other mercenaries snap to it and salute with heads bowed. Anyone who doesn't gets a quick cuff on the side of the head with a mailed fist. The PCs are in the military now, and they had better get used to it. Each Ispasian leads a group of recruits to the dining hall for the feast.

#### **Vird Infantrymen, 4th Level**

**Languages:** Rajanin +3, Common Talislan +1.

**Description:** There are as many Vird warriors as there are PCs. All male, 5'-6', 90-160 pounds. Dusky black skin, sparse black hair, deep-seated eyes, clawed hands and feet. They wear standard mercenary cavalier issue: gloves, boots, vests, and breeches of black strider hide, as well as scarlet cloaks and red iron armbands stamped with the seal of the mercenary cavaliers. In addition, they have retained their Vird armor and shields of land lizard hide, veiled turbans, and scimitars. Each is also armed with a heavy crossbow, a sheath of 12 quarrels, a boot dagger, and a longsword with scabbard. Each is equipped with a bedroll, backpack, tinderbox, 20 feet of rope, a lantern, a flask of lamp oil, and a leather pouch with 30 g.l. in mixed coins.

INT -1	PER +2
WIL 0	CHA -2
STR 0	DEX 0
CON 0	SPD 0

**Hit Points: 18**

Attacks	CR	Damage
Longsword	+3	d10
Scimitar	+3	d10
Dagger	+3	d6
Crossbow	+3	d10

**Armor:** Leather and hide shield, 1 point.

**Skills:** Secondary Combat +3, Swipe +4, Waylay +4, Stealth +4.

**Special:** The Virds prefer to attack opponents by surprise using the skill Waylay rather than engaging in a fair fight.

## The Feast

The dining hall is a vast, square chamber measuring over 600 feet on a side and is supported by pillars 40 feet tall. Flaming iron braziers hang by chains from the ceiling, illuminating the smoky interior. Thousands of troops are on hand, attired in costumes derived from the traditional Kang military gear: spiked iron collars and bracers, leather or mailed gloves, chainmail vests, leather breeches, cloaks, and iron-shod strider-hide boots with spiked or bladed

spurs. As is usually the case with the Kang, they exhibit the aggressive and rather belligerent behavior that passes for good fellowship among members of this race.

Tonight, a traditional Kang feast is to be offered; the main course consists of an entire land dragon carved into quarters and roasted over the four great fire pits located at the center of the chamber. For refreshment, iron flagons of blood-red arrack, a potent, bitter liquor favored by the Kang, are served in conjunction with the meal.

### Cultural Notes: Kang Society

#### *Kang Religion*

All Kang revere Zorlah, the Red God of War, who is most often pictured as a giant male warrior with fiery red skin, a long queue adorned with spiked silver rings, a rich suit of silver ceremonial battle armor, a great sword, and a pair of crossed daggers at his belt. He is sometimes shown riding a gigantic armored strider. Kang pray to Zorlah for courage, strength, and victory; in return, they donate a tithe of their pay to the war god's temple as an offering.

The worship of Zorlah entails few formal rituals; there are no regular services to attend, for Kang are usually too busy fighting or training to engage in such activities. Kang rarely visit the war god's temple except to have their newborn children subjected to the ritual baptism by fire, and to attend funeral services for great war heroes. Warrior priests of Zorlah may be found in all Kang fortresses and outposts and always accompany large armies into battle.

#### *Aggression in Kang Society*

Kang culture reflects the harsh military training that has formed the basis of Kang upbringing since ancient times. The males and females are equally aggressive, competing for dominant status among those of equal rank by blustering and physical intimidation. When carousing among equals, it is not uncommon for Kang to curse at each other in guttural voices, shove each other roughly, or even clout a friend on the side of the head. Kang may openly harass those of lower rank, but never show disrespect for individuals of higher rank unless issuing a blood challenge.

#### *The Queue*

The length and adornment of a Kang's queue—a sort of braided ponytail—is a mark of pride. For festive occasions, the queue may be bound with silver bands or jeweled rings. In battle, iron rings or leather thongs usually suffice. Kang never wear their hair down or unbound except to bathe. Losing one's queue in battle is considered a terrible disgrace. The victim knows no rest until he or she gains revenge for this evil act by killing the perpetrator and recovering the lost queue, if possible.

Kang who have been found guilty of serious offenses are commonly stripped of their queues prior to execution, bringing disgrace upon them and their clans.

#### *Kanjiko*

Kang often decorate their bodies with *kanjiko*, an intricate form of body scarring first practiced by their early ancestors. *Kanjiko* is created by carving a design into the wearer's bicep, forehead, or shoulder, then rubbing a black pigment into the wound. The procedure leaves a dark, raised scar, which the Kang consider a mark of distinction. Popular designs include crested dragons, military insignia, and family sigils.

#### *The Kang Sword Dance*

A popular feature of all Kang feasts is the traditional Kang sword dance, which may be performed by a group of as many as a hundred warriors at a time. The group separates into two "armies," which then charge each other with blades drawn. The first group slashes at its opponents. Those in the second group leap over the slashing blades, sailing past their attackers. Landing on their feet, they spin about and launch a counterattack. The defenders duck low under their blades, then counter again. The dance continues in this manner until the performers collapse with exhaustion.

Despite the considerable precision and split-second timing displayed by the dancing warriors, casualties are not uncommon. This is due primarily to the drunken state of the revelers rather than to any overt malice on the part of the performers.

#### *Kang Courtship Rituals*

As is the case with most aspects of Kang society, Kang courtship rituals tend to be aggressive and violent. Both males and females typically show interest in prospective mates by grabbing a desirable mate's queue and pulling, attempting to bend his or her head back into position for a rough kiss. If the recipient is interested, he or she offers resistance, attempting to grab the other's queue and pull his or her head back first. If not, the unwilling prospect shoves the suitor away. Kang prize aggressiveness in their mates above all other considerations.

Over a hundred Mandalan servants are also on hand. They are responsible for cooking and serving the food but are not allowed to speak to the troops, including the PCs.

After the PCs have seated themselves and are waiting to be served, have Ispal explain to them some of the details of Kang culture.

The feast entails much drinking and carousing late into the night. The following are several suggestions for activities that could take place during this time.

### Dedication

Before the meal is served, there is a dedication by Kroshuk, High Warrior Priest of Hadran. Wearing his best armored ceremonial vestments, he stands before the assemblage and commands everyone to rise and

draw their weapons. They do, and the PCs should as well. Kroshuk then recites the following short invocation:

*"Zoriah, Red God of War, we dedicate this great feast in your honor. Grant us courage in the face of danger, strength in battle, and victory over all who oppose us. We, your loyal soldiers and followers, ask this in your name."*

The Kang shout in reply:

*"Zoriah!"*

### Dragon Fire

Once the dragon has been roasted over the flames, the meat is cut into foot-long slabs. It is then doused



with red arrack, set alight, and served on flaming trays. When the PCs try to eat the flaming dragon meat, have them roll versus DEX. Failure means their gloves catch on fire, much to the amusement of the Kang.

### A Toast

During the early part of the meal, individual Kang troopers approach the PCs' table from time to time. In each case, the drunken Kang stops to stand before the new recruits and look them over. After a second or two, the trooper raises his or her flagon and says:

*"To the new recruits! May you die a valorous death!"*

Ispal explains:

*"The toast is something of a double-edged sword, and displays the typical Kang sense of humor, such as it is. The meaning is twofold. While the Kang hope you will prove brave, they don't think you will last for long. Thus, the best that can be expected of you is death with honor."*

Ispal then tells the PCs that they are expected to drain their flagons along with the Kang who proposed the toast. Each time they do, you should secretly roll versus their CON ratings to see if any of them are getting drunk.



## The Sword Dance

After the meal, a group of over eighty Kang warriors engage in the traditional Kang sword dance (see p. 19). As they take their places, a pair of Kang females grab hold of a random PC and drag him or her out onto the floor. Each time the two "armies" clash, have the player attempt a DEX roll, using a d10 unless the PC is proficient in Dance (Kang sword dance). Failure means the PC is hurt and suffers d8 points of damage, or accidentally injures a Kang dancer (GM's choice). The PC is then out of the performance. If the PC survives three passes without failing a DEX roll, he or she is given a rousing cheer and accorded a measure of *khir* (5 points, if you're keeping track).

## Fire Jumping

When the dragon's remains have been carted off, many of the drunken Kang warriors test their mettle by jumping over the fire pit. A drunken Kang orders two or more of the PCs to join him. The players must roll versus DEX, or another appropriate skill or special ability, with a -5 degree of difficulty penalty. Characters who fail fall into the hot grease and embers in the pit, suffering d10 points of damage each round for 1-2 rounds until the surrounding Kang haul them out. PCs who manage a partial success fall to cross the pit, but catch the opposite wall and may roll versus STR to pull themselves out. After a successful leap the PCs are allowed to return to their table, with the added benefit of a modest increase of *khir* (5 points).



## Romance

A Kang warrior of the appropriate gender makes a pass at one of the PCs, preferably one who has long hair. The player must attempt a STR roll if the PC decides to engage in the usual courtship ritual (see p. 19). If the character fails to properly indicate either interest or disinterest, the Kang may decide to start a fistfight instead.

## Basic Training

Early the next morning, the PCs are roused from their sleep by the barracks sergeant, a belligerent Kang named Kran. If they passed out at the feast, they'll find that they have been dragged back to the barracks and left on the floor beside their bunks. If they made it back to the barracks, assume they're in their beds. Either way, they awaken to a cold bucket of water flung in their faces by one of Kran's troops.

The PCs are likely hung over and tired. Kran does not care. He orders the recruits out of bed and ushers them out to the training field without delay.

The first thing on the agenda is a lesson in the basics of riding a strider. The PCs are taken to a pen made of sharpened wooden stakes that contains several large hill striders. Kran provides the following instructions:

*"Pay close attention: I will state the instructions once, and once only. To ride a strider, you must possess both skill and strength. Grab hold of the reins as I do [he demonstrates] and pull yourself up into the saddle. Kick the beast with both heels to go straight, or with one foot to turn in the desired direction. To stop, pull back hard on the reins. Now, who will be the first to try?"*

The PCs must mount their striders, then ride them at a trot and a gallop. For each of these tasks, have them roll once on the following table.

### Training to Ride Striders

Roll versus DEX, using d10 if not proficient at Ride (strider)  
Degree of Difficulty: -1 when trotting; -3 when galloping

Mishap	Strider throws rider; d10 damage.
Failure	Strider throws rider; d6 damage.
Any Success	Strider is mounted and ridden without incident.

This period of concentrated training and instruction lasts for the entire day. At day's end, have each player deduct 5 experience points, for they have spent them to develop a rudimentary ability (DEX+0) in the skill Ride (strider), which they may add to their character sheets. From now on, allow the players to

roll a d20 when their characters use this skill. PCs who do not have 5 experience points to spend should be allowed to take negative experience points. This is the only time you should do this; never allow your players to willingly spend experience points their characters don't have.

Note that Ride is not a combat skill. Even if the PCs learn this talent, they must roll a d10 to use this skill in any combat situation, unless they also have Mounted Combat (GB p. 108).

If any of the PCs are already proficient in strider riding, they do not have to spend any experience points and gain no benefits from the day's training. Rather, Kran requires them to help instruct those of lesser ability for the remainder of the day.

### Kran, Kang Warrior, 5th Level

**Languages:** Quan +5, Common Talislan +1.

**Description:** Male, age 37, 6'3", 200 pounds. Leathery red skin, brutal features, white eyes without pupils, long black hair worn in queue and confined with spiked silver bands. Kran is dressed in leather armor and armed with a broadsword and twin daggers. He has a *kanjiko* slogan emblazoned on his right shoulder that says "Death Before Surrender."

INT 0	PER 0
WIL 0	CHA 0
STR +4	DEX +2
CON +2	SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 25

Attacks	CR	Damage
Broadsword	+7	d10+4
Dagger	+7	d6+4
Kanquan	+7	special (GB p. 108)

**Armor:** Leather, 1 point.

**Skills:** Command +5, Kanquan +7, Mounted Combat +7, Primary Combat +7.

**Special:** Kang are aggressive and hot-tempered. If insulted or provoked, Kang find it difficult to restrain themselves; roll versus WIL or challenge the offending party to a duel.

### Striders, 3rd Level

**Description:** Striders are bipedal predators resembling a cross between reptile and flightless bird. They stand 7'-8' tall and weigh from 750-850 pounds. For more details see GB p. 257.

INT -7	PER +2
WIL 0	CHA -10
STR +6	DEX 0
CON 0	SPD +6

**Hit Points:** 22

Attacks	CR	Damage
Bite	+3	d4
Talons	+3	d8
Tail*	+3	d4

\*Can be used to grasp prey.

**Armor:** Thick hide, 1 point.

**Special:** None.

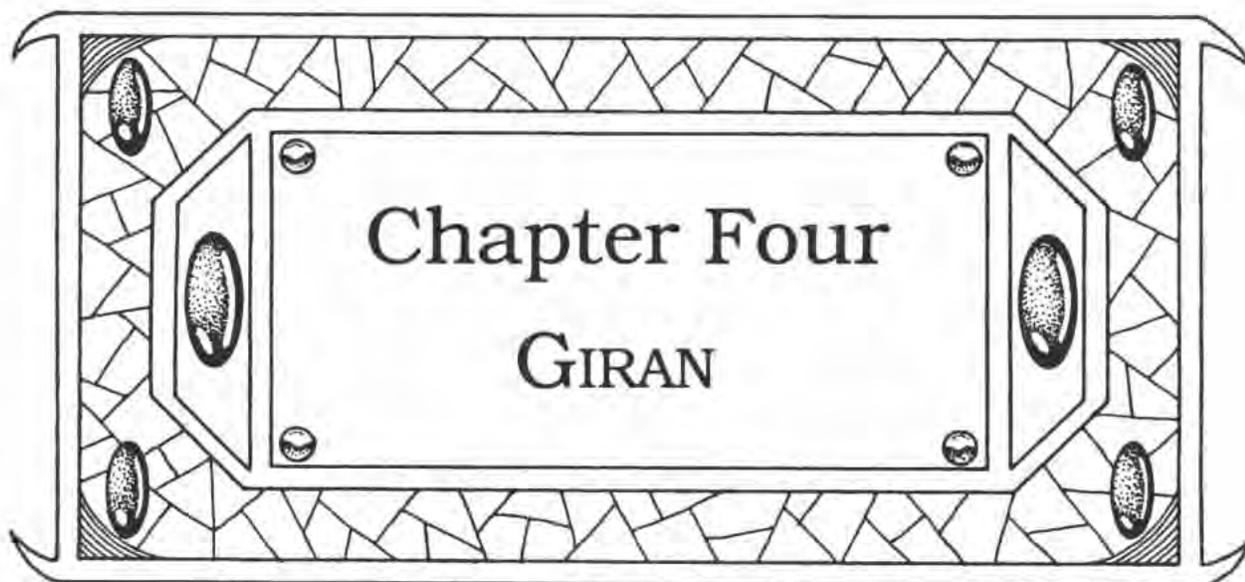
## The Briefing

At the end of the day, the PCs are served a meal of cold land lizard, black bread, and ale. They then spend the evening in a briefing session, during which Kran instructs them in the basic responsibilities of a mercenary cavalier. These are summarized as follows:

- Checking merchant caravans for official documentation. Foreign merchants must be carrying an official lead seal issued by the government.
- Inspecting cargo for contraband. The mercenary cavaliers are expected to thoroughly inspect all parcels, baggage, and containers carried by individuals or conveyances. Stolen Kang military issue, written materials opposed to Kang rule, and illicit drugs are the primary types of contraband the Kang are looking for.
- Stopping travelers for questioning. All non-Kang must be interrogated about their reasons for being on the road, regardless of the time and place where they are encountered.
- Proper respect for Kang. Mercenary cavaliers may not stop Kang units or individuals for any reason and must recognize all Kang as their superiors, according them the respect due individuals of higher rank.

Following the briefing, the characters are sent to their barracks to get some sleep. They are told to be up at the crack of dawn in order to begin the long journey to Ku-Chang, where they are to be stationed for their tour of duty.





As Kran indicated, the characters are roused from their bunks at dawn. After a quick meal of bread and erd milk, they are sent on their way to Ku-Chang along with the ever-present Ispal. Passing through the city gates, the group follows the Emperor's Road northeast toward their next scheduled stop, the new Kang outpost of Giran.

## On the Road to Giran

The initial leg of the journey is relatively uneventful. This section of the Emperor's Road is heavily patrolled by units of Kang cavaliers, and there is a considerable amount of traffic from Hadran to Shonan and back. It is two days of hard riding to get to the outpost of Giran. Some of the sights that may be seen along the way include the following:

### The Steppes of Kangir

On the way to Giran, the PCs pass through the rocky hills and plateaus of Kangir, which lies to the south of the Graylands. Ispal says:

*"The steppes are the ancestral homeland and traditional hunting grounds of the Kang, whose tribes ranged throughout the area prior to their absorption by the Quan Empire. Kang warriors still come here at times to visit the lands of their ancestors and to hunt wild tarkus, strider, and megalodont. Thankfully, there are few wild beasts in the territories through which the Emperor's Road passes due to the almost constant presence of Kang road patrols."*

### Merchant Caravan

A Djaffir merchant caravan bearing a cargo of Mandalan silkcloth for export to the west approaches

the PCs. The merchants ride and carry their belongings heaped upon the humped backs of ahtra, quadrupedal beasts similar in some respects to equus but with heavier torsos, longer legs, spiraling horns, and serpentine tails (see GB p. 252). Ispal says:

*"Certain of the Djaffir merchant tribes have done business with the empire for many years and have developed a good relationship with my people. They import goods from the Seven Kingdoms and even as far away as the Western Lands. Sheik Dhawi Ravar's tribe is the most prosperous of the clans, for the Sheik has a long-standing relationship with none other than the Nazdakk of Ispasia himself."*

### Military Convoy

A Kang military convoy heads toward the PCs from the northeast. The group is comprised of 30 large military drays—armored wagons drawn by teams of armored land lizards—and an escort of 60 Kang troops mounted on striders. Says Ispal:

*"The convoy carries supplies, mainly provisions from the rich groves and farmlands around the eastern city of Jacinth, through Shonan to Hadran. Unless I am mistaken, large convoys of this sort are fairly common here in the central regions but less so farther to the south and north. The logistics of keeping such a vast army fed and clothed could only be handled by the Ispasians. But hold a moment; the convoy has the right of way, and we must get off the road in order to let them pass."*

### Road Barracks

Toward sunset, the party comes upon a Kang road barracks, a military compound used by Kang troops as they travel along the Emperor's Road.

The installation is composed of a half-dozen stables for striders and other mounts and a dozen large barracks for the troops. Ispal says:

*"We will stop here for the evening. I will stay at a nearby consulate with other Ispasians. As for yourselves, find a bunk and get some rest. The facilities leave something to be desired, I am afraid, but it is better than sleeping out in the open."*

As members of the mercenary cavaliers, the PCs are ignored for the most part by the Kang regulars who are stationed here for the night. Dinner is a hunk of cold land lizard meat, a piece of black bread, and water; no alcohol is allowed in the barracks. If the PCs actively look for someone to talk to, tell them that these Kang are warriors from the Gray Hills region and are not inclined to speak with foreigners. If the PCs can speak Quan and try to listen to what the Kang are talking about, they may hear snatches of conversation:

*"Just returned from the Volcanic Hills . . . our armored divisions aren't worth much in such terrain . . . lava flows are everywhere, and the air stinks of poisonous fumes . . . Commander Kaijin's unit reported over two hundred kills last week, but the Saurans keep fighting . . . even worse in the south . . . cursed Witchmen are like serpents . . . we should burn down the jungles; that'll flush them out . . . guess they're having trouble in the north . . . the Mondre Khan are no better than animals . . . breed like vermin . . . kill them all now, that's what I say."*

### Peasants

The next day, the party encounters a family of poor Mandalan peasants on the road. These placid folk are dressed in simple smocks and sandals and carry all of their meager belongings in a rickety wagon drawn by a squat old durge, a six-legged burden beast. Ispal comments:

*"You will find that it is not uncommon to see families of Mandalan peasants traveling along the Emperor's Road. Most are peasants or servants traveling to and from their homes. Some of them are refugees who have been displaced from their villages so that new outposts and fortifications can be constructed in these areas. Ispasian mercantilists have provided the financing for these ventures as a service to the Kang."*

If criticized for helping carry out a policy that drives helpless peasants from their homes, Ispal replies: *"It is not personal. It is simply business."* This, as the PCs will learn, is the Ispasian credo.

### Armored Division

The party must make way for a Kang armored division of 20 Kang war dragons (armored siege

engines), 10 military drays, 40 Kang war chariots, and 100 heavy strider cavalry. The convoy is headed south in the direction of Hadran. Says Ispal:

*"Observe: Here comes one of the new Kang armored divisions. This unit is probably bound for the southern Volcanic Hills, where the campaign against the Saurans continues unabated. I am told that the operation is proceeding according to the best estimates of the Kang military, and that an early victory is expected."*

If the PCs overheard the Kang talking in the barracks the previous night and mention what they heard to Ispal, he says:

*"Yes, I have heard rumors of this sort before. No doubt we shall all learn more when we arrive at Ku-Chang."*

### Arrival at Giran

On the evening of the second day, the characters arrive at the outpost of Giran. This walled fortification is just a few months old, only recently completed by Vajra engineers. The outpost, staffed by a division of 100 Kang infantry and support personnel, is used as a stopover point for couriers and Kang cavaliers. There are no mercenary cavaliers stationed here. When the PCs arrive, they are told to report to the outpost's commander, Kiyen. Ispal accompanies them, as usual, along with an escort of four Kang guards.

Kiyen's chambers are located in the uppermost floor of the outpost's single war tower. The room is devoid of ornamentation, and contains only a wooden desk, three rattan chairs, and a wall map showing the outpost and surrounding territories. A window on the wall opposite the door overlooks the Steppes of Kangir.

Kiyen is a female Kang nearly as imposing as Subcommander Kuata of Hadran. A former member of the cavaliers, she is more cordial to mercenary cavaliers than the vast majority of her kindred. When the PCs arrive at her door she says:

*"Enter and stand at ease, I am Commander Kiyen. What is the news from Hadran?"*

Kiyen listens to any news the PCs may have from Hadran or the road, but has no interest in small talk. Like most Kang, she is abrupt and to the point. When the news has been reported, she says:

*"I invite you to take part in one of our traditional pastimes—an expedition to the Steppes of Kangir, where we shall hunt wild strider. Go eat and sleep. We leave at dawn."*

At this, the four Kang guards escort the PCs from the room. They are provided a meal of durge stew and wooden mugs of the local Mandalan ale. They are then ordered to go to the visitors' barracks. Foreigners are not allowed to wander about the outpost after curfew.

If Ispal is asked about the strider hunt, he says:

*"It is a quaint old tradition observed by the ancestors of the Kang. I am told that it is quite invigorating. Unfortunately, I will not be in attendance tomorrow. I go now to discuss business dealings with the local Ispasian mercantilists at the local consulate, and will in all likelihood work late into the night. Enjoy your day of sport, and I will catch up to you later tomorrow."*

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### Kiyen, Kang Warrior, 7th Level

**Languages:** Quan +7, High Talisman +1.

**Description:** Female, age 26, 6'2", 180 pounds. Leathery red skin, brutal features, white eyes without pupils, long black hair worn in queue and confined with spiked silver bands. She is dressed in ornate Kang battle armor and is armed with a Kang falchion, twin daggers, and a light crossbow. She wears a *kanjiko* dragon inscribed upon her forehead and is missing one eye, the result of a Witchfolk blowgun dart.

INT 0            PER -1  
WIL 0            CHA 0  
STR +4           DEX +2  
CON +2           SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 29

Attacks	CR	Damage
Falchion	+9	d10+4
Crossbow	+9	d8
Dagger	+9	d6+4
Kanquan	+9	special (GB p. 108)

**Armor:** Kang battle armor, 5 points.

**Skills:** Command +7, Kanquan +9, Mounted Combat +9, Primary Combat +9.

**Special:** Kang are aggressive and hot-tempered. If insulted or provoked, Kang find it difficult to restrain themselves; roll versus WIL or challenge the offending party to a duel.

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## Strider Hunt

At dawn on the following day, the characters are awakened by a quartet of Kang guards, who instruct them to get dressed and ready for the hunt. They escort the PCs to the outpost gates, where Kiyen and her retinue of four Kang cavaliers are already mounted on striders and ready to depart. Each of the PCs is provided with traditional strider hunting gear: a pair of thick leather gauntlets reinforced with mail, a black iron helm, and a polearm with a noose of braided hide attached to one end. The group departs at once, eating a cold breakfast of durge, bread, and water in the saddle.

The party heads out across the steppes, traveling at a leisurely pace. The terrain consists mainly of scrub plains dotted with outcroppings of windworn stone, patches of loose shale, and a few scattered copses of withergall and coarse sedge. Along the way they spot a herd of bounders, harmless bipedal herbivores that traverse the land with a hopping, bounding gait.

Riding at the head of the party, Kiyen offers the following advice to the PCs:

*"When we find striders, it will be best if you hang back, at least to start. The guards and I will take the first ones so you can see how it is done. If you spot a single strider it will most likely be a female. The males generally stand guard over the nest while their mates go out to hunt. You should know that the under-scales of the male are blue, while those of the female are purple. Be forewarned: female striders seldom venture far from their nests, and mated pairs may fight to the death to defend each other."*

After traveling for about two hours, the party's guide spots a pair of wild plains striders: a blue-scaled male standing watch over his nest and a purple-scaled female hunting for bounders amid a nearby patch of sedge.

Kiyen signals to the PCs to keep back, then takes off at a gallop toward the nearest strider, followed by the other four Kang. The group fans out. Kiyen and one of the Kang race after the first strider, while the other three go after its mate.

A wild chase ensues as the striders attempt to elude the hunters with a series of intricate maneuvers. Kiyen follows her prey's every move, weaving through the sparse undergrowth and rocks. Closing on her prey, she strikes with the lasso pole, snagging the



wild strider on the first attempt. Kiyen pulls back on the reins of her steed and the wild strider goes down. As Kiyen holds the beast's head down with the lasso pole, her compatriot binds the strider's jaws with a length of rope. Then Kiyen's companion slips his lasso pole over the strider's neck, enabling the two hunters to keep the creature between them.

The other group of hunters closes in on the strider's mate. One of the Kang misses his prey on the first attempt and the vicious creature snaps at him, sinking its teeth into the rider's heavy gauntlet. On the second pass the Kang snare their prey, bring it down, and muzzle it. Then they transport the captive strider back to the main group.

Exulting over their victory, Kiyen and her companions signal to the PCs to follow them. They lead the group along for another mile or so until they spot a solitary strider feeding on the remains of a dead megalodont. Kiyen motions to the PCs; it's their turn to show what they can do.

Let the PCs handle the hunt any way they like. Use the following rolls and degree of difficulty modifiers as needed:

- Riding at a trot: -1
- Riding at a gallop: -3
- Using a lasso pole: d10 instead of d20 unless proficient
- Snaring strider with pole while galloping: -4
- Bringing down a snared strider while mounted: STR versus STR
- Holding down a snared strider: STR versus STR
- Muzzling strider without getting bitten: DEX roll with -5 penalty

Capturing a wild strider may be beyond the PCs' present abilities. However, the objective here is not necessarily to succeed, but to act courageously. As long as the PCs do so, they earn *khir* in the eyes of Kiyen and her companions—10 points if successful, or 5 points for a good effort.

At the conclusion of the hunt, the PCs and their companions return to Giran. Here they find Ispal waiting to continue their journey, and Kiyen bids them farewell. If the PCs have shown well, she tells them they are welcome to return and hunt with her again. If not, her manner is somewhat cold and aloof.

### Wild Striders, 3rd Level

**Description:** Striders are bipedal predators resembling a cross between reptile and flightless bird. They stand 7'-8' tall and weigh from 750-850 pounds. For more details see GB p. 257.

INT -7	PER +2
WIL 0	CHA -10
STR +6	DEX 0
CON 0	SPD +6

**Hit Points:** 22

Attacks	CR	Damage
Bite	+3	d4
Talons	+3	d8
Tail*	+3	d4

\*Can be used to grasp prey.

**Armor:** Thick hide, 1 point.

**Special:** None

## Departure from Giran

The PCs pass through the gates of Giran and head northeast along the Emperor's Road. The journey to Shonan takes two days, during which little of great import is likely to occur. Unless you want to, don't bother roleplaying each day of travel. Instead, concentrate on the following highlights:

- More displaced Mandalan farmers.
- Another uneventful stay at a road barracks.
- The bridge spanning the river Shan, at which a toll of five gold lumens is charged. Here, the characters see great armored barges piloted by Sunra mariners conveying their cargos downriver. Says Ispal:

*"These war barges carry arms and supplies south towards Vulge, where the Kang are engaged in an ongoing military action against the Chana Witchtribes."*

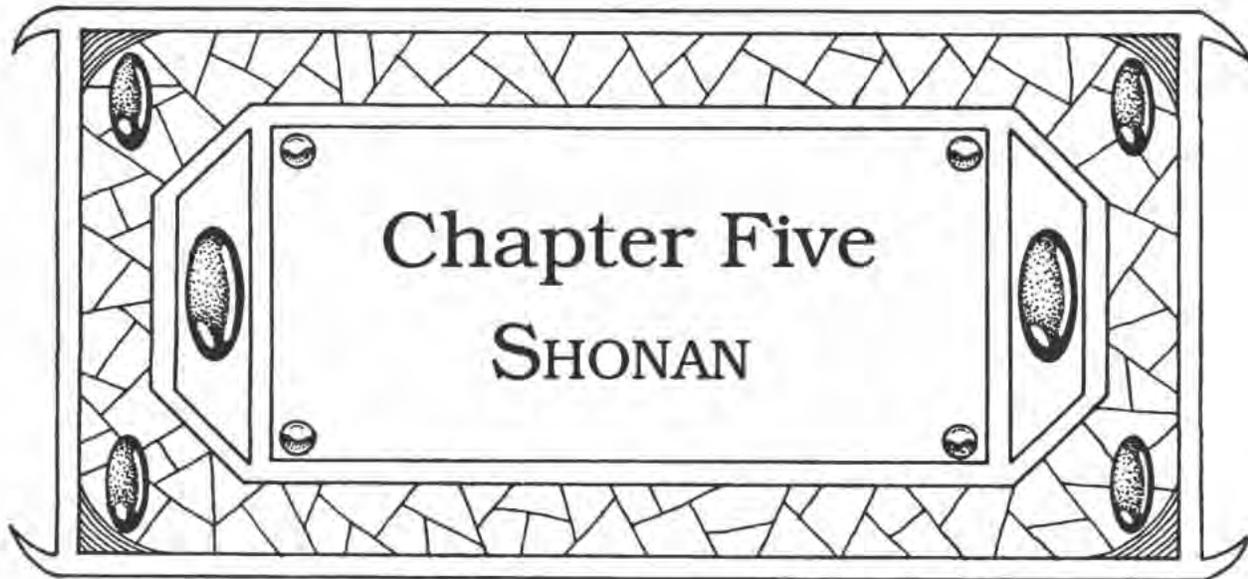
### Cultural Note: The Sunra

If asked about the Sunra, Ispal offers the following information:

*"The Sunra are a semiaquatic race subjugated long ago by the Quan and now under the control of the Kang. Sunra mariners are employed to pilot the great barges that ply the river Shan from Tian to the Inland Sea, and to convey shipments of goods to distant ports, such as Tarun in Faradun. No Sunra ship is ever allowed to sail beyond the Inland Sea unless escorted by a sizable contingent of Kang guards. Furthermore, both inlets to the Inland Sea are blocked by heavy chains that can only be lowered by the Kang guards in the watchtowers to either side of these waterways."*

*"The Sunra live in the coral city of Isalts, a fabulous settlement situated in the midst of the Inland Sea. Isalts stands above the waterline except during high tide, when the waters rise, burying the coral city beneath the waves. For this reason, Kang are only stationed at Isalts for short periods of time."*





# Chapter Five

## SHONAN

After crossing the bridge over the river Shan, the party is allowed to pass through the gates of Shonan, a large military and trade complex located at the point where the river Shan intersects the Emperor's Road. It is constructed of gray stone from the Volcanic Hills and surrounded by a wall 40 feet high topped with rows of sharpened black iron spikes. A thousand Kang troops are stationed here, including units of heavy strider cavalry and an armored division. Their primary duties are to act as a supply station for troops deployed against the Sauran war clans of the Volcanic Hills and to serve as a shipping point for materials sent downriver to Vulge. Among the diverse goods that pass through Shonan are precious stones and metals from Karang, moonfish from the coral city of Isalis, Mandalan silkcloth, cerulean dyes, and costly hardwoods and rare herbs from the jungle outpost of Vishana.

Here the characters spend the night before continuing on their way. As before, Ispal stays in an Ispasian consulate. Before leaving he informs the PCs that today is payday and hands them each a voucher for one week's pay, 700 gold lumens. Ispal directs them to the offices of the fortress's paymaster, who will convert the vouchers into gold. If none of the characters speak Quan, Ispal also points them toward another mercenary recruit who can serve as a translator for the evening.

### The Paymaster

In Shonan, the offices of the Ispasian paymaster are located in the same building as the requisitioner. Troops queue up to a window and await their turns. When the PCs hand in their vouchers, the paymaster pays them each seven gold emperors, Quan coins worth 100 gold lumens apiece throughout the Quan Empire. Though the PCs may not know it, these coins are worth only 10 gold lumens elsewhere. The paymaster will not change emperors for lumens, of

which he claims to have a limited supply. If the PCs cause any trouble, the paymaster summons the guards.

### The Barracks

Upon entering the visitors' barracks, the PCs run into their former friends, the Arimite mercenary cavaliers from Hadran. If approached, the Arimites tell the PCs that they have been assigned to road patrol outside of Vulge. "A real hellhole," says one of the knife-fighters.

If the conversation continues, the Arimites could ask the PCs where they are being sent. If the characters say they have been assigned to Ku-Chang, the Arimites reply: "So, you too will be earning your pay." Aside from a rumor that this is a tough assignment, they know nothing about Ku-Chang.

A short time later, a Kang sergeant arrives and orders the mercenaries to get to the mess hall.

*"Dinner is about to be served, so move along. You won't want to miss the entertainment."*

### The Dining Hall

The mess hall is a chamber similar to the dining hall at Hadran but only about half the size. There is a central pit in which land dragon can be roasted, though there is no feast tonight. Instead, the troops get land lizard, bread, ale, and a special attraction.

After dinner has been eaten, the characters get a chance to observe another example of Kang culture: a traditional test of courage, which is a duel between Kang warriors accused of cowardice in the line of duty. The accused must prove their courage by fighting to the death. The survivor is thereby proven innocent of all charges and reinstated into the military. The loser is given a coward's funeral, the lowest fate that can befall a Kang.

PCs who care to do so may join the Kang troops in betting on the outcome of each battle. Not surprisingly, given the nature of their culture, the Kang are aggressive bettors who favor high-stakes competition.

### Test of Courage

If the players show an interest in betting on the contests, use the following list of contestants:

- Kozang, a cavalryman, favored 2 to 1 over the infantryman Kurzhan.
- Kenja, a female cavalier, even odds versus the male sentinel Kuzon.
- Koyuk, a huge male guard, 3 to 1 over the female tracker Kimeka.

To save time, these battles can be simulated by rolling one or more d6 according to the odds. When you roll more than 1d6, count only the highest die; don't add the dice together. For example, suppose a player bets on Kozang, the favorite of a 2 to 1 contest. The player rolls 2d6, getting a 4 and a 6. You roll 1d6 for Kurzhan, the underdog, getting a 5. Kozang and the player win since 6 was the highest roll.

If several players split their bets between Kozang and Kurzhan, nominate one player to roll for Kozang and another to roll for Kurzhan. In the event of a tie, simply roll again.

There is no limit to the betting. Feel free to create a few more contestants if the players seem to be enjoying this. A PC who wins big can also earn a modest amount of *khur*—5 points if you're keeping track—and might well attract a Kang suitor. If any of the Kang bettors suffer heavy losses, a brawl could erupt.

Odds	Favorite Rolls	Underdog Rolls
Even	1d6	1d6
2 to 1	2d6	1d6
3 to 1	3d6	1d6

### K'yan

The troops stationed at Shonan also enjoy a game called *k'yan*, named after the Kang word for "flinch." The rules are simple. Two contestants place their bets on a table and roll a pair of dice. The two then square off. The one with the low roll stands with arms folded across his or her chest, while the high roller deals the opponent a brutal blow to the face. The two then exchange roles. If either contestant flinches, he or she loses the bet; if both do, then the match must be replayed. If neither do, the contestants may decide whether to end the game there or go another round, though most Kang consider it cowardly to end a tie game of *k'yan* before the fifth round.

To simulate this game, have the contestant who is about to be hit roll versus WIL to resist flinching. A result of partial success is considered a failure. If you like, you can apply modifiers based upon the perceived or actual toughness of the opponents, up to a

maximum of +/-5. For example, characters about to get hammered by a 6'6", 220-pound Kang warrior will likely be a bit more apprehensive than those facing opponents of lesser stature.

Whatever the PCs do to pass the time, they are sent back to their barracks at the conclusion of the contests. In the morning Ispal joins them once more and they continue on their way.

## Departure from Shonan

The journey from Shonan to Tian-Ku takes six days. Once again, you don't have to roleplay each day of travel. Instead, you can focus on the following highlights:

### Messengers

When leaving Shonan, the PCs and Ispal are accompanied by four Kang guards mounted on striders. These warriors bear a sealed message from Klak, the commander at Shonan, to Ku-Chang's Commander Kajan. If the PCs somehow manage to read the message, they discover it is a request for Kajan to send a contingent of Vajra engineers to repair a wall at Shonan.

### Kyun, Kung, Kazu, and Kaishen, Kang Warriors, 1st Level

**Languages:** Quan +1.

**Description:** Two males and two females, all adults and about 6'4", 200-220 pounds. Leathery red skin, brutal features, white eyes without pupils, long black hair worn in queue and confined with spiked silver bands. All are dressed in full suits of Kang battle armor. Each is armed with a broadsword, twin daggers, and a heavy crossbow with 20 quarrels. Each carries d20 x 10 g.l. in a stiff leather belt pouch. Kaishen carries a sealed message from Commander Klak to Commander Kajan in her pouch.

INT 0      PER 0  
WIL 0      CHA 0  
STR +4      DEX +2  
CON +2      SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 17

Attacks	CR	Damage
Broadsword	+3	d10+4
Crossbow	+3	d10
Dagger	+3	d6+4
Kanquan	+3	special (GB p. 108)

**Armor:** Kang battle armor, 5 points.

**Skills:** Command +1, Kanquan +3, Mounted Combat +3, Primary Combat +3.

**Special:** Kang are aggressive and hot-tempered. If insulted or provoked, Kang find it difficult to restrain themselves; roll versus WIL or challenge the offending party to a duel.

## The Virds

While the characters are eating lunch by the side of the road, their old nemeses the Virds pass by. As they do, several of the Virds favor the PCs with lewd gestures. Harsh words may be exchanged, though the Kang guards will not allow a fight.

## A View of Tian

The PCs pass the old Quan capital of Tian. Here they see Quan pleasure barges drifting lazily on the waters of Lake Tian. The Kang accompanying the party order the group to halt and stop to watch for a few moments. One of the Kang guards sneers as he points to the barges and says:

*"See the fat ones afloat on their lake, wasting their time. This is why we are now the rulers of the empire."*

## Convoy

A line of twenty military cargo drays drawn by teams of land lizards and escorted by a contingent of thirty Kang heavy cavalry approaches. If the characters ask Ispal about this, he replies:

*"Observe: here is a supply caravan bearing iron ingots from Ku-Chang to Shonan, where the metal will be mixed with red iron and made into weapons and armor. Such shipments are vital to the efforts against the Saurans, or so I am told."*

## Cultural Note: The Quan

If the PCs express any interest in the Quan, Ispal discloses the following information:

*"Ironically, the very folk who once ruled the empire are now regarded as its least useful subjects. Lacking all but the most basic clerical talents, the Quan have been reduced to the status of petty bureaucrats with absolutely no authority outside of the city of Tian. They are no longer allowed to own property or have servants and are forbidden to live anywhere but Tian. Kang soldiers often come here to mock them, watching them as they would some endangered species now existing only in a zoo."*

*"Incredibly, despite their fall from power, the Quan retain something of their former attitude of superiority. Shorn of their old status symbols of wealth and power, they must now rely upon the elaborate titles they bestowed upon themselves during the time when they were rulers of the empire. Thus, even the lowliest Quan is addressed with such flowery phrases as 'Splendid Jade Potentate,' 'Munificent Lotus Personage,' and 'Wondrous Sapphire Excellence.' Old habits die hard, or so it would seem."*

## Pit Trap

At nightfall on the fourth day, the Kang guards order the party to halt and make camp for the evening at the side of the road. The PCs are instructed to take turns on watch. Whoever gets the second watch hears a noise in the bushes a short distance from the campsite. If the character fails to investigate, the noise continues until the Kang are awakened and order the whole party to see what is causing it.

If the original watcher is actively looking for traps while investigating, have the player attempt a PER roll or an appropriate skill roll with a -10 penalty. On a partial success or better, the PC notices a well-hidden pit trap and can avoid it. Otherwise, the luckless character steps into the trap, falling eight feet into a hole lined with sharpened stakes and suffering d12 points of damage.

When the Kang examine the pit, they conclude that it was made by the Mondre Khan and that the noise was a lure. They order the watch doubled for the remainder of the night.

## Trouble at Mansai

A group of terrified-looking Mandalan peasants rushes up to the party on the road. They report to Ispal that a wild beast is loose in the fields outside of their village and has killed an old woman. They are afraid to go back into the fields to harvest their crops, which are to be delivered to Tian-Ku.



The Kang guards shake their heads at the Mandalans' fear and order the PCs to go kill the beast while they stop and water their steeds at a nearby stream. The characters have no choice but to comply. Ispal accompanies them to serve as translator but shuns any further involvement, saying:

*"Matters of this nature are beyond my area of expertise."*

The Mandalans lead the PCs to the small village of Mansai, which is located just a few hundred yards from the main road. Here they find a dozen pagoda-like structures fashioned of intricately woven reeds, each with its own garden and small shrine. Farther back from the road is an orchard of fruit trees, and beyond this, a field of grain in which the characters can see an exomorph greedily devouring the body of a dead Mandalan woman.

The Kang expect the party to go forth and either kill or drive away the exomorph. Here are the likely results of a few possible methods:

- If the characters approach the exomorph on foot, moving downwind in order to prevent it from scenting them, they can take the creature by surprise while it remains occupied with its grisly meal. In this case, the PCs gain the initiative plus one round of undefended attacks before the beast can react.
- If the PCs try to approach quietly on their striders, the exomorph hears them coming and uses its uncanny chameleonlike abilities to hide in the high grasses. Camouflaged and unmoving, the beast is almost impossible for the PCs to detect; the players may attempt PER rolls with a -5 penalty. The striders have a more highly developed sense of smell and receive only a -2 penalty to their PER rolls to smell the exomorph. If they succeed in scenting the creature, the striders become so skittish that the players must attempt a Ride (strider) skill roll to control their characters' mounts and avoid being thrown. The exomorph, having recently eaten, is not so hungry as to attack a mounted party. But if a PC falls off a skittish mount, it pounces upon the unlucky individual at once.
- If the PCs approach on striders in an attempt to flush out or scare the exomorph, the beast abandons its meal and tries to run away. While it moves through the field, the characters suffer a -4 penalty to spot it or hit it with targeted attacks such as spells or missile weapons. If the characters use this tactic, they can avoid a fight.

Whatever tactics the players choose to employ, the exomorph tries to run away if badly wounded. It does not fight to the death unless surrounded. The old Mandalan woman is beyond help, her body mangled and half eaten by the exomorph.

After the exomorph has been slain or driven away, the villagers show their gratitude afterward by giving the PCs a basket of fruit and offering to heal

anyone who has been wounded. If the PCs have treated the Mandalans with respect, or if they performed a selfless action of any sort, such as bringing the body of the old woman back to the village, the Mandalans bow before them and say, "Your kindness will not be forgotten." As the characters head back to the road, a small Mandalan child gives one of them a tiny doll made of woven straw.

The reaction of the Kang is quite different. If the characters kill the exomorph or drive it away without taking casualties, they earn 10 points of *khir* apiece from their Kang companions. If they or their mounts are injured and the beast escapes, they lose 5 points of *khir*. Either way, the Kang aren't that impressed, stating that the Mandalans should have been able to deal with the problem themselves.

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### Exomorph, 6th Level

**Description:** Exomorphs are fierce quadrupedal predators measuring from 7'-9' in length and weighing 400-600 pounds. They have lizardlike skin, heavily muscled torsos, and great, gnashing fangs. The primary attribute of the exomorph is its uncanny ability to alter the coloration of its thick, scaly hide so as to perfectly blend in with its surroundings (see GB p. 262).

INT -7	PER +4
WIL 0	CHA -11
STR +5	DEX +3
CON 0	SPD +4

**Hit Points:** 38

Attacks	CR	Damage
Bite	+9	d8
Claws	+9	d12

**Armor:** Hide, 1 point.

**Special:** Alter color of hide at will (roll versus PER at -5 to detect), stealth, tracking (by scent at level+PER)

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### Sign of the Times

Approximately five miles from the outpost of Tian-Ku, the party sees a group of four Kang trackers leading tarkuses by thick chains. The beasts are scouring the woods at the side of the road. The Kang accompanying the party order the group to halt, then go to consult with their comrades. When they return, they report that a Kang courier who disappeared on the previous evening has been found. They show the group his mutilated body, now hanging upside down from a tree. The Kang recognize this as the work of the Mondre Khan, though they show no outward sign of fear.

# Chapter Six

## TIAN-KU

Tian-Ku is a small fortified outpost recently built in response to the growing threat of the Mondre Khan. It consists of a stone wall 15 feet high enclosing a barracks, stables, a requisitioners' warehouse, and a central tower. Thirty Kang trackers and their trained tarkuses are stationed here, along with a few dozen support personnel. These include two Ispasian requisitioners, eight Mandalan servants, and six Vajra engineers. The outpost's commander is Kvarian, a Kang tracker of some ten years' experience. The left side of his face is horribly scarred, the result of a close encounter with a Mondre Khan.

### News from the North

Upon arriving at Tian-Ku, Ispal and the Kang leave the PCs and head off to be with their kin, as usual. A Danuvian swordswoman who introduces herself as Arradan shows the characters to the barracks where they are to bunk down for the night. She is also a mercenary cavalier and is willing to talk to the characters about any of the following topics:

### Experiences in the Empire

*"I hired on a month ago following a stint in the Dracartan military, along with four other mercenaries. All are dead now. Two were killed by the Mondre Khan, one was devoured by an exomorph, and the last was executed by the Kang for cowardice. Replacements are expected within the week, but until then I have been removed from active duty, without pay. The Ispasians control the payroll, and have informed me this is standard policy among the Kang."*

### The Surrounding Area

*"The Kang are in the process of stepping up their operations against the Mondre Khan. Each day, more troops and military drays pass by en route to Ku-Chang, which has become a veritable*

*fortress. They think the greatest concentration of Mondre Khan is located in the mountains surrounding this installation, which the Mondre Khan want to disrupt or destroy since it's an important source of black iron ore."*

### About the Mondre Khan

*"The recent efforts to expunge the Mondre Khan from their mountain territories have yielded little. The Half-Men hide by day, when the Kang are out in force, then come forth at night to set deadly snares and wreak havoc upon their supply trains. Rumor has it that several supply convoys have been diverted somehow, though details are scarce here at Tian-Ku."*

### Arradan, Danuvian Swordswoman, 4th Level

**Languages:** Common Talislan +4, Quan +1.

**Description:** Woman, age 24, 6'5", 175 pounds.

Bronze skin, black mane, strong features, face decorated with pigments. She wears gloves, boots, a vest, and breeches of black strider's hide, as well as a scarlet cloak and a red iron armband stamped with the seal of the mercenary cavaliers. She is armed with a heavy crossbow, a sheath of 12 quarrels, a boot dagger, and a longsword with scabbard. Arradan's other gear includes a bedroll, backpack, tinderbox, 20 feet of rope, a lantern, and a flask of lamp oil.

INT 0	PER 0
WIL 0	CHA +1
STR +3	DEX +3
CON +1	SPD +2

**Hit Points:** 21

Attacks	CR	Damage
Crossbow	+7	d10
Dagger	+7	d6+3
Longsword	+7	d10+3

**Armor:** None.

**Skills:** Animal Handler +4, Command +5, Mounted Combat +7, Primary Combat +7.

**Special:** None.

### **Departure from Tian-Ku**

In the morning the characters, Ispal, and the four Kang guards are on their way once again. The last leg of their voyage is the trip to Ku-Chang, another four days on the road. As before, you can skip the details and focus on the following highlights:

### **Large Convoy**

On the first day out from Tian-Ku, the party encounters a convoy of twenty military cargo drays drawn by teams of land lizards. The drays are escorted by a contingent of thirty Kang heavy cavalry.

If Ispal is asked about this, he replies:

*"The Ispasians at Tian-Ku inform me that the Kang have increased the size of their convoys in order to provide additional security from Mondre Khan attacks. Two of the smaller convoys are said to have disappeared recently under mysterious circumstances. One was bearing supplies and*



*provisions to Ku-Chang, and the other was headed south for Shonan with a cargo of iron ingots. I am told that we will hear more about this when we arrive in Ku-Chang."*

### **Rockslide**

As the road winds its way through increasingly mountainous and more heavily wooded terrain, the Kang guards warn the PCs to be on the lookout for signs of the Mondre Khan. A short time later, the party members hear a loud rumbling noise coming from the slopes on the left-hand side of the road. A rockslide is headed directly for the party.

Have all the members of the group attempt a Ride (strider) skill roll. Those who succeed are able to control their mounts and get away in time to avoid being struck by falling stones ranging from 1-2 feet in diameter. Those who fail suffer 3d4 points of damage, divided evenly between rider and mount. When the danger has passed, the Kang order the PCs to clear the stones from the road. They have no desire to investigate the cause of the rockslide, knowing the Mondre Khan will be long gone.

### **Traffic Jam**

The party comes upon a group of three Mandalan peasants whose six-legged durge refuses to budge from the middle of the road. Strapped to the beast's broad back are four huge clay urns. The Kang order the characters to take care of the matter at once:

*"Do whatever needs to be done, only get that useless creature out of the way."*

Ispal comes along to translate if necessary. One of the Mandalans, a venerable old man named Dwan, explains that the durge is very old and has been with his family for many years. He says the beast is tired from being worked so hard and merely needs to rest for a moment or two. Dwan explains that the clay urns contain Mandalan wine, which they are taking to market.

The PCs must decide what to do. If they try to coax the durge with food, slap it on the hindquarters, or prod it with a stick or goad, it still refuses to budge. They can tow it out of the way using a rope and at least two strider steeds, or possibly use some form of magical influence, but otherwise the creature will not move unless it is subjected to severe pain.

This encounter is designed to place the PCs under stress by putting them between the impatient Kang and the placid Mandalans. If they seem indecisive, have the Kang give them a hard time; the greater the delay, the more impatient the Kang become.

If the characters take too long, the Kang prod the beast with their blades and it lumbers off the road in a panic. The clay urns fall from its back, breaking and spilling their contents on the road. Dwan shows no emotion as he stares at the wine-soaked earth, even though selling the wine would have provided enough money for his family to survive for several months.

As before, if the characters exhibit kindness instead of cruelty, they win the admiration of the Mandalans and the scorn of the Kang.

### **Burned Barracks**

After spending two restless nights camping at the edge of the road, the party arrives at a road barracks located in a wooded area about 50 feet from the highway. To their dismay, they discover the installation has been burned to the ground. Any PC who succeeds at a Tracking or other applicable skill roll realizes the fire occurred three days ago.

The Mondre Khan are suspected, though there are no tracks in the area. The Kang guards decide to spend the night in the burned ruins rather than camp in the surrounding woods. Once again, they order double watches.

About an hour before dawn, those on the last watch suddenly smell smoke. Looking about, they discover that someone has set fire to a stretch of woods between the party and the road. The fire line is 20 feet long and growing fast.

The best way for the party to fight this fire is with magic. Many of the barrier spells do not allow gases to pass through them and thus could be used to surround and smother the blaze. A Control Fire spell cast at 5th level or better can extinguish the fire also.

Without magic, the characters must move quickly before they are surrounded by flames. There is also an unknown danger; the Mondre Khan have quietly set snares around the camp during the night. Those trying to circle around the fire to the immediate left or right set off a concealed snare that hurls a half-dozen sharpened wooden spikes in their direction. Roll a d20 for each spike; on a result of 10+ a spike hits a random target (rider or steed) for d6 points of damage. PCs carefully searching for traps can avoid them by succeeding at a Detect Traps or Detect Snares roll with a -5 penalty.

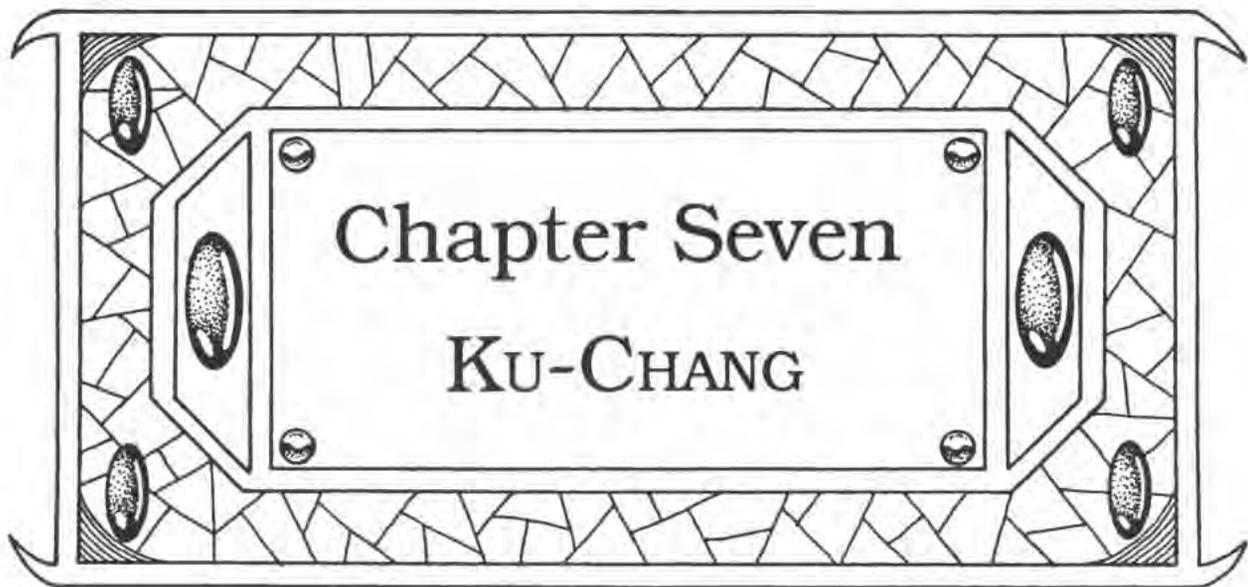
Once they have made it safely to the road, the Kang order the party to move out. They refuse to go into the woods at night to look for Mondre Khan, or to spend the rest of the night in this place.

### **The Tower**

Ten miles south of Ku-Chang, the characters pass a fortified stone tower. Its sloping outer walls bristle with razor-sharp spikes and crossbow bolts protrude from arrow slots in the upper walls. The Kang guards traveling with the PCs call out a gruff "Hoy!" as they pass by, which is returned by several voices from within.

Ispal explains:

*"This is one of several checkpoints established between Tian-Ku and Ispasia, which lies to the north. Road patrols from Ku-Chang stop here to check in, then turn back to the fortress, following a circuit of 20 miles. Take note of the location of this place. It is likely that you will be required to check in here during the course of your duties."*



# Chapter Seven

## KU-CHANG

This large, heavily fortified mining installation covers an area measuring over 1,000 feet on a side. The outer wall is made of stone, stands over 20 feet in height, and is topped by three rows of razor-sharp spikes. At each of the four corners stands a 40-foot war tower. Mounted atop each tower is a pair of springals (GB p. 180).

Enclosed within the outer walls are four barracks, each housing over 100 Kang troops. Of these 400 or so troops, a total of 200 heavy strider cavalry and 140 infantry and artillerymen are assigned to guard the fortress. A mixture of over 50 Kang trackers, mercenary cavaliers, and other military advisors and personnel reside here also.

There is a large stable for striders and another for land lizards and cargo drays. Facilities for the 40 Mandalan laborers and servants employed at Ku-Chang are located near the stables. A requisitioners' warehouse managed by a consortium of five Ispasian mercantilists stands nearby. The Ispasians' offices are located in an attractive structure built to resemble an Ispasian manse.

The fortress's central war tower stands over 50 feet in height and serves as the headquarters of the outpost's Commander Kajan, a heavily decorated veteran of the Sauran wars who was assigned to Ku-Chang after he led his army to victory in the Battle of Erendor's Way. His superiors hope he will have greater success against the Mondre Khan than did his predecessor, the late Khubas of Hadran.

Also contained within the complex is the entrance to the Ku-Chang mines, a vast network of tunnels created by the Vajra that extends over two miles below the ground. Near the entrance rests a large forge used to process raw ore into ingots, a warehouse used to store ingots and mining equipment, and an underground barracks complex used to house a work force of over 200 Vajra. Ku-Chang is an important supplier of iron, and the Vajra work the mines and forges night and day.

The Kang sentinels positioned atop the walls of the fortress are always on full alert. This is a war zone; an atmosphere of tension prevails throughout Ku-Chang.

### **The Briefing**

Upon their arrival at the fortress, Ispal and the Kang guards take their leave of the party, as usual. Prior to leaving for the consulate, Ispal gives the PCs their pay vouchers for the last ten days of duty. The PCs can visit the installation's paymaster and turn in their vouchers for 10 gold emperors each.

After receiving their pay, the PCs are met by a contingent of four Kang guards who escort them to Barracks Four. Here they are assigned bunks, told where to stow their gear, and introduced to Sergeant Klet, who will be their direct superior—and translator, if necessary—while they are assigned to Ku-Chang. Immediately thereafter, the characters are brought to the war tower for a briefing by Kuomat, a heavy-set Kang who serves as adjutant to the fortress's commander. Kajan himself is too busy to bother with such trivial concerns as mercenary cavaliers.

Arriving at Kuomat's chambers on the second floor of the tower, the PCs are given the following lecture:

*"I am Kuomat, adjutant to Commander Kajan and subcommander of the mercenary cavaliers assigned to Ku-Chang. My responsibilities are many, and so I will be brief. First, be advised that I will tolerate nothing less than exemplary behavior from those under my command. Insubordination or laziness will result in immediate disciplinary action; an hour or two in the Hole, spent in the company of garbage-eating urthrax and other detestable vermin, has proven inspirational to even the most hapless recruits. Deserters will be*

hunted down by Kang trackers and tarkuses and returned to Ku-Chang for punishment. At Shonan, I hear you were privileged to witness the fate of those individuals who have been accused of cowardice in the line of duty, and so I need say nothing more on this topic.

"Your group is hereby designated Mercenary Squadron Four. Your primary responsibility will be to patrol the Emperor's Road from Ku-Chang to the checkpoint located 10 miles to the south, starting at sunrise and returning to the base before nightfall. You may also be called upon to augment security forces in the mines or elsewhere, as needed. Perform your duties to my satisfaction and you will earn my favor, and be accorded positions of even greater responsibility.

"So ends your first briefing. Now, I exhort you: go forth and perform your duties like true cavaliers, courageous and resolute in the face of danger!"

After the briefing the PCs are escorted to their barracks, where they find their old friends, the Vird mercenary cavaliers. Like themselves, the Virds have been assigned to Ku-Chang. They have just returned from their first road patrol and as usual are in a foul mood. When they see the PCs, they begin to mutter among themselves, looking at the party in a most menacing manner. A fight or argument seems imminent.

Sergeant Kiet arrives a moment later and orders the mercenaries to stand at attention. She says:

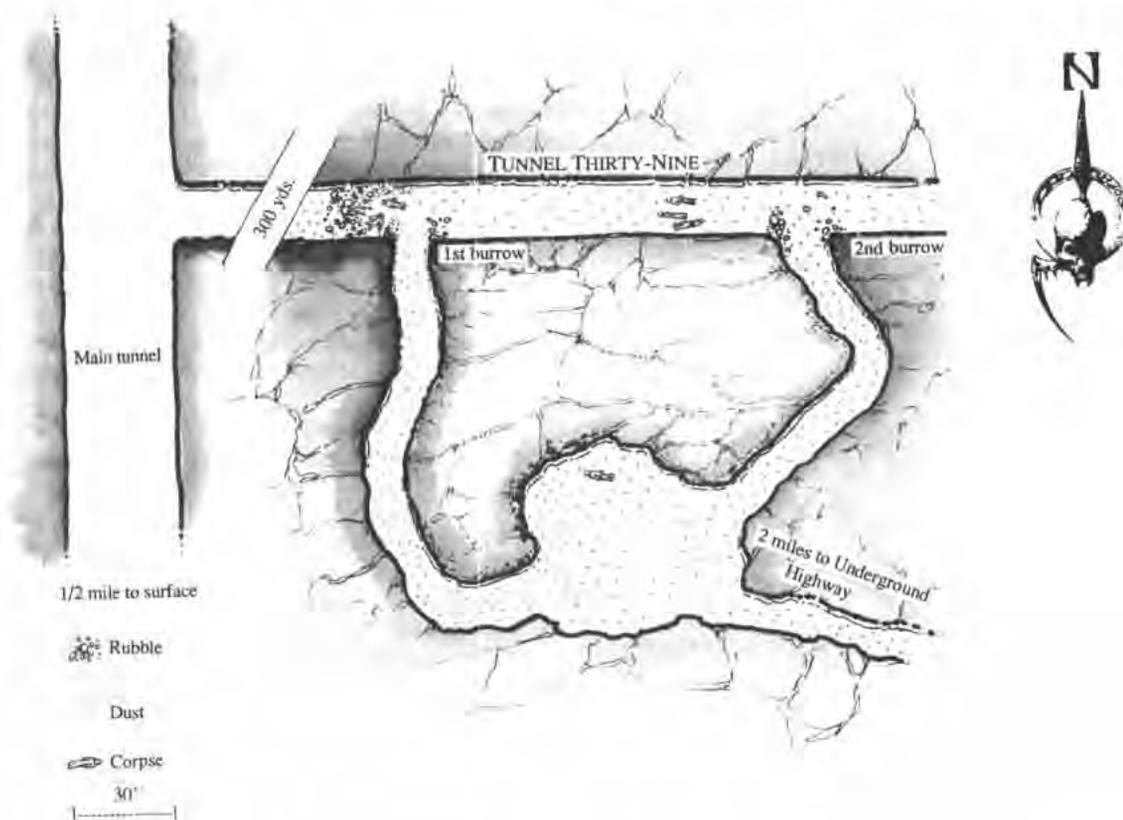
"Squadron Four, report at once to Sergeant Kronar in the mines. There has been a disturbance in Tunnel 39, and you are to provide assistance. On the double! Squadron Three, as you were."

The characters are expected to grab their gear and follow the sergeant without delay. They will not need their mounts for this job.

### Into the Mines

Sergeant Kiet leaves the PCs at the entrance of the Ku-Chang mines, an opening carved into the face of a hill and measuring approximately 30 feet wide and 20 feet high. A pair of heavy iron portals, which can only be opened and closed by a winch mechanism, flank the entranceway. Beyond this point is a tunnel hewn from solid stone, sloping downward at a 30-degree angle. Heavy ore wagons, drawn by teams of land lizards and operated by Vajra drivers, roll up and down this tunnel at intervals of 20-30 minutes. Those going into the mine are empty, while those coming out are loaded with iron ore.

Conditions in the mines are intolerable. The Vajra work 12-hour shifts and are driven hard by Kang overseers armed with iron-shod whips. Rows of great cast iron lamps light the darkness. The air is hot and thick with dust and the tunnels ring with the constant din of hammers, stonecutters, pry bars, and the ever-present rumbling of the ore wagons.



## Cultural Note: The Vajra

The Vajra are a peaceful race of subterranean humanoids whose ancestors once dwelled among the Opal Mountains of the far northern Quan Empire. They were originally subjugated by the Quan, who captured a large clutch of hibernating Vajra young and threatened to kill them unless the adults surrendered. Fearing that their species might be driven to extinction if the Quan continued this tactic, the Vajra acceded to the Quan's demands. Following the Silent Insurrection of 611, the Vajra became subjects of the Kang.

Vajra excel at all manner of earthen or stone-work construction, engineering, and excavation. The Kang employ them as miners, road workers, and builders, often driving them mercilessly. It is only the Vajra's stoic nature and devotion to family that enables them to survive under such difficult conditions.

Sergeant Kronar, a great barrel-chested Kang wearing an iron gauntlet in place of his missing right hand, meets the PCs at the entranceway. He speaks in a thickly accented, growling version of Common Talislan:

*"It's about time! Come this way, you laggards, and be quick about it! We've got trouble in Tunnel 39, and dead tunnel-wyrms all over the place!"*

Sergeant Kronar leads the party along the main tunnel, which has many smaller passageways branching off it. At the entrance to each of these tunnels is a black iron plaque inscribed with the number of that tunnel. The group travels for a half-mile or more before they arrive at the entrance to Tunnel 39. A crew of five Vajra miners is huddled in the main tunnel, looking somewhat shaken.

Sergeant Kronar stops here. Shouting to be heard over the noise, he addresses the party:

*"All right, pay attention. We have a break-in along Tunnel 39, about 300 yards from here. The Kang overseer, Kurg, is missing and presumed dead, along with seven miners. The survivors attribute the disturbance to a land kra, supposedly of great age and size—maybe 30 or 40 feet long, if these tunnel-wyrms are to be believed. Your orders are to take your squadron in there, find the kra, and finish it off. Also, find Kurg or whatever is left of him and bring him out, but don't waste any time on those pathetic excuses for miners. Is that clear?"*

If the PCs request a Vajra guide, Sergeant Kronar orders one of the nearby Vajra to accompany the mercenaries.

### Valkra-Sar, Vajra Engineer, 3rd Level

**Languages:** Quan +4, Common Talislan +1.

**Description:** Adult male, age 43, 4'9", 145 pounds.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: KU-CHANG

Squat, heavy-limbed, body covered with overlapping orange-brown scales. He wears a loincloth and a wide belt for his tools and wields an iron spear.

INT +1      PER -1  
WIL 0      CHA -1  
STR +3      DEX +1  
CON +4      SPD -2

**Hit Points:** 24

Attacks	CR	Damage
Iron spear	+3	d12

**Armor:** Plated skin, 3 points.

**Skills:** Engineer (Mines) +4, Geography +4, Secondary Combat +3.

**Special:** Burrow through soil (1 foot per round), keen hearing (PER +4 when listening).

## Looking for the Land Kra

The PCs are forced to enter Tunnel 39 and search for some sign of the land kra. About 200 yards from the main tunnel, they encounter a cloud of thick, choking dust. Visibility is limited to 10 feet; apply a -3 penalty on all PER rolls due to the dust. Vajra are able to breathe air like this, but most others cannot. Unless the characters cover their mouths and noses with wet cloth, they begin to choke on the dust. Symptoms begin with runny eyes and noses, then continue to include sneezing and an uncontrollable cough. Certain spells or devices, such as a Fresh Air or Swirling Winds spell, might also be used to solve this problem.

Just over 300 yards into the passage, the PCs find a pile of rubble. A cave-in here has partially blocked the passage and the characters must move the debris in order to get by. Roll a d20 in secret; on a result of 1-4, there is a second cave-in. Portions of the weakened ceiling collapse and all in the area must succeed at a DEX roll or take d6 damage.

Beyond the blockage, the tunnel is filled with dust and visibility is further reduced to 5 feet; apply a -6 penalty on all PER rolls. The PCs can see two dead Vajra lying nearby, crushed by a massive slab of stone.

Just past this point there is a gaping hole in the south wall of the tunnel, measuring over 10 feet in diameter. Unlike the smooth-cut tunnels made by the Vajra, the walls of this passageway are rough and jagged. This is the burrow made by the kra when it broke into Tunnel 39. If the PCs look closely, they find that this section of the floor shows deep scratches and gouges, evidence the kra passed through this opening, turned east, and headed farther down Tunnel 39.

If the PCs decide to head south into the burrow, they soon run head-on into the land kra, which is circling back toward Tunnel 39. It has sensed the PCs and is returning to attack them. In this case, skip the next section and go directly to page 39, "The Land Kra."

If the PCs choose to bypass the burrow and keep going east down Tunnel 39, they find the remains of three more Vajra after about 20 yards. All three have been badly mangled. Some are missing limbs, while



MARK TEDIN © 93

others have apparently been crushed as if by something massive. There are no survivors.

Ten yards east of the three corpses, the PCs find another pile of rubble and another 10-foot hole in the south wall of the tunnel. There is not enough rubble here to block the tunnel, but there's enough to make the footing treacherous. Apply a -3 penalty if any PCs attempt to fight or run through this 20-foot section of the tunnel.

The hole opens into a second burrow filled with dust. Apply a -7 penalty on PER rolls. The floor of this passage is scored, showing that the kra passed this way. Beyond this point, the floor of Tunnel 39 is not scored.

The conclusion should be obvious to the players. The kra exited Tunnel 39 at this point, burrowing back through the surrounding earth and stone. What

the PCs may not yet know is that the kra has sensed their presence and is now headed back towards them from the opposite direction.

If the characters head down this burrow, they come upon a natural cavern located about 30 yards south of Tunnel 39. The cavern is roughly circular and measures 20 yards in diameter. Two other burrows lead off from the cavern; one is the first burrow the PCs encountered along Tunnel 39, and the other is the kra's original burrow, which delves deep into the earth and eventually connects to a tributary of the Underground Highway.

In this chamber the PCs find what little still remains of the Kang overseer Kurg: a few pieces of bloody armor scattered about the cavern floor. Nearby is Kurg's head, still encased in an iron helm. There is no sign of the kra in this cavern.



### **The Land Kra**

If the PCs headed into the first burrow, they encounter the kra head-on. If they went down the tunnel and into the second burrow, the kra attacks them from behind. Either way, the land kra makes enough noise and vibration as it approaches that the characters will easily notice it. Give the PCs one round to react and devise a plan before the kra arrives.

The first thing the characters see is the kra's armored cranium and gnashing jaws, which measure over 7 feet across. The kra's segmented body, which the PCs cannot see if they encounter the creature in either of the narrow burrows, is covered with heavy armored plates.

When the kra attacks, it moves toward the party at a SPD of +1, its massive size giving it tremendous forward momentum. If the PCs do not flee, attempt a

fighting retreat, or find some way to stop the creature or slow it down, the kra simply runs them over, crushing them under its massive bulk and inflicting 3d12 points of damage. It then returns to the cavern, turns around, and comes back to feed upon those it has crushed.

With an armor value of 6, the kra's head is highly resistant to damage. Unless the PCs draw the kra into the cavern or Tunnel 39, they will not be able to flank the creature and attack its body, which is much more vulnerable.

Another option might be for some of the PCs to try to keep the kra occupied while others circle back through the tunnel in order to attack the creature from the rear. While in either the tunnel or the burrows, the immense creature cannot turn around or maneuver.

Note that the land kra is blind, sensing prey by vibration, and so is not affected by illusions or spells such as Radiance or Invisibility. It can burrow through rock at a rate of about 2 feet per round, or cause d20 battering damage to any physical or magical barrier.

If the PCs succeed in killing the kra, they receive something of a surprise. They hear a thumping noise from inside of the great beast, as if someone or something was pounding on the creature from within. If they cut open the kra's stomach, they find the last of the missing Vajra: a miner named Vaj-Do-Rahn who was swallowed whole during the kra's first attack. He is badly shaken, bruised, and a bit disoriented, but alive. If the PCs help him get back to his companions in Tunnel 39, he is very grateful, as are the rest of the Vajra miners.

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### Land Kra, 12th Level

**Description:** Land kra are a species of giant, segmented eels related to the ocean-dwelling kra. Their bodies are covered with heavy armored plates, with the cranium and gnashing jaw parts composed of a chitinous substance harder than stone. A full-grown specimen may exceed 40 feet in length and can weigh as much as 5 tons. Land kra are burrowers, using their powerful jaws to tear their way through rock, soils, and sand. They are blind, sensing prey by vibration.

INT -9	PER +1
WIL +7	CHA -12
STR +12	DEX -4
CON +8	SPD +1

**Hit Points:** 57

Attacks	CR	Damage
Bite/Tail	+8*	d20

\*Because of its immense size and lack of maneuverability in the tunnels, consider the kra to have a 0 CR when under attack.

**Armor:** Armored plates: body, 2 points; head, 6 points.

**Special:** Burrow through stone (2 feet per round), burrow through soil (20 feet per round).

---

### Back to the Surface

When the kra has been taken care of, the PCs should report back to Sergeant Kronar, bringing with them the remains of the slain overseer. This wins them the approval of Kronar, who says:

*"A job well done. I will commend you to your superiors at the first opportunity. Report back to your barracks and await further orders."*

That evening, just before dinner, the PCs each receive a commendation from Subcommander Kuomat: a red iron medallion decorated with the image of a dragon in bas relief and bearing the inscription "Valor in Combat." If you're keeping track, the PCs also earn 20 points of *khir*.

However, if the Vajra they rescued from the kra's belly is still with them when the PCs report to Sergeant Kronar, his reaction is quite different. Glaring at the PCs, he growls:

*"I see you have chosen to disregard my orders concerning the Vajra. Report back to your barracks at once. I will inform your superiors of this insubordination at the first opportunity."*

If you're keeping track of *khir*, deduct 10 points from each of the PCs' totals.

In this case, just before dinner the PCs receive a visit from Subcommander Kuomat, who is accompanied by a platoon of 12 Red Dragons. The subcommander gives the Red Dragons the following orders:

*"These mercenaries are to be disciplined. Escort them to the Hole and give them an hour to reconsider matters."*

The Red Dragons draw their weapons and order the PCs to accompany them as instructed. If the PCs try to resist, they are in for trouble. The Red Dragons are tough customers and reinforcements can be brought in within d4 rounds, if needed. If the PCs must be taken by force, they are thrown in the Hole for the entire night. In either event, turn to Chapter Nine. When you've played the events of that chapter, return here.

### The Mess Hall

As long as the PCs avoid getting thrown into the Hole, they are allowed to report to the mess hall for the evening meal. The facilities here resemble those at Shonan, though there is no "entertainment" scheduled for this evening. Here the characters run into the Vird mercenary cavaliers, who are bitter because the PCs earned commendations while they have yet to do the same. Their leader, Vir-Shan, tries to instigate a fight, saying:

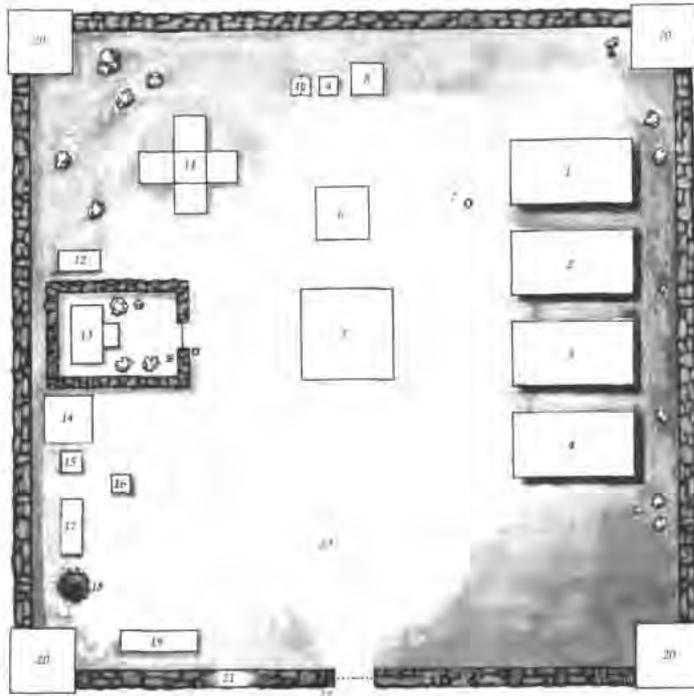
*"Dung-eaters! We heard how you kissed up to the Kang to get your pretty medals. I doubt such a half-witted lot will fare so well when it's your turn to go on road patrol."*

If the PCs do not react to these comments, the Virds leave them alone. If they start a fight, both the Virds and the PCs could end up spending an hour in the Hole.

Assuming nothing drastic occurs, dinner proceeds without further incident. At the conclusion of the meal, Ispal stops by for a brief visit with the PCs. He asks how they're getting along, and informs them that they can either return to the barracks and hang around until curfew or spend a few hours at the Ku-Chang Tavern. After telling them how to get to the tavern, Ispal bids them good evening and departs for the Ispasian consulate for the night.

If the characters do not want to go to the tavern, skip the next section and go to page 42, "Back at the Barracks."

# KU-CHANG



200'



1. Barracks 1
2. Barracks 2
3. Barracks 3
4. Barracks 4
5. Central war tower
6. Mess hall
7. Well
8. Mine warehouse
9. Forge
10. Mine entrance
11. Ku-Chang tavern
12. Infirmary
13. Ispasian consulate
14. Requisitioners' warehouse
15. Mandalan servants' quarters
16. Paymaster
17. Land lizard stable
18. The Hole
19. Strider stable
20. War towers
21. Wall
22. Gate
23. Training field

## Ku-Chang Tavern

The tavern, meant as a place for Kang troops to unwind after a hard day, is a large structure of rough-cut beams and stone. Six Kang guards are stationed at each of the four entrances to keep celebrants in line. There are four large common rooms, one for each of the barracks. Troops from one barracks are not allowed to mingle with those housed elsewhere. The atmosphere is typical of most Kang gatherings: loud and raucous, with the potential for violence always present.

The tavern serves iron cups of potent red arrack for 5 s.p., or a strong local ale similar to grog for 2 s.p. per flagon. The bartenders, a mix of males and females, are all Mandalans who hail from the nearby village of Tanzal. The only furnishings found in any of the common rooms are rows of wooden benches and heavy tables, all of which are bolted to the floor so they cannot be used as weapons.

Aside from drinking, the only activities normally taking place at the Ku-Chang Tavern are fighting, gossiping, and the occasional game of *k'yan*. Some of the individuals in attendance include the following:

### Kihuan, Kang Warrior (Artillerist), 3rd Level

**Languages:** Quan +3, Common Talislan +1.

**Description:** Female, age 29, 6'1", 185 pounds. Leathery red skin, brutal features, white eyes without pupils, long black hair worn in queue and confined with spiked silver bands. Kihuan is known for her indiscriminately curious nature and quick temper. She aggressively seeks suitors of other races and has been known to attack those who spurn her advances. If none of the PCs speak Quan, Kihuan follows them around all evening, translating for them and trying to embarrass them with not-so-double entendres.

INT 0      PER 0  
WIL 0      CHA 0  
STR +4     DEX +2  
CON +2     SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 21

Attacks	CR	Damage
Falchion	+5	d10+4
Dagger	+5	d6+4
Kanquan	+5	special (GB p. 108)

**Armor:** Leather, 1 point.

**Skills:** Artillerist +5, Command +3, Kanquan +5, Primary Combat +5.

**Special:** If insulted or provoked, Kang find it difficult to restrain themselves; roll vs. WIL or challenge the offending party to a duel.

### Kuong, Kang Warrior, 4th Level

**Languages:** Quan +4.

**Description:** Male, age 43, 6'6", 200 pounds. Leathery red skin, brutal features, white eyes without pupils, long black hair worn in queue and confined with spiked silver bands. Kuong is a veteran cavalryman who has seen action against the Saurans and now the Mondre Khan.

INT 0      PER 0  
WIL 0      CHA 0  
STR +4     DEX +2  
CON +2     SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 23

Attacks	CR	Damage
Falchion	+6	d10+4
Crossbow	+6	d8
Dagger	+6	d6+4
Kanquan	+6	special (GB p. 108)

**Armor:** Leather and plate, 3 points.

**Skills:** Command +4, Kanquan +6, Mounted Combat +6, Primary Combat +6.

**Special:** If insulted or provoked, Kang find it difficult to restrain themselves; roll vs. WIL or challenge the offending party to a duel.

If asked about the Mondre Khan, Kuong describes them as follows:

*"These creatures are animals that belong in cages. They refuse to fight us in the open like true warriors, and would rather skulk about in the bushes like wild beasts, waiting to tear out our throats the moment we turn our backs."*

If asked how the offensive against the Mondre Khan is going, Kuong shrugs and says:

*"It is not wise to speak of such things. But in truth, I would rather fight Saurans."*

### Kama, Kang Tracker, 6th Level

**Languages:** Quan +6.

**Description:** Female, age 35, 6'5", 190 pounds. Leathery red skin, brutal features, white eyes without pupils, long black hair worn in queue and confined with spiked silver bands. She wears strider hide armor, gauntlets, thigh boots, and a cloak. Kama is armed with a dagger and light crossbow with 12 quarrels.

INT 0	PER +1
WIL 0	CHA 0
STR +2	DEX +3
CON +3	SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 28

Attacks	CR	Damage
Crossbow	+7	d8
Dagger	+7	d6+2
Kanquan	+9	special (GB p. 108)

**Armor:** Leather, 1 point.

**Skills:** Animal Handler +6, Kanquan +9, Mounted Combat +9, Secondary Combat +7, Stalking +9, Tracking +7.

**Special:** If insulted or provoked, Kang find it difficult to restrain themselves; roll vs. WIL or challenge the offending party to a duel.

Kama only recently arrived at Ku-Chang. She is talking to two other trackers about the rumor that shipments of arms and weapons have been hijacked along the Emperor's Road farther to the north. She says:

*"I arrived from the outpost of Iskan, near the city of Ispasia, just a week ago, so I can tell you the stories are true. On two occasions we lost shipments that were to have been sent from Shonan. Our commander ordered us to scour the hills for Mondre Khan, who must have been responsible for the thefts. But in neither case were we able to locate any of the stolen cargo."*

If asked what she thinks really happened, Kama says:

*"It is not my place to question my superiors. If they said it was Mondre Khan, then so be it."*

The PCs can stay at the tavern until curfew. At this time the tavern closes and all must return to their barracks.

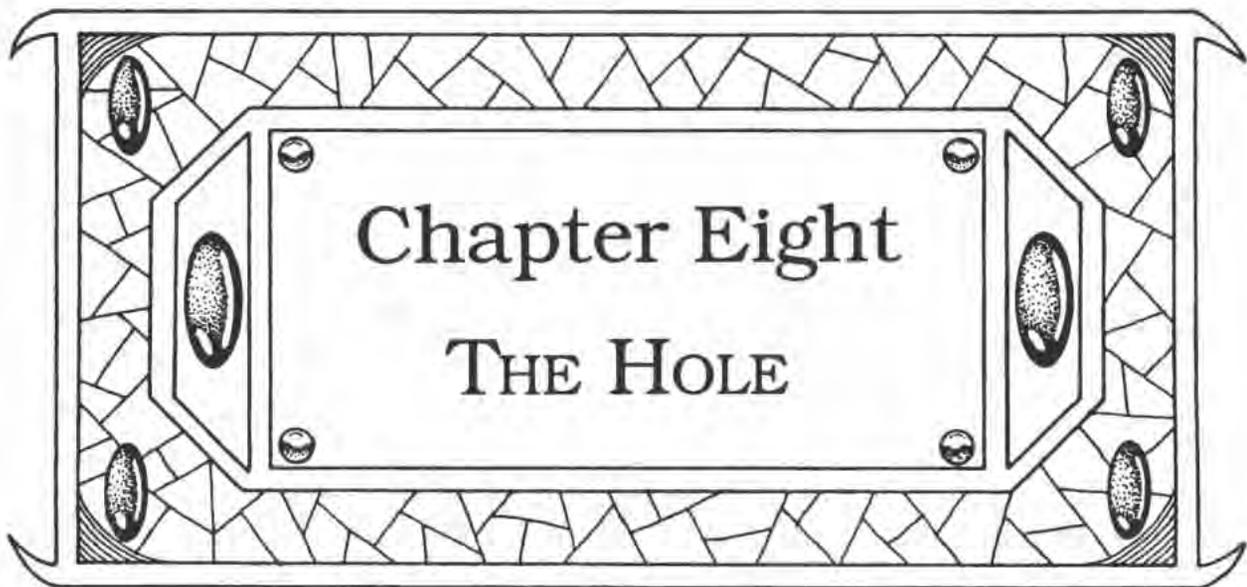
### Back at the Barracks

When the PCs return to their barracks, choose one of them at random. This PC discovers the blanket from his or her bunk is missing. Since all the blankets given out by the requisitioner look alike, it may not be possible to determine who stole the missing item unless the characters use magic.

The Virds are already asleep in their bunks. Their leader, Vir-Shan, did in fact steal the blanket and has stashed it under his bunk. He intends to trade it to an Orgovian while on road patrol. If the PCs plan any pranks or reprisals, they can take the Virds by surprise while they sleep. But even if caught with the stolen blanket, Vir-Shan denies his guilt. He claims that the blanket must have been placed under the bunk by the old Mandalan servant who tends the barracks.



Quantrigue



# Chapter Eight

## THE HOLE

Refer to this chapter any time the PCs are tossed in the Hole as punishment. They may also visit here out of curiosity during their time off, especially if the Virds have been put here as a result of events in Chapter Nine.

The Hole is a pit 50 feet deep and 30 feet in diameter. The Kang dump their sewage and organic wastes here, such as spoiled food, rotten produce, and so forth. It is located at the far southern corner of the installation near the stables, the contents of which also end up here. The powerful stench wafting from within is truly awful.

The Hole is filled to a depth of eight feet with a thick, brownish sludge. All manner of disgusting substances float within. Heavy rains, evaporation, and ground seepage may alter the level of sludge by up to a foot or so in either direction, but otherwise the sludge "tide" remains fairly constant. The sides of the pit are slick and muddy and the soft earth makes it all but impossible for anyone to climb out of the Hole without assistance (-15 penalty; roll every 10 feet).

The Hole is a breeding ground for all sorts of noxious vermin and diseases. It is infested with such creatures as urthrax, water bugs, leeches, and worst of all, an immense aramatus—a segmented, armored leech that has grown to the astounding length of 20 feet.

### **Disciplinary Action**

Besides being a waste pit, the Hole is also used as a form of punishment for soldiers who fail to live up to the expectations of their superiors. The procedure is simple and straightforward: the offender is stripped of his or her armor, dragged across the courtyard, and unceremoniously thrown into the Hole. The offender is allowed to retain a loincloth or cloth tunic and a weapon, such as a dagger or sword, but nothing else.

Simple insubordination or failure to meet one's responsibilities usually results in an hour in the Hole. For more serious offenses, the time may be increased to two, three, or four hours. Very serious offenses may be punished with an entire day or night in the Hole. It is not unknown for habitual offenders to be left here to die, though such drastic sentences are rare.

A contingent of 12 Kang guards armed with heavy crossbows and spears stand guard around the edge of the Hole. Kang who have been assigned to this duty invariably become extremely annoyed by the pungent smell and sometimes take shots at the prisoners in the Hole in order to vent their frustrations. For the guards' statistics, use those given for Kyun, Kung, Kazu, and Kaishen on page 29.

### **Thrown in the Hole**

PCs who are thrown into the Hole take 4d4 damage from the fall, though half of this damage is temporary. Healing occurs at the rate of 1 point per round, +1 per point of CON. For individuals with negative CON ratings, healing is limited to 1 point per point of negative CON rating in rounds. For example, a character with a CON of -3 heals at the rate of 1 point per every 3 rounds. Keep in mind that individuals who have been rendered unconscious as a result of the fall may die by drowning in the sludge, losing 1 hit point per round until dead or rescued.

Assuming the offenders survive the fall, their next concern is keeping afloat. Initially, this is not too difficult because the sludge is thick and heavy enough to support anything reasonably buoyant, such as a humanoid body. Individuals who have the Swim skill have no problem keeping their heads above the sludge line, though nonswimmers may have to resort to clinging to the muddy walls. Either of these activities is tiring, however.

Once every half hour, the PCs must succeed at a CON roll or tire and sink beneath the sludge. Apply a -1 penalty for each half hour spent in the Hole. Submerged characters can hold their breaths for 10 rounds +1 per point of CON rating. After this time the prisoner begins to drown, suffering one point of damage per round until dead or rescued.

The awful stench, plus the knowledge of what it is composed of, together yield the next problem: nausea. Each PC must succeed at another CON roll or lose one point of STR and CON from extreme nausea. Lost attribute points cannot be regained by nonmagical means until victims are removed from the Hole and bathed.

As if conditions are not bad enough, there is also the problem posed by those entities—living or dead—currently residing in the Hole. Every 15 minutes, roll a d20 on the following table to determine if the PCs encounter anything of note during their time in the Hole.

### Encounters in the Hole

d20 Roll	Encounter
1-5	No encounter
6-9	Bloated corpse
10-12	Prisoner
13-15	Sadistic guard
16-17	Urthrax
18-19	Alatus
20	Aramatus

### Encounter Descriptions

After rolling on the table, refer to the following entries to discover exactly what occurs.

**Bloated Corpse:** Noxious gas bubbles bring a corpse to the surface. If the PCs entered the Hole after the events in later chapters, they might recognize the corpse as one of the Virds or a Kang soldier interrogated for losing the cargo drays. Otherwise, the body is that of a stranger. It has no possessions other than a dagger still clenched in one fist.

**Prisoner:** Gasping for air and clawing his or her way up from below, a prisoner breaks through the surface of the sludge. If the PCs entered the Hole after the events in later chapters, they might recognize the prisoner. Otherwise, the prisoner is a stranger. This unfortunate individual is injured and exhausted and tries to cling to one of the PCs.

**Sadistic Guard:** One of the guards standing around the lip of the Hole shoots a heavy crossbow at a random prisoner. For simplicity, assume the guard scores a hit on a roll of 14 or better.

**Urthrax:** Swimming up from below, 1d4 of these foul creatures proceed to gnaw at the prisoners' feet. Urthrax are not known for their ferocity, and each retreats if it suffers even a single point of damage.

### Urthrax, 1st Level

**Description:** Urthrax are disgusting creatures, devoid of any redeeming qualities. They resemble six-legged lizards with fanged jaws dripping streamers of slime and pores exuding a reeking ooze. Two blinking ocular organs, each set at the end of a pale stalk, serve as eyes. A row of spiny bristles runs from the back of the creature's misshapen head to the end of its tail, affording it some protection from grasping predators. Urthrax measure 3'-4' in length and weigh 25-50 pounds.

INT -9	PER +5
WIL +3	CHA -14
STR -4	DEX +7
CON +10	SPD +7

**Hit Points:** 3

Attacks	CR	Damage
Bite	+8	d6
Claws	+8	d4

**Armor:** Scaly hide, 3 points.

**Special:** Emanate vile odor (roll versus CON or be incapacitated due to nausea; range 10 feet), immune to toxins and poisons, 10% chance of contracting disease from its bite.

**Alatus:** Chosen at random, one of the PCs feels something coil around his or her leg: a six-foot alatus.

### Alatus, 3rd Level

**Description:** An alatus is a hideous, serpentine, leechlike creature measuring 6 feet in length and weighing 120 pounds. It has leathery wings and a mouth filled with curved fangs.

INT -9	PER 0
WIL 0	CHA -14
STR +2	DEX +1
CON 0	SPD +1

**Hit Points:** 15

Attacks	CR	Damage
Bite	+4	d4 per round/blood drain
Tail	+4	d4 per round/constriction

**Armor:** None.

**Special:** Flight, bite may cause blood-fever (roll versus CON to avoid contracting this disease).

**Aramatus:** Undoubtedly the most dangerous denizen of the Hole, the aramatus tries to latch onto a leg of the nearest PC and drag him or her under the sludge to its lair. Feeling about in the muck, the victim may find the bones of hundreds of dead prisoners along with their discarded weapons. You might include an enchanted sword or other magical weapon as a bonus to anyone unlucky enough to have to endure this encounter.

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### Aramatus, 8th Level

**Description:** An aramatus is best described as a giant armored leech measuring 20 feet in length and weighing 200 pounds. It is a distant relative of the alatus, or flying leech.

INT -8      PER +2  
WIL +4      CHA -11  
STR +5\*     DEX -2  
CON +2      SPD +2

\*Bite grips with STR +8

**Hit Points:** 36

Attacks	CR	Damage
Bite	+6	d8 +d6 per round/blood drain
Constriction	+6	d6+1 per round

**Armor:** Armored plates, 4 points.

**Special:** Tenacious bite is practically impossible to escape (roll vs. STR at -8), may cause blood-fever (roll vs. CON to avoid contracting this disease).

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### Combat in the Hole

Maneuvering and using a weapon while simultaneously trying to stay afloat or hold onto a muddy wall is no simple task. Apply a -7 penalty for degree of difficulty to all combat rolls, or -5 if the prisoner is a swimmer. Unless the prisoner is a member of an aquatic race, apply a -3 penalty to both SPD and DEX.

### Getting Out

After the prisoners' time is up, the Kang guards stationed about the Hole lower a rope with a loop around one end and haul up the prisoners one by one. The prisoners are then doused with a bucket of cold, soapy water, given a blanket, and escorted back to their barracks. Those who are in dire need of medical attention may ask to be brought to the infirmary.

### Last Resort

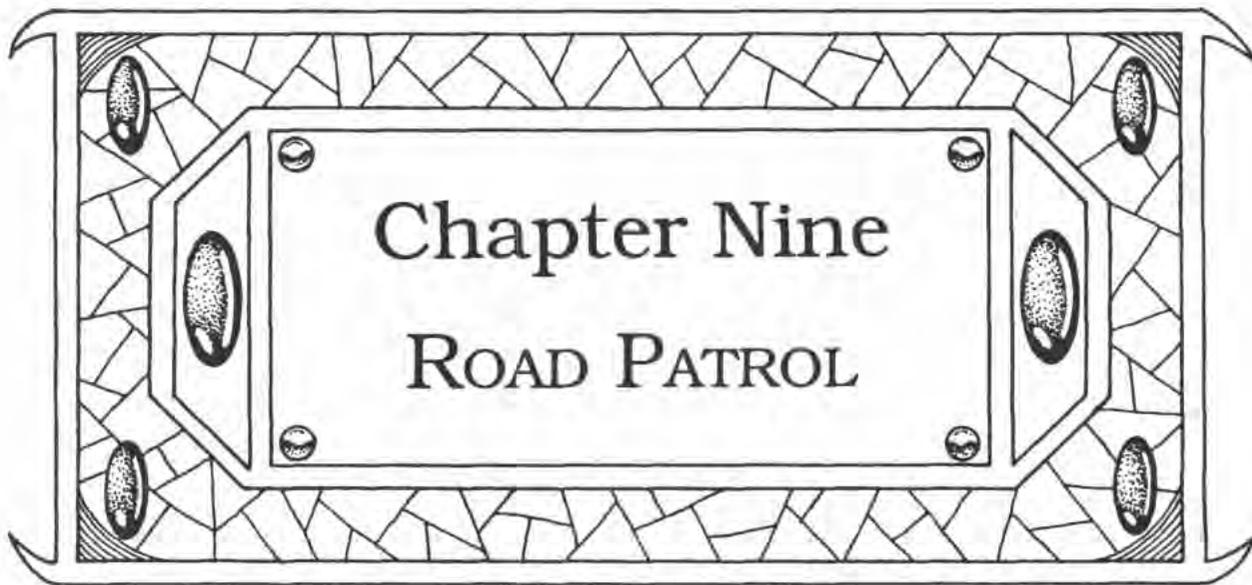
It is possible that the PCs might have really botched things up and been thrown into the Hole for good. In this case, you should let the PCs linger in the Hole for a couple of hours in order to experience the depths to which they have fallen. Use encounters to build suspense and to illustrate the grave danger of the situation.

At some point, one of two things should become apparent. Either the PCs are close to death or they have hit upon a feasible plan of escape. In the former case, you need to produce a *deus ex machina* in order to rescue the players. The easiest way to do this is to have a group of Vajra miners tunnel into the Hole. The Vajra would certainly do this if the PCs helped them in the mine incident, or even if they just treated the miners decently. Have the miners emerge through one of the walls at a point just a few feet above the sludge line, then pull the players to safety. The Vajra then lead the PCs through a long tunnel en route to their secret sanctum. At this point, you should turn to page 55, "Into the Tunnel."

## CHAPTER EIGHT: THE HOLE

Of course, the PCs may believe they can handle this themselves. While escape from the Hole may seem almost impossible by nonmagical means, you should not discount the possibility that the players could pull this off. Should any of the PCs manage to escape from the Hole and somehow get out of Ku-Chang, they could seek help from the Mandalans, whose village of Tanzal is located about five miles to the south. If they forget about the village, have them run into some Mandalans, who offer them food and shelter even if the PCs were not kind to them before this. If the PCs have been kind to the Mandalans, the villagers may offer the full extent of their aid. At this point, you should turn to page 57, "The Village of Tanzal."





On the morning after their night at the tavern, PCs who have avoided the Hole or managed to spend only a minor amount of time there are awakened and ordered to fall in for roll call. Sergeant Kiet arrives to give them their orders:

*"Squadron Four, today you are assigned to road patrol duty. Following the morning meal, you will report to the stables and get your mounts. You are then to exit the fortress by the south gate and follow the route designated during your briefing. Return before nightfall if you know what's good for you, entering as you left, through the south gate. Squadron Four, you are dismissed."*

Unless the characters are still squabbling with the Virds, the morning meal at the mess hall is uneventful. The PCs are expected to eat, grab their gear, get their strider mounts, and be on their way within a half-hour.

If none of the PCs know the Quan language, they will need a translator while on patrol. To resolve this, assume the Danuvian swordswoman named Arradan, whom they met at Tian-Ku, was transferred to Ku-Chang. She arrived late the previous night and has been assigned to the PCs' squadron.

## Day One

The first day of road patrol brings few surprises. The weather is fine and there is hardly any traffic on the road. A mile or two from Ku-Chang, the party spots a contingent of thirty Kang heavy cavalry approaching from the south. If the PCs attempt to engage them in conversation, the platoon's sergeant calls his troops to a halt and says:

*"We're bound for Ku-Chang from Shonan. How goes it on the road?"*

If the PCs indicate that the road is clear, the Kang sergeant responds with a perfunctory salute. He and his troops then continue on their way.

### The Mandalan Peasants

About five miles from Ku-Chang, the PCs encounter a large, rickety wagon drawn by an old red cow. Four Mandalan peasants walk alongside the wagon: an old man, his wife, and two young teenage sons. They are dressed in humble garments and wear disk-shaped hats of woven reeds. Seeing the party, they stop and bow.

If asked what they are doing on the road, the old man replies:

*"We are simple peasants from the village of Tanzai, which is located just a short distance from here. My family and I are bound for Ku-Chang to sell our bushels of grain to the Ispasian requisitioners."*

The Mandalans allow the PCs to inspect their wagon and possessions as needed. They have no contraband on their persons and seem as though they have nothing to hide. The inspection, and this encounter, should present no difficulties for the PCs. Afterward, the Mandalans and the party go their separate ways.

### The Checkpoint

The PCs can travel the remainder of their 10-mile journey to the tower checkpoint at a fairly leisurely pace, and arrive safely by the noon hour.

When they call out to those stationed within, the PCs are asked to identify themselves. They need only state that they are Squadron Four on road patrol from Ku-Chang. The checkpoint guards then ask:

*"All clear on the road?"*

If there were no problems, the PCs should tell them that all is clear, after which they can head back north to Ku-Chang. If there are any problems, the mercenary cavaliers are expected to describe them in brief to the guards. Only after they have done so are they free to leave. Under no circumstances will the checkpoint guards allow the PCs or anyone else into the tower.

### **Return of the Virds**

The PCs are only a mile from returning home to Ku-Chang when they spot a commotion on the road ahead. A small group of Mandalan peasants is being accosted by a group of mercenary cavaliers. As the PCs approach, they recognize this as the same family of Mandalans they met earlier in the day. They also see that the mercenaries are their old enemies the Virds, who are returning from road patrol to the north. Vir-Shan has grabbed the old man by his collar and is shaking him violently. Another is doing the same to the old woman, while the rest of the Virds hold the two young sons. None of the Mandalans appears to be offering any resistance.

The PCs must decide whether to intervene or not, and if so, to what extent. If they decide not to get involved and simply head back to the fortress, the Virds nod their heads as if to say, "You better mind your own business."

If the PCs decide to get involved, consult the following options:

- If the PCs ask the Virds what they're doing, Vir-Shan replies: "We're searching these peasants; that's what we get paid for. Be on your way, dung-eaters. This isn't your concern." He and his men then continue to harass the Mandalans.
- If the PCs ask the Mandalans what's going on, the old man replies: "We have done nothing wrong, and only wish to return to our village. Why do they frighten our children and threaten us in this way?" The Vird leader then strikes the old man, knocking him to the ground.
- If the PCs approach and try to stop the Virds, Vir-Shan lets go of the old man, draws his sword, and advances to stand before the nearest PC in a threatening manner. He is only bluffing and is trying to get one of the PCs to make the first move. If he is successful, a fight ensues between the Vird leader and one of the PCs. If the Vird is losing, he'll quit rather than be killed. If not, he presses the advantage until the PC is disabled or unconscious. Then he motions for his men to leave the area at once.

If the PCs hold their ground and do not attack, the Vird leader backs off and angrily says: "I swear you'll regret this!" He then motions to his companions, who mount their striders and head back to the fortress, entering through the north gate.

If the characters help the Mandalans in any way, the peasants offer their profound thanks, then continue on their way back to Tantai. The PCs' kindness will be rewarded at a later date.



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## Returning from Patrol

When the PCs return to their barracks, they are approached by Subcommander Kuomat, who is accompanied by a dozen Red Dragons. He says:

*"You have been accused of interfering in the duties of another squadron of mercenary cavaliers. Explain the reason for your actions at once."*

Allow the player who does most of the talking to attempt a CHA roll for his or her character. In addition to the PC's normal CHA attribute modifier, apply a +/-1 modifier for every +/-25 points of *khir* the character has, if you are keeping track of *khir*. For example, if the PC has accumulated 53 points of *khir*, he or she gains a +2 bonus to the CHA roll.

If the CHA roll is a full success or better, the subcommander replies:

*"Squadron Three was acting within the limits of their authority as mercenary cavaliers. These peasants must be shown who is in charge here at Ku-Chang, and in no uncertain terms. Do I make myself clear? Now get a meal and report to your barracks for the night."*

If the CHA roll is a partial success or less, the subcommander barks an order to his security forces:

*"Take them away, and let them spend an hour in the Hole as punishment for their offenses."*

The Red Dragons move to follow this order at once. If the PCs resist, the soldiers attempt to subdue them. Reinforcements are available if needed. The length of the characters' punishment could increase depending on how much resistance they offer. Unless they really go berserk and kill someone, the PCs should not be given more than one night in the Hole.

The last thing they see as they are being dragged off are the Virds, laughing and gloating at the party's ill fortune. If you are keeping track of *khir*, subtract 10 points from each PC's total.

If the PCs have avoided their punishment, continue play with this chapter. If they are tossed in the Hole, turn to Chapter

Eight, returning here if appropriate when the events of that chapter are resolved.

## Day Two

The second day of road patrol begins like the first; the PCs rise at dawn, fall in for roll call, and receive their orders from Sergeant Kiet. As on the previous day, the PCs are ordered to patrol the 20-mile circuit from Ku-Chang to the checkpoint and back. They are instructed to get their gear, mount up, and hit the road.

The southern leg of the circuit poses no major difficulties for the PCs. Planned encounters include the following:

- Another group of Mandalan peasants from Tanzai, riding or walking alongside a dudge-drawn wagon loaded with fodder for the Kang's mounts. As usual, the Mandalans are peaceful and cooperative. They submit to inspection without complaint and carry nothing suspicious. If the PCs have been kind to the Mandalans before this, word has gotten around among the villagers and they are greeted warmly. If not, the Mandalans are polite but somewhat aloof towards the party.
- A division of a hundred Kang heavy cavalry, followed by their baggage train and a few Mandalan bearers and lackeys. An adjutant of the division commander, riding at the head of the column, offers the PCs a perfunctory salute. He tells them that the group is headed north to



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### Cultural Note: The Orgovians

The Orgovians are nomadic traders who range from the Wilderlands of Zaran to the Desert Kingdoms and occasionally visit the Eastern and Western Lands. They travel in small armed bands, their mounts loaded with piles of curious goods from many regions.

Orgovians do not accept coins of any type or denomination, but deal exclusively in barter. They tend to be suspicious of civilized folk, whose ways the Orgovians neither fully understand nor trust. Normally stoic and reserved by nature, Orgovians talk sparingly, believing that an individual's actions speak louder than mere words.

It is the custom among many of these people to give a small trinket, such as a glass bead, a copper coin, or other bit of brummagem, to those with whom they wish to trade. The gift signifies the Orgovian's good intentions and the expectation that such intentions will be reciprocated. This feeling is best conveyed by giving the Orgovian a gift in return, the value of which can be quite insignificant. If the gift given in return is of greater value, the Orgovian will be favorably impressed. If not, the Orgovian may believe the giver is either cheap or dishonest. This can lead to unfortunate consequences, for although Orgovians trade with almost anyone, they often kill those whom they believe are trying to cheat or rob them.

reinforce the troops stationed at Ku-Chang, but has nothing else to say. The division commander, a Kang in silver battle armor, has little respect for mercenary cavaliers and does not lower herself to speak to such individuals. The procession continues on without pausing.

- At the checkpoint, the PCs are asked to identify themselves as on the previous day. Again they should reply that they are Squadron Four on road patrol from Ku-Chang. The checkpoint guards ask if all is clear on the road, after which the PCs can answer and then head back to Ku-Chang.

### The Orgovians

When the PCs are about three miles south of Ku-Chang on the return leg of their patrol, they encounter a group of Orgovian traders headed their direction. For every PC on patrol, there are two Orgovians.

The Orgovians are dressed in leather vests, blousy pantaloons, curl-toed boots, and traditional headdresses. Each rides a loper, a tall, bipedal reptilian with a strangely humanoid face. The lopers are piled high with a great number of bags, parcels, waterskins, jugs, sacks, and miscellaneous goods of many types. The traders are armed with prod-hooks, which they use to load baggage and control their unruly steeds, and star-throwers, which are modified crossbows that hurl spiked iron balls called shooting stars.

Taking note of the party, the Orgovians bring their steeds to a halt. When the PCs approach, the first thing the Orgovians do is offer them each a copper ring—Imrian currency, which the Orgovians picked up in trade. Such gift-giving is a custom among certain of the Orgovian clans; see the cultural note above. The Orgovians expect the PCs to give them a token of some sort in return. Until the party does so, the Orgovians seem offended and refuse to acknowledge the PCs' existence. The problem is easily remedied by giving each Orgovian a small gift.

If the PCs tell the Orgovians that they must inspect their baggage, the Orgovians shake their heads and say:

*"No need. We'll pay the usual bribe and be on our way."*

At this, the Orgovians take out a small pouch and hand it to one of the PCs. Inside are two drams of a glistening blue powder known as euphorica, the narcotic pollen of the mantrap plant, which is illegal in the Quan Empire. The Orgovians then prepare to continue on their way.

If the PCs persist in detaining the Orgovians, the strange traders become irritated. Their spokesperson, a male named Najhid Ganul, angrily says:

*"This lot is even greedier than the Virds. Very well, we'll give you three drams, but no more!"*

If the characters refuse to take bribes, the Orgovians seem baffled. Says Najhid Ganul:

*"We were told that all mercenary cavaliers take bribes."*

If asked to explain, the Orgovians say that on two different occasions they gave the Vird mercenaries euphorica. In return, they were allowed to continue on their way without undergoing a thorough search of their baggage. They say the Virds told them that this type of barter is standard practice among mercenary cavaliers.

The PCs must decide how to deal with the Orgovians, who are not inclined to listen to long-winded explanations and are suspicious of the ways of civilized peoples. A gift of some sort calms them down. The PCs can then search their baggage. If they choose to follow the orders of their Kang superiors, if they do, the PCs discover six more drams of contraband euphorica, as well as a number of items they recognize as Kang military issue: four blankets like the one stolen from the PC's bunk, a suit of Kang battle armor, and three Kang falchions.

If questioned, the Orgovians say they got these items from the Virds. If the PCs try to confiscate these goods, the Orgovians demand some form of compensation in return, arguing that the Virds told them these items were not restricted. If asked in a polite manner, the Orgovians agree to accompany the PCs to Ku-Chang in order to work things out; otherwise, the Orgovians refuse to let the party take their goods and will almost certainly become violent.

If the players are clever, they realize this is an opportunity to get revenge upon the Virds by reporting the dishonest mercenaries to their Kang superiors. If the PCs decide to take this option, see "Back at Ku-Chang" below.

The PCs might decide to take a bribe from the Orgovians. In this case they can take the usual two drams of euphorica, or be greedy and ask for three drams. If they demand four or more drams, the Orgovians feel they are being cheated and respond with violence. Each of the traders keeps a loaded star-thrower handy at his or her side, and is ready to use it at the first opportunity.

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### Orgovian Traders, 3rd Level

**Languages:** Common Tallslan +4, Sign +4.

**Description:** Equal mix of adult males and females, ages 13–36, 5'4"–6', 90–160 pounds. Dusky orange skin, narrow, protruding chin, squinty eyes, lean build. Each wears a leather vest and boots, a loincloth, a brown felt headdress, 10–20 iron armbands, and a variety of pouches, bundles, and sacks. Each is armed with a prod-hook and a star-thrower with a dozen shooting stars. Each carries d10 x 50 gold lumens in barter goods such as ivory, bolts of cloth, metal tools and weapons, pottery, or salt and spices.

INT +1	PER +1
WIL 0	CHA 0
STR 0	DEX +3
CON +2	SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 18

Attacks	CR	Damage
Star-Thrower	+5	d8
Prod-Hook	+5	d6

**Armor:** Leather, 1 point.

**Skills:** Appraise Treasure +4, Barter +3, Beast Handler +4, Mounted Combat +6, Secondary Combat +5.

**Special:** Orgovians are normally subdued by nature, tending to keep their thoughts to themselves. The traders have few reservations about whom they deal with, provided they are offered fair value for their wares. They despise bandits and cheats, however, and routinely kill such individuals in order to trade their scalps and possessions for useful goods.

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### Back at Ku-Chang

If the PCs decide to report this incident to their superiors and head back to Ku-Chang with the Orgovians, the traders corroborate their testimony. An Ispasian requisitioner reluctantly compensates the Orgovians for their losses. The traders then go their way without causing any further problems.

The PCs are rewarded for exposing corruption among the ranks with a bonus of 1 gold emperor and 10 points of *khir* each. As soon as the Virds return to the fortress, they are arrested and thrown into the Hole, never to be seen again. If the characters didn't turn them in, the Virds remain their smug, annoying selves.

The PCs are then relieved of duty for the rest of the day and ordered to get a meal, after which they can spend the rest of the evening in their barracks or at the tavern. If they decide to head for the tavern, and if they turned in the Virds, they learn that the story of their exploits has gotten around. As a result, no Kang speaks to them. Unlike their superiors, the troops have no great regard for those who turn in their companions. PCs who press the issue are in for a fight.

No matter how things went with the Virds, Ispal locates the PCs after a couple of hours and says:

*"I hear that you have had an eventful day. Why not come with me to the consulate, where we can discuss matters in more pleasant surroundings? I have taken the liberty of securing the permission of your superiors, who have agreed to allow you this privilege."*

If the PCs are interested, they can leave with Ispal. If not, they can return to the barracks and kill time until curfew.

### The Ispasian Consulate

Ispal leads the PCs across the compound to a small estate surrounded by a 10-foot stone wall. A pair of Kang Red Dragons stationed at the gatehouse opens the wrought-iron gates at Ispal's approach, allowing the party to pass within.

The grounds are tastefully landscaped with fruiting shrubs, shade trees, and beds of flowers. A walkway paved with white jade leads to a stately manse constructed in the Ispasian style, with circular windows of rose-colored glass, a pagoda roof, slender white columns, and a flight of white stone stairs sweeping upward in an arc to a grand entranceway. The double doors are made of costly hardwoods imported from the jungles of Chana, carved and polished to a fine luster.

The interior of the consulate is decorated in a style that is rich and lavish, yet elegantly understated. Beyond the entranceway is a large sitting room illuminated from without by rose-tinted light. The parquet floors are carpeted with costly rugs imported from the Desert Kingdoms. The furnishings are of polished hardwood, waxed and oiled to a deep sheen and upholstered in the finest Mandalan silkcloth. Positioned about the room are priceless antique vases, examples of fine sculpture, paintings from past eras, and other works of art and collectibles.

Three other Ispasians are in the room at the moment: a male and two females, all middle-aged. They are dressed in robes of rich silkcloth and seated on cushioned sofas positioned at opposite corners of the room. The three study sheets of parchment inscribed with long columns of figures while they sip wine from fluted crystal glasses. The atmosphere in the sitting room is quiet and subdued.

Ispal leads the PCs to an unoccupied corner of the room and invites them to be seated. He tugs once on a silken cord. A few seconds later, a Mandalan

servant dressed in silkcloth robes appears in the doorway. Ispal asks the PCs:

*"Would you care for some refreshment? The wine cellar is amply stocked, and the kitchen is available to meet any needs or wishes you may have. I myself am partial to the amber wine, and the chef's ambrosia wafers cannot be faulted."*

The PCs may order whatever they want, though if they eat or drink too much the Ispasians begin to look at them with distaste. Proper behavior is considered an essential element of Ispasian culture.

While the PCs await their refreshment, Ispal looks about the room and says:

*"I hope you find the surroundings to your liking. My people prefer to dwell in comfort, though the Ispasian sensibility is somewhat more refined than that of the Guan, whose tastes tend towards the ostentatious. Our one weakness is the desire to acquire things of value and beauty. This vase, for instance, dates back to the time of the Mazdaks and has been appraised at over twenty thousand gold lumens."*

When the Mandalan returns with the refreshments, Ispal instructs him to place the tray on a nearby table. The servant bows and leaves the room. Ispal then says:



*"Allow me to explain the reason I have brought you here this evening. Events of a complex nature are currently transpiring around us. The empire is not a monolithic entity, as it may appear to those who look upon it from the outside. Rather, it is a mosaic of different cultures, each with its own beliefs and aspirations."*

*"The Mandalans are like the wind and rain, gradually wearing down the walls that imprison them until one day those walls will crumble. The Vajra are earth and stone—dark and deep, with memories as old as the world. They lurk below the surface until the time when they will erupt like a sleeping volcano. The Sunra are like a river whose many tributaries want nothing more than to run free to the sea."*

*"The Mondre Khan are the beast that sleeps by day and comes forth by night from the depths of the forest to strike fear into the hearts of civilized peoples. The Kang are fire—always burning, consuming all in their path. Like flame they must always feed, for if they cease to do so they will die. The Guan were once like this, but now their fire is extinguished and all that remains are a few wisps of smoke."*

*"My people are different from the others who dwell among us. The wind fills our sails, and the rain waters our fields. We use earth and stone to shelter us and to build things of lasting beauty. We drink from the river and leave the beast to roam in the forest as it will. And we feed the fire, for it warms our hearths and lights our way."*

*"I have brought you here tonight to tell you that you will soon be compelled to make certain decisions, decisions destined to effect your own future. It is possible that you will be called upon to choose between opposing viewpoints, with the fate of yourselves, your companions, and many others hanging in the balance."*

*"It was I who chose you for this position and escorted you to this place. For this reason I am confident that, given a choice of possible alliances, you will make the right decision. However, I feel obliged to offer you the following advice: Do not stand too long in the fire, or you will surely be burned."*

If asked to explain, Ispal says:

*"I shall be more direct. Like yourselves, my people are mercenaries by nature. The Kang pay us well for our services, but we harbor no close ties to these folk. Neither do we feel kinship towards any of the other races, all of whom oppose the Kang to one degree or another. Due to this opposition, the Kang are always at war and so require an endless supply of goods and materials, which they must obtain through our agencies. This suits*

*us, for war is a very profitable business and making a profit is our business.*

*"I have been observing your actions over the course of the past few days, and have seen you struggle with the question of alliances. As a fellow businessman, I thought it only fair to advise you that things will only get more difficult in the following days. Soon, you may be forced to choose sides, and when you do, you must be prepared to live with your decision."*

If asked what side he is on, Ispal replies:

*"The Ispasians owe allegiance to no one. For the present, we work for the Kang, using their gold to purchase ever larger tracts of land, resources, and property. One day we will own all of the territories from the Volcanic Hills to the shores of the Far Seas, and then the Ispasians shall rule the empire. In the meantime, the petty struggles of the Kang and their enemies are of no concern to us."*

If criticized for his views, Ispal merely shrugs and says:

*"It's not personal; it's business."*

In any case, Ispal ends the interview by saying:

*"Now, I have work to do, and so I must bid you good night."*

Ispal rises, bows at the waist, and instructs his Mandalan servant to escort the PCs to the door. Before the PCs leave he hands one of them a card and says:

*"Should you ever wish to contact me for any reason, no matter where you may be, you need only hand this card to an Ispasian. And now, I must bid you farewell."*

The PCs may return to their barracks, or they can visit the Ku-Chang Tavern until curfew. The next planned encounter does not occur until several hours after curfew, in the dead of night.

## Attack of the Mondre Khan

Sometime after midnight, the PCs are awakened by the sound of war gongs tolling from the fortress towers. Looking outside the barracks, they find a scene of utter chaos; a nearby barracks is on fire, and hundreds of Kang troops are scurrying back and forth across the compound. Some carry iron buckets of water. Others can be seen calling out for reinforcements, hastily donning suits of battle armor, or searching the area for signs of invaders.

Sergeant Kiet arrives on the scene a few seconds later. She is out of breath, dressed only in leather breeches, an unlaced tunic, and boots and armed with a falchion. She gives the following orders:

*"To arms! We are under attack by the Mondre Khan! Squadron Four, secure the barracks. Take positions and be on the alert for arsonists! All others, come with me. Barracks Three is burning, and there are still a hundred troops trapped inside!"*

The PCs' duty is to defend the barracks from attack. How they do this is for them to decide. You can introduce any or all of the following problems as appropriate.

### Exterior Fire

A torch, flung by an unseen assailant, lands on the wooden roof of the barracks. The fire begins to spread. Unless magic is used, it takes a single individual two rounds to extinguish the blaze for every round that it is allowed to burn unchecked. For example, if the fire burns for two rounds before someone starts putting it out, it takes four rounds to extinguish. Inform the players that there are buckets, shovels, and blankets in the barracks, but the well is on the other side of the compound. The rest is up to them.



## Sniper

Positioned in a tree adjacent to the PCs' barracks, a Mondre Khan attacks the party with a heavy crossbow, firing once every three rounds. The party must determine the source of the shots, which requires a successful PER roll with a -3 penalty. Note that Mondre Khan can see clearly in the darkness. If the sniper is captured, the PCs find that the Mondre Khan is armed with a Kang crossbow and a Kang dagger. If you want to make things really challenging for the players, this event could take place while the PCs are trying to deal with one or more fires.

## Interior Fire

The PCs see a shadowy figure with a wild, flowing mane race up to the barracks with a burning torch in one hand. Allow the PCs one chance to stop the would-be arsonist before she throws the torch through a window, setting one of the bunks on fire. If this happens, another bunk catches fire every four rounds.

## Mondre Khan Warriors, 7th Level

**Languages:** Chanan +6, Sign +6.

**Description:** Equal mix of adult males and females, ages 15-29, 6'-6"6", 160-250 pounds. Mane of coarse black hair, bestial features, shaggy forearms and forelegs, claws, leathery brown skin. Each wears leather and plate armor, a hide loincloth, and a pouch containing a tinderbox and 30 feet of rope with a small grapnel. Each is armed with a rasp, 2d4 caltrops, a heavy crossbow with 2d10 quarrels, and 2d4 blade stars.

INT -1	PER 0
WIL 0	CHA -2
STR +3	DEX +3
CON +2	SPD +1

**Hit Points:** 28

Attacks	CR	Damage
Blade Star	+7	d4+3
Claws	+7	d4
Crossbow	+7	d10
Rasp	+7	d6+3

**Armor:** Leather and partial plate, 3 points.

**Skills:** Ambush +6, Assassinate +10, Camouflage +6, Hide +6, Sabotage +6, Scout +7, Secondary Combat +7, Stalking +10, Waylay +10.

**Special:** Claws can be used as weapons (d4 damage) and to climb (+3 on climbing rolls). The Mondre Khan are savage and feral by nature, often exhibiting the ferocity and cunning of wild beasts. They find it extremely difficult to repress their bestial side; roll vs. WIL if subjected to any form of stress, or react in the manner of a wild animal.

## Aftermath of the Battle

An hour after the war gongs sounded, everything is quiet once again. The barracks originally ignited by the Mondre Khan has burned to the ground. The bodies of more than fifty troops have been located in

the charred wreckage, and another twenty or so are still missing. Enemy casualties total three dead, not counting any Mondre Khan killed or captured by the PCs. Point out to the players that several of the slain Mondre Khan were armed with Kang falchions, Kang crossbows, and pieces of Kang battle armor.

The characters soon hear a rumor going about that the entire attack consisted of no more than a dozen Mondre Khan, and perhaps as few as six. The troops seem demoralized and spent as they return to their bunks. Those from the burned barracks are assigned bunks along with the PCs, making for crowded conditions.

## Cultural Note: Kang Battle Tactics

The Kang are an aggressive race known for their intensity and ferocity in combat. In mass combat situations, they favor such offensive tactics as heavy cavalry charges, overrun attacks by armored siege engines, and overwhelming assaults in waves. Kang commanders put little stock in subtlety and will never order a retreat once their forces have been committed to battle.

While the Kang's aggressive style of combat has in the main served them well for many centuries, their lack of patience and careful planning makes them poor defenders. This is especially true when Kang troops are asked to defend a fortification or to hold their positions against an attacking force. In such instances, Kang may quickly become demoralized, or even somewhat disoriented. This can be expressed in game terms by giving Kang troops a +2 bonus when attacking and a -2 penalty when attempting to defend their positions.



# Chapter Ten

## MYSTERY OF THE LOST CARGO

At dawn on the following day, the PCs are awakened as per the usual procedure. The events of the previous evening are not discussed. The Kang prefer not to dwell upon defeat, and there are other things to be concerned about, as the party will soon learn.

After the morning meal, the PCs are given the following orders by Sergeant Kiet:

*"This morning I was informed that a shipment of four large military cargo drays carrying arms and supplies from Shonan was somehow diverted on the way to Ku-Chang. The Mondre Khan are no doubt to blame. Still, the circumstances of the case are unusual, to say the least. The eight Kang assigned to guard the caravan arrived at the fortress an hour ago on foot. They were unharmed, but seemed confused and disoriented. All had been stripped of their armor and weapons—a terrible dishonor. They claimed to know nothing of what transpired and have said only that the caravan disappeared without a trace. In punishment for their failure they will soon be thrown into the Hole, where they will reside for the remainder of their days.*

*"Your duty is to locate the missing cargo drays and determine how they were taken. This is not the first shipment lost recently, and Commander Kajan has ordered this situation remedied without delay. You have your orders. If there are no questions, you should make preparations to depart Ku-Chang at once. Return by sunset and report to Subcommander Kuomat, who will be expecting a full report."*

The following are some of the questions the PCs may ask, along with the answers Sergeant Kiet provides.

- **Where did the incident take place?** *"The guards who were assigned to the caravan believe*

*the incident occurred approximately four miles south of Ku-Chang, along the Emperor's Road. It is hoped they will provide more specific information soon."*

- **Where are the guards now?** *"They are being held in the military dungeon, located in the subterranean levels of the northeast tower. The interrogators are heating their irons even as we speak. You may attend the interrogation if you believe this will be of help to your investigation, though I would advise that you do so soon if this is your desire. In a matter of an hour or so, they will be dropped into the Hole, and that will be the end of them."*
- **Were there any other witnesses?** *"Unknown, though we believe villagers from Tanzai sometimes travel the roads at night, carrying goods from one place to another. The Mondre Khan ignore them, probably because they know the feeble creatures are harmless and barely worth the effort to kill."*

### Interrogation

The military dungeon of Ku-Chang is a maze of winding stone stairways and dank corridors illuminated by torches set in rusted iron sconces. The conditions within are abysmal. The cells are damp, filthy, and crawling with vermin. The iron bars on the doors and windows are lined with twin rows of inch-long, needle-sharp iron spikes, a precaution intended to prevent the most powerful prisoners from prying the bars apart with their bare hands. Some, desperate to escape harsh edicts of the Kang military tribunal, try anyway.

If the PCs decide to visit the dungeon, they are escorted through the lower levels by a pair of burly Kang jailers. Descending several long flights of worn stone steps, they arrive at the "interrogation room," a Kang euphemism for the more accurate term "torture chamber." A pair of hooded interrogators prepare to perform their duties as the PCs are let into the room.

If the PCs tell the interrogators that they have been assigned to investigate the incident of the missing cargo, they are allowed to attend the interrogation. They cannot order the proceedings stopped, but if they insist, they are allowed to question the guards before the Kang have been tortured. Both of the interrogators also speak Common Talisman and can act as interpreters if needed.

The Kang prisoners recall little of what happened on the previous evening. They only remember suddenly feeling groggy as they passed beneath a great willowood tree by the eastern side of the road. They awoke some time later, divested of their weapons and armor. Regarding the caravan, the guards claim that it was as if the cargo drays had disappeared into thin air. They spent a short time searching the area by moonlight, but without success. After this, they decided to walk to Ku-Chang as quickly as possible in order to report what had occurred.

In actuality, the guards were felled by a large dose of morphius powder dropped upon them from above. Inhaling the powder, they fell into a stuporous sleep lasting over an hour. During this time, they were stripped of their weapons and armor and the caravan was hijacked.

If any of the PCs are skilled in alchemy, they might think to subject the Kang's skin, hair, or garments to analysis, using an alchemical test kit (GB p. 194). If the analysis is successful, it reveals minute traces of morphius powder on all of these surfaces.

The PCs know the large willowood by its description, as they have passed it before while on patrol. They can then head out on the road and investigate.

There is no way for the PCs to save the imprisoned guards without taking on everyone in the dungeon, and perhaps all of Ku-Chang. If it looks like they might try, you can have one of the prisoners tell them:

*"Escape from the dungeon is not possible. Leave us now. If we must die, let us do so with courage."*

## The Scene of the Crime

If the PCs decide to inspect the scene of the crime, they locate the willowood tree on the eastern side of the road without any problem. This tree stands over 40 feet in height, with several of the large lower branches overhanging the road. Both sides of the road are dotted with wild barberry bushes, creeping vines, and weeds. Even so, there is not enough vegetation in the area to conceal a large cargo dray, let alone several such conveyances.

When the PCs begin searching the area for clues, ask the players what their characters are doing and where they are looking. Then consult the following list to determine if they find anything of note:

- Alchemical testing of this section of road and the grass by the road's edge reveals traces of morphius powder.

- The willowood tree shows no marks or other visible signs that someone or something had climbed it recently. This would seem to rule out Mondre Khan, who use their sharp claws when climbing, leaving deep slashes and gouges that are very easy to spot.
- PCs with Tracking skill find no footprints visible in the area except those of the Kang guards, who appear to have wandered around quite a bit as they searched for the lost cargo. However, by succeeding at a Tracking roll with a -3 penalty, the party finds evidence of a pair of wagon tracks leading off the road to the northeast. The tracks are surprisingly faint given the softness of the surrounding earth, and measure only about four feet in length. Following in the direction of the tracks, the PCs come to a 40-foot wide clearing encircled by low-lying shrubs and bushes. This area radiates a strong magical aura that can be detected by PC magicians as well as by certain spells and devices (see below).
- If the PCs use a Spirit Track spell or the special ability Spirit Tracking, they discover that two humanoids were in the tree on the previous night. The spirit traces of these two beings lead from the tree to the clearing, then trail off to the southeast toward the Mandalan village of Tanzai. These tracks were left by a pair of Mandalan Mystic Warriors. If the PCs decide to go to Tanzai to question the villagers, turn to page 57, "Village of Tanzai."
- PC magicians attempting to detect the presence of magic find nothing unusual in the area of the willowood tree, but do note the presence of a powerful magical aura that begins with the wagon tracks and leads to the clearing. Magical examination of this aura reveals that a very powerful Transform Earth and Stone spell was cast in this area on the previous night.
- Probing the soil with weapons or digging in the area of the clearing reveals the presence of a subterranean tunnel leading downward into the earth. Upon further excavation, wagon tracks are plainly visible along the floor of the tunnel, which leads north in the direction of Ku-Chang. Also visible are the footprints of a dozen or more Vajra, leading in the same direction.

## Into the Tunnel

The tunnel continues north for two miles, then opens into a yawning cavern over 500 feet in diameter. The missing military drays are here, along with other drays and beasts stolen from the Kang over the course of the last few days. There are several dozen Vajra at work in the cavern, opening crates of arms and supplies and taking inventory of their contents. Among them is a figure dressed in the robes of a Vajra priestess. Several tunnels lead off of the main area. The largest of these are branches of the Underground Highway.

A few seconds after the PCs arrive at the entrance to this cavern, they are surrounded by twenty

Vajra guards armed with iron spears. One of them, acting as their spokesperson, says:

*"Do not move. You must all be detained."*

Should the PCs attack, the Vajra attempt to keep them surrounded and attack only to subdue. The priestess arrives on the following round and quickly imprisons the party in a cylindrical Geomantic Barrier. Because the barrier blocks solids, liquids, gases, and magical energy, and can only be destroyed by a reverse spell cast at 21st or higher level, the PCs are likely trapped. Eventually, they must surrender.

If the PCs were kind to the Vajra on previous occasions, the priestess knows of this, and says:

*"These are the ones who assisted our people in the mines. Do not harm them, for they are our friends."*

If the PCs did not help the Vajra in the mines, they are bound hand and foot with iron shackles after surrendering.

Either way, the priestess dispels the Geomantic Barrier and says:

*"I am named Vaj-Nan-Sa. You have discovered our secret, and so we must speak."*

The PCs are escorted to a cave located off of the main cavern and allowed to sit on moss-covered stones. If they have just been rescued from the Hole by Vajra miners, they are offered buckets of water in which to wash themselves. Otherwise, they are offered stone mugs of cool water and plates of steamed tubers and instructed to wait quietly until



the Vajra priestess returns. She then departs the cave, leaving the other Vajra to guard the PCs.

The priestess returns a few moments later. With her is an elderly Mandalan who bows and introduces himself as Xan-Yan. The PCs recognize him as the old man whose family was harassed by the Vird mercenaries. If the PCs were kind to him then, the old man smiles and says:

*"Yes, I know these people. They are friends."*

If the PCs were given the straw doll by the child at Mansal, and they still have it to show him, Xan-Yan adds:

*"There is no need for the Vajra to be concerned. These people can be trusted."*

At this point, continue with page 58, "The Conspiracy."

### Vajra Engineers (Guards), 1st Level

**Languages:** Quan +2.

**Description:** Equal mix of adult males and females, ages 40-70, 4'8"-5'4", 140-200 pounds. Squat and heavy-limbed, body covered with overlapping orange-brown scales. Each wears a loincloth and a wide belt for tools, and they all wield an iron spears.

INT +1	PER -1
WIL 0	CHA -1
STR +3	DEX +1
CON +4	SPD -2

**Hit Points:** 20

Attacks	CR	Damage
Iron Spear	+2	d12

**Armor:** Plated skin, 3 points.

**Skills:** Engineer +2, Geography +2, Secondary Combat +2.

**Special:** Burrow through soil (1 foot per round), keen hearing (PER +4 when listening).

### Vaj-Nan-Sa, Vajra Priestess, 10th Level

**Languages:** Quan +12, High Talislan +5, Common Talislan +3.

**Description:** Middle-aged female, age 76, 4'8", 140 pounds. Her body is covered with overlapping orange-brown plates, squat torso, heavy-limbed. She wears the traditional raiment of members of her sect: a necklace of polished stones and a robe of soft brown moss-felt worn under vestments made from disks of hammered iron and copper. She carries an enchanted +3 iron staff.

INT +2	PER -1
WIL +1	CHA -1
STR +2	DEX +1
CON +3	SPD -2

**Hit Points:** 37

Attacks	CR	Damage
Iron Staff	+3	d10+5

**Armor:** Plated skin, 3 points; robes and vestments equivalent to scale mail, 3 points; total of 6 points.

**Field(s) of Magic:** Geomancy

**Spells per Day:** 9

Spells	MR	Effect
Conjure Earth	+8	10 cubic feet/level
Earthform	+8	Change into earth
Geomantic Aura	+8	Stops 4 points/level
Geomantic Bolt	+8	d4 damage/level
Geomantic Barrier	+8	5 feet/level
Pass through		
Earth/Stone	+8	1 round/level
Transform Earth/Stone	+8	10 cubic feet/level

**Skills:** Engineer +12, Geography +12, Healing +12, Herb Lore +12, Rudimentary Combat +3, Secondary Magic +8.

**Special:** Burrow through soil (1 foot per round), keen hearing (PER +4 when listening).

### Village of Tanzai

If the PCs visit Tanzai to question the villagers or end up there after escaping from the Hole, they find a scene similar to the Mandalan village of Mansai (see p. 31). The villagers greet them politely, bowing at their approach. A few seconds later, an old Mandalan emerges from his thatched hut to speak with them. The PCs recognize him as the old man encountered



### The Underground Highway

This complex network of subterranean tunnels and caverns purportedly extends throughout the entire continent. Without doubt, the vast majority of its twisting tributaries have never been explored and mapped by civilized people.

Traversing the Underground Highway poses many dangers, both natural and unnatural. A few of the more mundane threats include bottomless pits and lakes, swift and unpredictable rivers, deadfalls, and cave-ins. Creatures commonly prowling the dank tunnels include land kra, crag spiders, cave bats, urthrax, earth demons, and satada armed with their notorious capture-bows.

on the road during the incident with the Vird mercenaries. He says:

*"I am Xan-Yan. How may we be of service to you?"*

If the characters showed kindness to any Mandalans in the past, or if their sewage-covered state attests to their troubles with the Kang, Xan-Yan treats them as friends. He does not show complete trust unless the PCs demonstrate by words or deeds that their loyalties are not with the Kang. The easiest way to do this is to show him the straw doll the PCs may have been given at Mansai. Upon seeing this, he takes them into his confidence at once.

If the PCs have been antagonistic or neutral toward the Mandalans, Xan-Yan and the other villagers remain polite but aloof. They have nothing to say to the PCs, quietly insisting that they know nothing of the missing cargo or of any other activities that do not concern them. No matter what tactics they use, the PCs get no useful information from the villagers. If they search the village, they find nothing.

### The Mandalans' Secret

Xan-Yan only offers information to PCs who have proven friendly and trustworthy to his people:

*"You have been kind to us in the past, and so I will tell you what I know. But first, you must swear never to speak of this to any others."*

Assuming the PCs are willing to make such a promise, Xan-Yan says:

*"Come with me, and I will tell you what you wish to know."*

He then leads the PCs into the fields and lifts a tussock of hay. Brushing away the soil, Xan-Yan reveals a hidden trap door made of wood. He opens the door to reveal a narrow flight of stairs leading underground. Xan-Yan descends, motioning for the PCs to follow. Once all are below ground one of the villagers shuts the trap door, throwing all into

darkness. Xan-Yan says:

*"Do not be alarmed. Follow close behind, and I shall lead you to our secret place."*

The group continues along the darkened tunnel for about a mile, following a circuitous route along many small side tunnels. After a while they arrive at the entrance to a cave illuminated by phosphorescent fungi. Seated on stones are several Vajra, including a Vajra priestess dressed in a long robe. The priestess offers her greetings and asks the PCs and Xan-Yan to sit beside them and talk.

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### **Xan-Yan, Mandalan Savant, 10th Level**

**Languages:** Quan +12, High Talisman +12, Archaen +12, Common Talisman +3.

**Description:** Venerable man, age 69, 5'8", 90 pounds. Golden skin, almond-shaped eyes, placid features, shaven head. Xan-Yan wears only a silkcloth robe and sandals.

INT +2	PER +3
WIL +3	CHA +1
STR 0	DEX 0
CON 0	SPD 0

**Hit Points:** 28

Attacks	CR	Damage
Mandaquan	+5	special (GB p. 108)

**Armor:** None

**Field(s) of Magic:** Mysticism

**Spells per Day:** 9

Spells	MR	Effect
Alter Density	+8	Pass through walls, etc.
Mystic Aura	+8	Stops 4 points/level
Mystic Bolt	+8	Does d4 damage/level
Mystic Barrier	+8	5 feet/level
Soulsearch	+8	Locate individual

**Skills:** Agriculturist +12, Diplomacy +11, Herb Lore +12, Rudimentary Mandaquan +5, Secondary Magic +8, Vintner (Mandalan wine) +12.

**Special:** None

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## **The Conspiracy**

Either Xan-Yan or Vaj-Nan-Sa makes the following statement, depending upon whom the PCs first contacted.

*"We are members of a secret conspiracy whose goal is the eventual restoration of freedom to all the subjugated peoples of the empire. To this end we have begun to work together to undermine the efforts of our current oppressors, the Kang."*

*"Last night, as on several previous occasions, a group of us banded together and ambushed a Kang supply train carrying weapons and supplies headed for Ku-Chang. Two Mandalans, operating as Mystic Warriors, concealed themselves in the branches of a willowood tree. When the Kang*

*soldiers rode by, they released a cloud of morphius powder, causing the troops to fall into a deep slumber. While they slept, the Mandalans rode the wagons below ground through a tunnel created by a band of Vajra miners from Ku-Chang. Then, using magic, we concealed the entrance to the tunnel and brought the wagons and cargo to this place.*

*"Some of the stolen supplies will be given to the Mondre Khan in order to help them in their struggle against the Kang. We have given them arms and weapons now for several weeks, which is why the Mondre Khan clans of this region will not harm any of our people. The rest will be transported via the Underground Highway to the Volcanic Hills, where they will be given to a tribe of Saurans sympathetic to our cause.*

*"Since you have discovered our secret, we cannot allow you to return to serve the Kang. Thus, we are forced to take action to protect ourselves and the lives of those whom we serve."*

If the PCs are not on friendly terms with the Mandalans and Vajra, the speaker continues:

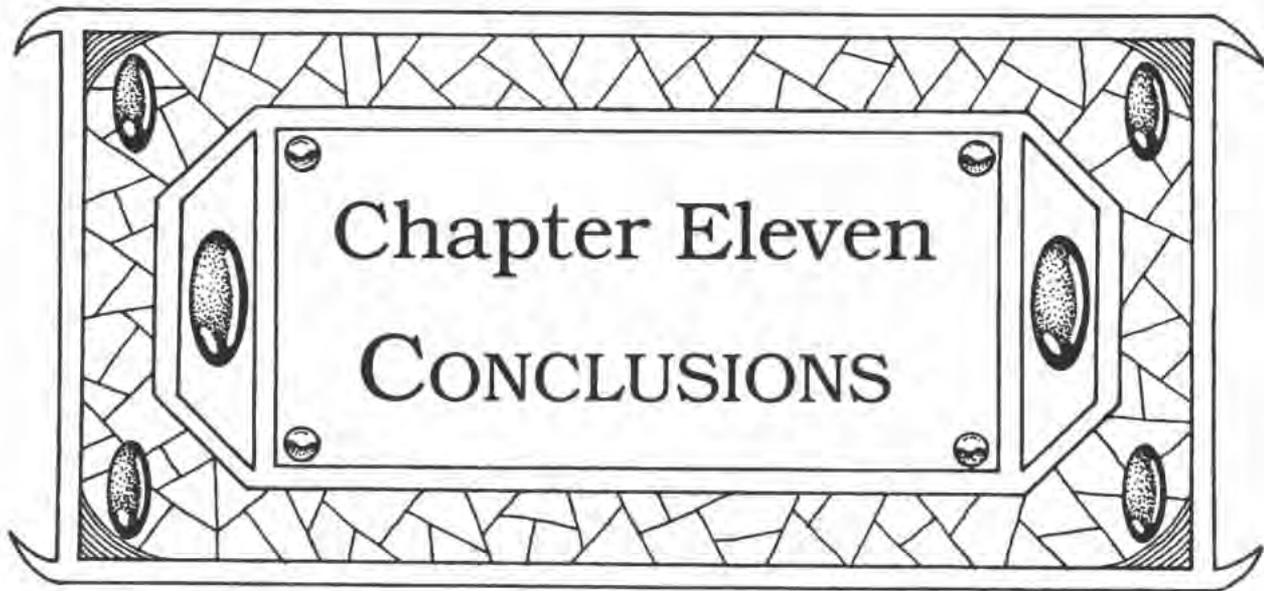
*"As you have shown no compassion for our people, we have no choice but to banish you from the empire. Accordingly, you will be taken by Underground Highway to a point beyond the eastern border of the Volcanic Hills, furnished with food and supplies, and left to your own devices. Go now, and do not return to Ku-Chang."*

The PCs are then bound and gagged, taken out of the cave, and conveyed westward by wagon along a branch of the Underground Highway. Turn to Chapter Eleven to finish the adventure.

If the PCs are on good terms with the Mandalans and the Vajra, the rebel spokesperson says:

*"In recent days, you have shown us kindness and compassion. For this reason I offer you a choice: remain with us for a time, and help us in the struggle against our enemy. We will hide and protect you and offer you gold for your services, if this is what you require.*

*"If you do not choose to remain here, then we will provide you with safe transport out of the empire. The Kang will believe that you have just disappeared, as have others before you, and will soon forget about you. Either way, you have our gratitude."*



# Chapter Eleven

## CONCLUSIONS

If the PCs have been kind to either the Mandalans or the Vajra, they have at least two options: join the rebellion or allow the rebels to escort them safely beyond the borders of the empire. If the PCs have shown a close affinity for the Kang, they are banished from the empire and you should go directly to "Exiles from the Empire" on page 60.

You should discuss the situation with the players and allow them to decide what their characters would most likely do. The PCs' tour of duty in the mercenary cavaliers has come to its conclusion, and it's now time for you to determine what happens next.

### **Interrelated Adventures**

The actions and decisions the PCs have made during this adventure could have a profound effect on their futures. If the players are having fun and choose to continue this saga, you can create interrelated adventures—a series of continuing episodes that build on this adventure and make it part of your ongoing campaign.

The following are some suggestions for adventures related to *Quantigue*. Let the players' actions choose their direction and elaborate upon it as desired.

### **Rebels Against the Empire**

After joining forces with the members of the conspiracy, the PCs dedicate their hearts and minds to the rebellion. Traveling by Underground Highway, they could carry on a series of daring raids against the Kang: hijacking cargo shipments, sabotaging the Kang's military plans, rescuing a rebel who has been taken captive and scheduled for execution, helping refugees escape from the empire, and so forth.

Adventures of this sort can form the beginning of an epic campaign continuing for many months. The PCs will initially have to be satisfied with small victories. After all, the conspiracy is still in its infancy, and the Kang are immensely powerful. Still,

the conquerors are surrounded by enemies and the PCs can count on support from numerous factions. In time, it might be possible for the PCs to help bring about important changes in the empire, perhaps even leading to the eventual overthrow of the Kang.

### **Secret Agents**

If the PCs have thoroughly gained the rebels' trust, they may be allowed to return to their posts as mercenary cavaliers, where they will be able to overhear rumors and misdirect Kang efforts to discover the conspiracy. In this case, Xan-Yan and Vaj-Nan-Sa help them manufacture evidence that the Mondre Khan intercepted the missing cargo drays; the story won't be perfect, but the Kang are predisposed to believe it. The rebels may even allow the party to bring back one of the missing drays as proof of their story.

This turn of events could lead to some very dangerous and exciting adventures for the PCs, who will have to do whatever they can to help the rebels without attracting unwelcome attention from the Kang, who take an extremely dim view of traitors. At first, the rebels won't expect much of the characters, asking only that they keep in regular contact with Xan-Yan during their road patrols and pass along any helpful information they may learn. But as the characters' loyalty becomes clearer, they may be asked to sabotage or steal Kang equipment, help free rebel prisoners, pass messages or supplies along to other spies, or provide covering distractions for important rebel actions. If the Kang become too suspicious, the rebels can always smuggle the party out of the empire—if they notice in time.

### **Wrapping Things Up**

If your players would rather move on to a different adventure, all they have to do is ask the rebels to smuggle them out of the empire. In fact, if you're not interested in creating any connected adventures, you

can simply omit the rebels' offer to let the PCs join the conspiracy. In this case, you can use one of the following possibilities:

### Exiles from the Empire

After being banished by the rebels, the PCs find themselves cast into the harsh environs of the Volcanic Hills. Their immediate goal is survival. The rebels have left them with their weapons and equipment, but without mounts and with just a week's supply of food and water.

No matter where they choose to go from here, they will be forced to overcome great hardships. Possible threats to the PCs could include encounters with vicious bands of Araq, warlike Sauran clans, and such predatory creatures as vaspas, raknids, and opteryx.

Elements of the Kang military might also be encountered in the Volcanic Hills, with unpredictable results. If the PCs make their way into the Wilderlands, they might have to fight their way through bands of Za raiders. If they head too far south, they could be in danger of running into the Rajans. A series of adventures based on this idea would probably not last very long, but could provide an exciting segue into the next phase of a picaresque or other type of campaign.

### Ispasian Enterprise

The PCs end up on good terms with the rebels, but decide they would prefer to remain neutral rather than get involved in the conspiracy against the Kang. They leave the empire via the Underground Highway, returning to wherever they make their home.

Here they decide to take Ispal up on his offer, and hand the card he gave them to a visiting Ispasian mercantilist. Ispal gets in touch with them by courier within a few days and offers them the opportunity to act as purchasing agents for the Ispasians. If the PCs agree they are provided with a 100,000 g.l. account, offered a handsome salary and commission, and sent all over the continent to purchase or sell large quantities of goods and supplies.

They could travel to Faradun in order to acquire windship components, go to Carantheum to buy red iron, to Zandu for exotic spices, to the Thaeclian Isles for enchanted orbs, to L'Haan for blue diamonds, or just about anyplace else you choose. If the PCs do well, they could be provided with an even larger account, a windship of their own, and other amenities. This could be the beginning of an exciting, high-stakes mercantile campaign.



# TALISLANTA

## Character Sheet

Name

Race  
Profession  
Homeland

Sex

Age

INT  
PER  
WIL  
CHA  
STR  
DEX  
CON  
SPD  
XP  
LEVEL  
HP(max)

Physical Characteristics

Personality Traits

Character Portrait

HP

Character's Symbol

**SKILLS**

Languages

Special Abilities

Primary

Secondary

Rudimentary

**COMBAT**

Basic Combat Rating:

Weapon

Rating

Damage

Weight

Armor

Protection Weight

Shield

Weight

**MAGIC**

Basic Magic Rating

Fields of Study

Spells per Day

## MERCENARIES WANTED:

The Crimson Horde is now recruiting mercenary cavaliers to supplement Kang road patrols in certain isolated corners of the Quan Empire. Recruits will be paid 100 gold lumens per day, plus equipment valued at over 700 gold lumens. See an Ispasian representative for more information.

Let your players explore the mysterious Quan Empire, choose between duty and conscience, and affect the course of Talislantan history in this epic adventure of cultural clashes and military intrigue. Designed for 3—6 characters of 4th—7th level, *Quantrigue* uncovers for the first time what's really going on beneath the surface of the Quan Empire since the Kang took control in 611 N.A. So expose your players to a little Kang culture; neither they nor the empire will ever be the same!



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